

Outdoor Oklahoma

MARCH / APRIL 2023 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR

ANGLERS' GUIDE 2023

**Smaller Bass:
Keep a Limit,
Aid the Future**

INSIDE

**Ticks Actually Do
Serve a Purpose**

**Oklahoma's Sunfish
No Longer One Fish**

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



PANORAMAS



Marni Loftis

Your state Department of Wildlife Conservation plays many roles in safeguarding the great outdoors. Just consider the Department's mission statement: "We manage and protect fish and wildlife, along with their habitats, while also growing our community of hunters and anglers, partnering with those who love the outdoors, and fostering stewardship with those who care for the land."

To me, the part of that statement that stands out most is about protecting our natural resources.

As the full-time training coordinator of the Department's Law Enforcement Division, I make sure all of ODWC's law enforcement officers receive all the instruction (and then some) that they need to perform their duties at the level of excellence demanded by our agency and the citizens of Oklahoma.

I spent 16 years as a Game Warden in the field. In September 2019, I promoted into my current position at ODWC headquarters.

Among my initial projects was to create the first ODWC Game Warden Training Academy for newly hired Game Wardens. The first academy was in 2020. The third academy launched March 1 this year.

The 2023 academy is notable in several ways. The curriculum has evolved into one of the most comprehensive Game Warden training academies in the nation. Other conservation agencies are already looking at our schedule to see how they can incorporate some of our classes and training.

The academy focuses almost solely on game- and fish-related law enforcement. Most of the 360 hours of instruction is accredited by Oklahoma's Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET). Recruits receive instruction in topics you would expect, such as wildlife and fisheries laws, wildlife and fisheries enforcement techniques, search and seizure, and firearms. Other topics perhaps less expected include snake ID, precision boating, wildlife forensics, man tracking, hunter incident investigations, and trauma first aid.

An Oklahoma Game Warden is a certified peace officer, just like law enforcement officers in local police departments. After they finish the academy, they attend the CLEET Basic Academy to receive their Oklahoma CLEET certification, if they don't already have it.

Unlike city police, Game Wardens are certified to enforce laws across the entire state, just like Oklahoma Highway Patrol officers. Add to that the fact that Game Wardens also enforce federal wildlife laws, and you realize that Oklahoma Game Wardens are entrusted with the most extensive law enforcement capabilities of any peace officer in the state.

Also notable this year is the size of the training class. Because of an unusual number of retirements in the ranks, 10 Game Warden recruits have started this year's academy. It is believed to be the largest Game Warden recruit class in the Department's 120-plus-year history.

Much of the academy takes place at Camp Gruber in Muskogee County.

About 30 instructors are employed during the intensive nine-week academy that culminates in a badge-pinning ceremony. Then the new Game Wardens will begin the brand new 12-week field training program to learn alongside their colleagues on the job across the state.

Game Wardens are the "public face" of the Wildlife Department. They deserve the best training possible, and that's what we are doing through our Game Warden Training Academy. We strive to earn the public's trust through our professionalism, excellence, pride, and dedication to serving all of Oklahoma's citizens and protecting our natural resources that belong to everyone. ♡

A handwritten signature of Marni Loftis in green ink, written in a cursive style.

Marni Loftis, Operations Manager, Law Enforcement Division, ODWC

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ON THE COVER:

This artwork of a white bass is featured on one of this year's collectible durable license cards. Artist Shea Meyer of Stratford created this painting. Check out the other artwork on page 3.

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OKLAHOMA



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

NOTES ON WILDLIFE • OUTDOOR TIPS • READERS' LETTERS • ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS
COMPILED BY DON P. BROWN

DAVE MCGOWEN/RPS 2017




ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Program helps nongame species such as these burrowing owls.

OKLAHOMANS CAN CHAMPION THE WILD ON TAX RETURNS

DONATIONS SUPPORT WILDLIFE DIVERSITY FOR NONGAME SPECIES

Taxpaying Oklahomans receiving a refund this tax season can champion wildlife by donating all or a portion of their refund to the Wildlife Department's **Wildlife Diversity Program**. Tax refund donations can be made on Schedule 511-H of the 2022 state return, which must be filed with the Oklahoma Tax Commission by April 17, 2023.

The Wildlife Department does not receive any state tax appropriations and instead relies on hunting and fishing license sales and donations to match federal conservation funds. Donations support grants that fund surveys of species of greatest conservation need, including Texas horned lizards, Oklahoma salamanders, and American alligators.

Wildlife supporters needn't wait for tax season to help out; everyone is welcome to make a direct, tax-deductible donation any time of the year through the "Shop/Donate" tab at www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com. 

LICENSE BUYERS HELP SET ORGAN DONATION RECORD

For almost a year, the Wildlife Department has been giving Oklahoma's hunting and fishing license buyers a chance at the time of purchase to register as an organ, eye, and tissue donor.



The partnership between ODWC and the nonprofit organization **LifeShare Oklahoma** was one of the first in the nation to pair the life-saving opportunity with the hunter and angler community.

LifeShare recently announced that Oklahoma donors saved 535 lives during 2022, the highest


number of recipients ever recorded in Oklahoma.

LifeShare coordinated the recovery of more than 600 organs from 249 organ donors and 1,106 tissue donors in 2022.

In addition to the 535 people saved through organ donation, more than 82,000 people were provided mobility and life enhancement through tissue donation.

"Hunting and fishing are very important in Oklahoma," said Jeffrey Orlowski, president and CEO of LifeShare. He said the partnership with the Wildlife Department helps outdoorsmen realize that creating a tradition of generosity through organ and tissue donation is just as important.

Hunters and anglers in Oklahoma can buy their licenses online at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com and in-person at vendors across the state.

About 700 Oklahomans are awaiting life-saving transplants. To learn more about organ and tissue donation, go to <https://www.lifeshareoklahoma.org>. 

NEWEST COLLECTIBLE LICENSE CARDS NOW ON SALE

BY MICHAEL BERGIN, SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Each year, Oklahoma sportsmen and sportswomen may choose to have their hunting and fishing licenses encoded on collectible license cards featuring the work of an Oklahoma wildlife artist. These license cards are durable and waterproof, easily carried in a wallet or pocket whenever needed.

The newest pair of cards features images of a white bass and a mallard drake, both painted by Stratford artist Shea Meyer. And they are on sale now for \$6.

While the collectible license card option has been available for the past five years, 2023 marks the first year the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has commissioned a local artist to specifically produce original images for the durable card program.

The cards can carry up to nine licenses or privileges, which are encoded on the back side. The card can then be carried into the field or on the lake and serves as proof of license whenever needed.

A portion of the sale of each card is designated for outreach efforts aimed at recruiting, retaining and reactivating lapsed hunters and anglers — important because the Wildlife Department relies on hunting and fishing license sales for funding.

Additionally, Meyer's original paintings will be framed and donated to the **Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation** to be auctioned at one of its upcoming events. OWCF is a nonprofit charitable foundation formed to work exclusively alongside and provide support for the Wildlife Department. The proceeds from the artwork auction will further benefit conservation efforts in Oklahoma.

The program is a "win-win-win" for wildlife, the Wildlife Department, and state artists whose artwork is showcased. The Department plans to continue commissioning artists for future collectible license cards.

It didn't take long for Wildlife Department personnel to realize Meyer was the right artist for this inaugural commissioned project.

Meyer won the Department's annual waterfowl stamp design contest in 2014, and was a runner-up in the contest the past two years. That contest is judged by a panel of wildlife professionals, and the artists' names are withheld until judging is completed.

Meyer's work captured the attention of the most scrutinizing waterfowl experts and proved time and again the artist's attention to wildlife detail. Not only that, he's a lifetime license holder, outdoorsman, and educator at Stratford Schools. He is an accomplished outdoorsman and a supporter of conservation.

Meyer said he feels honored to have his work featured on the new cards.

"I was excited to find out the Wildlife Department wanted me to paint a mallard, since waterfowl



is such a big part of my subject matter. And I couldn't wait to paint a white bass, Oklahoma's state fish," he said. "I am a proud Oklahoman, and I am honored to have my work represent our state and it's amazing wildlife."

To get your hunting or fishing licenses encoded on one of the newest collectible cards featuring Meyer's work, log in to your **Go Outdoors Oklahoma** profile and click "Purchase Licenses." If you already have a current hunting or fishing license, you can still buy a collectible card from the License Catalog. Or, when buying any license, you can add a collectible card to your purchase. ♡



WELCOME TO THE DOCK!

ARE THE FISH BITING? YOU BET!

Are the fish biting? You bet! Step onto The Dock and take a gander at some great catches made recently by Oklahoma anglers. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To see more or submit a photo of your catch, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the_dock or scan the code:



Boone Boys, walleye, Canton Lake, Jan. 23, 2023.



Gloria O'Donnell, white crappie, Lake Oologah, Jan. 21, 2023.



Trevor T., rainbow trout, Robbers Cave State Park, Jan. 2, 2023.



Ron Miller, smallmouth bass, Skiatook Lake, Dec. 11, 2022.



Jimmy Jestice, striped bass, Fort Gibson Lake, Jan. 3, 2023.



Alex Siharath, sunfish, Edwards Park OKC, Nov. 4, 2022.

WILD ABOUT COOKING

BASS OVER ANGEL HAIR PASTA WITH CITRUS CREAM SAUCE

Bass taste good, especially younger ones taken from cool, clean waters.

This dish is pan-sautéed and dressed with a citrus cream sauce that also features sun-dried tomatoes, and just enough pepper to balance out.

Most flaky, white-meat fish that fillet well would work. This includes crappie or bluegill.



INGREDIENTS

- 5 Tbsps. olive oil, divided
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped scallions
- 3 thinly sliced shallots
- 1 clove minced garlic
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 8 ounces bottled clam juice
- ½ cup orange juice
- 1 Tbsp. lime juice
- 2 Tbsp. diced sun dried tomatoes
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. herbs de Provence (or ½ teaspoon each basil and thyme)
- 1 tsp. orange zest
- ½ tsp. lime zest
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 8 ounces angel hair pasta
- 8 small bass fillets (about 24 ounces of fish)
- All-purpose flour
- Salt and black pepper
- Cayenne pepper (optional)
- Orange zest and chives for garnish

DIRECTIONS

- Heat 2 tablespoons oil in saucepan over medium-high heat. Add scallions, shallots, and garlic. Cook for a minute until vegetables begin to soften. Add wine, clam juice, orange juice, and lime juice. Stir in tomatoes, Worcestershire sauce, herbs, and zest. Add cream and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer 10-15 minutes, until sauce is reduced by half.
- Cook and drain pasta according for al dente.
- Lightly season fillets with salt, black pepper, light sprinkle of cayenne pepper optional. Dredge in flour and shake to remove excess.
- Heat remaining 3 tablespoons oil in skillet over medium-high heat. Brown fish on both sides. Fillets take 2-5 minutes each side, based on thickness.
- Toss pasta with half the sauce. Add fish and top with remaining sauce. Garnish with orange zest and chives.

— Courtesy of Ken Perrotte,
OutdoorsRambler.com

OUTDOOR CALENDAR

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.
GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX

NOTICE: Events listed are subject to change.

MARCH 2023

- 1** Bank Fishing for Paddlefish, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 3** Bank Fishing for White Bass, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 3-5** Backwoods Hunting and Fishing Expo, State Fair Park, Oklahoma City. Ticket valid each day.
- 4** Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 4-5** NatureWorks Art Show and Sale, Southern Hills Marriott, Tulsa. Info: www.natureworks.org.
- 5** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 6** Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Enid.
- 7** Bank Fishing for Crappie, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 8** Bank Fishing for Bass, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 12** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 14** Bank Fishing for Walleye/Saugeye, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 15** Bank Fishing in Tailwaters, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 19** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 25** Turkey Hunting 101, Central Oklahoma National Wild Turkey Federation, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Arcadia Conservation Education Area. Register: www.nwtf.org/events or (405) 410-1379.
- 26** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- Ducks Unlimited** events set in Claremore, March 1; Wagoner, March 4; Poteau, March 24; Tulsa, March 24; Miami, March 25; Stillwater, March 27; Claremore, March 29; Ponca City, March 30. Info: www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events.
- Friends of NRA** event info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.
- National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Pryor, March 3; Muskogee, March 9; Wagoner, March 11; Glenpool, March 25; Westville, March 25; Elk City, March 31. Info: www.nwtf.org/events.
- Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever** events set in Weatherford, March 3; Blackwell, March 4; Pryor, March 25; Yukon, March 31. Info: <https://pqf.myeventcenter.com>.

APRIL 2023

- 1** Hunter education class, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., McLoud Public Library. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 2** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 3** Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City.
- 4** Bank Fishing for Sunfish, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 5** Bank Fishing for Catfish, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 9** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 11** Wading to Fish Illinois River, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 15** Entry period closes for **Outdoor Oklahoma** Readers' Photo Showcase contest; www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS.
- 16** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 17** Fly Fishing for Warm Water Fish, free webinar, 1-3 p.m. Register: "Events" at www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com.
- 23** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 30** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- Ducks Unlimited** events set in Norman, April 6; Tulsa, April 18; Porum, April 28; Bixby, April 28. Info: www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events.
- Friends of NRA** event info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.
- National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Weatherford, April 1; Blanchard, April 7; El Reno, April 7; Seminole, April 8; Woodward, April 22; Wagoner, April 29; Edmond, April 29. Info: www.nwtf.org/events.
- Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever** event info: <https://pqf.myeventcenter.com>.

** FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO
www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons **

GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

ACCOUNTS FROM THE FIELD BY THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO ENFORCE THE FISH AND WILDLIFE LAWS OF OKLAHOMA



Game Warden **Larry Green**, based in Osage County, caught up with some notorious wildlife violators in his county. Assisted by Game Warden **Spencer Grace**, based in Kay County, the two Game Wardens apprehended two convicted felons in possession of a firearm, no driver license, hunting without landowner consent, untagged and uninsured truck, and illegal possession of a deer head, found in the feed box of the truck.

Both violators were transported to Osage County Jail, and the vehicle was impounded. Numerous charges were filed.



Game Wardens **Phillip Cottrill**, based in Major County, and Lt. **Ben Bickerstaff**, based in Alfalfa County, recently teamed to put a stop to the activities of two Major County deer poachers.

The Game Wardens filed eight charges on two men for taking 11 illegal deer. The charges amounted to \$11,400 in fines, court costs, and restitution.

It's important to note that not every violation that occurred resulted in a citation during this investigation; if all violations had been written, the fines, court costs and restitution could have totaled more than \$55,000.



Larry Green



Spencer Grace

All deer were shot from public roadways in and around Mosier Station and Highline Road in Major County.

While this case resulted from traditional law enforcement observation and investigation, many other cases result from reports from concerned citizens. Anyone who may know of possible illegal activity to contact any Game Warden. Poachers steal wildlife from all the citizens of Oklahoma! 🦌



Phillip Cottrill



Ben Bickerstaff



(Reports from the Oklahoma Game Wardens Facebook page.)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please help make a difference! When violators break the law, they steal fish and wildlife from you! Report violations anonymously by calling Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039. You could earn a cash reward.

GAME BAG

A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

We'd like to hear from you! Send your letters to Outdoor Oklahoma Letters, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or send e-mail to donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov.

Dear Director J.D. Strong:

I would like to express my gratitude to ODWC and its employees for hosting the outstanding trapping workshop in January at Fort Gibson Waterfowl Refuge Portion. Senior Wildlife Biologist **JD Ridge** and Wildlife Biologist **Colby Farquhar** have an enthusiasm for the sport that is truly contagious. They were very engaging and accommodating with the students. Game Warden **Jared Cramer** came in on Sunday and graciously shared his wealth of knowledge on fleshing and preparing hides. Game Warden **Cody Morris'** presentation on the applicable laws and regulations was quite informative. I would also like to express a special thanks to Wildlife Biologist **Brett Thompson** and Wildlife Technician **Zeke Hawkes** for their assistance with the class. I chose to take the class because my 14-year-old son has recently developed an interest in trapping. We have searched for resources to provide him with the skills he needs to successfully trap, skin, and flesh an animal and have found very little. The knowledge and skills that he obtained from the workshop far exceeded our expectations for it. We look forward to taking more workshops like this in the future.

Brad Wheeler



JD Ridge



Colby Farquhar



Jared Cramer



Cody Morris



Brett Thompson



Zeke Hawkes

Dear Director J.D. Strong,

Just a quick note to commend Senior Wildlife Biologist **Kyle Johnson**. He helped me with my WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program) project in 2021. Unfortunately, I didn't get to participate in '22 (funding), but he's already reached out about the 2023

program. I'm currently working with USDA NRCA for participation in EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program). There's a marked difference between working with Kyle and working with the federal agency. Kyle is responsive, positive, efficient, and insightful. A real pro.

Steve Kahn, President, AT&T



Kyle Johnson

Dear Wildlife Department,

A quick word of thanks to Wildlife Biologist **Hayden Savage** and Wildlife Technician **Cody Crisswell** for providing the opportunity for a great hunt at Beaver River Wildlife Management Area on opening weekend of deer gun season. I was lucky enough to help family friend Jacob Ceder taste success, thanks to your efforts. You guys made this draw hunt a top-notch experience for Jacob by sharing information and guiding us to a fantastic opportunity. On our ride back downstate, Jacob was telling me how impressive it is that ODWC employees invest so much of their time and effort into making this hunt so memorable. He was blown away that you would help get his deer to the shop, help skin it, and help quarter it up. I couldn't agree more. Your efforts throughout the year resulted in Jacob's best buck to date. I want you guys to know how much your daily, weekly, and seasonal work is appreciated.

Thank you both for hosting this memorable experience for a young hunter!

Kurt Kuklinski



Hayden Savage



Cody Crisswell

IT'S THE LAW: WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PASSPORT

Have you been wanting to explore some Wildlife Department-owned areas when you aren't hunting or fishing? People using those areas for activities such as birdwatching, hiking, or photography are required to have either a Wildlife Conservation Passport or any current hunting or fishing license issued by the Wildlife Department to legally enter those areas. Exempt from the passport are people younger than 16 at the start of the calendar year, and students and instructors participating in educational tours or activities approved in advance by the Wildlife Department. The passport requirement is in keeping with the user-pay, user-benefit principle whereby hunter and angler license fees fund Department operations. Passports are available at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com. 🍷

2022 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

"SINCE BEFORE I WAS BORN"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each year, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International sponsor a creative writing competition for middle and high school students. A boy and a girl from two age divisions are selected winners. Students write essays using the theme "Hunting: Sharing the Heritage" or "Archery: What I Like About Archery in the Schools and Bowhunting." Winners in the age 15-17 category receive a guided antelope hunt in the Texas Panhandle, and winners in the 11-14 age category receive a hunting trip with Rack Attack Outfitters of Fairview (or similar) and a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, Outdoor Oklahoma honors junior category female winner Emery Cannon from Cheyenne Public Schools.



HUNTING: SHARING THE HERITAGE

By Emery Cannon

My family has been hunting since before I was born. My sister, mom, dad, grandad, and great grandad have been hunting for over 50 years. The love of hunting runs in my family. My family's heritage consists of harvesting deer, making them into jerky, and spending time with my family.

It all started with my great grandad. He started hunting, and he has killed more deer than one can count. Then he taught his son, my grandad, how to hunt. My grandad still hunts to this day! Then the same heritage was passed down again! Also, my grandad taught his son, my dad, how to hunt.

My dad and grandad's favorite hobby to do together is probably to go hunting. I do not blame them! It is one of my favorite pastimes. They use bows or rifles to kill the animal that they are hunting. The animal that is hunted most in my family is deer.

My dad was the one who taught my mom, sister, and me to hunt! He is the best hunter I know. My mom has killed four deer. My sister has also killed four deer! I have killed five deer.

My family consumes every deer we harvest by

turning them into deer jerky. We have our own setup, which includes jerky marinade, a slicer, and a commercial dehydrator. Every year, it is my goal to kill at least one deer to have my own, delicious deer jerky.

The first deer I killed, I used a crossbow. Then I wanted to try something a little different, so I tried using a 6 mm Remington. I loved using that gun, so that was the one I used to kill the other four deer that I shot.

The first year that I hunted with a gun, my dad took me out to the farm and made me sight in my gun. Once I got it sighted in, he woke me up early the next morning, and we went to my great grandad's house to get set up for the hunt. My dad had previously set up a

deer blind, and we went to get into the blind.

While sitting in the blind, we both watched through our binoculars, and then in came the doe. I shot her with my 6 mm, and she dropped right there. This made me really excited, but I think it excited my dad more.

To say the least, my family would not be the same without getting to go hunting every year. It is definitely a privilege that my family has made this a tradition. I hope that this heritage continues on for many more generations. ♥

My family consumes every deer we harvest by turning them into deer jerky. We have our own setup, which includes jerky marinade, a slicer, and a commercial dehydrator. Every year, it is my goal to kill at least one deer to have my own, delicious deer jerky.



SELECTED YOUTHS SAMPLE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT AT FREE CAMP

A week full of fun outdoor activities, conservation education, and camaraderie is in store for dozens of lucky teens who are selected to attend the **2023 Wildlife Youth Camp**. Applications are due April 15 for this summer's once-in-a-lifetime event.


"If you are interested in hunting, fishing or a career with the Wildlife Department, then this camp is for you," said Game Warden Lt. Dru Polk, youth camp coordinator.

"Campers will get a better understanding of wildlife and fisheries management as well as conservation law enforcement, and at the same time participating in some fun outdoor activities."

The camp will be June 18-23 at the University of Oklahoma Biological Station at Lake Texoma. Game wardens, wildlife and fisheries professionals, and dedicated hunter and angler volunteers will be conducting the camp and supervising activities.

Activities will include fishing, archery, wildlife identification, rifle/shotgun shooting, ropes course, self-defense, wildlife law enforcement, wildlife and fisheries management, and deer/turkey/waterfowl hunting and law enforcement techniques.

"What's even better is that it's all free for the campers," thanks to the support of generous sponsors including the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Polk said.

Applicants must be Oklahoma residents who will be 14 to 16 years old as of June 18. Scan the code to apply. 



WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM



IT'S A SNAP TO ENTER YOUR SHOTS FOR READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE


Attention shutterbugs! Do you have an awesome photo or three you've taken that features Outdoor Oklahoma? Here's your chance to have your work published and admired by thousands of people. That's what will happen if your photo is selected as one of the "best of the best" in Outdoor Oklahoma magazine's annual Readers' Photography Showcase competition.

The entry period is open now through April 15.

Outdoor Oklahoma's July/August issue showcases photos of wildlife, landscapes, scenics and other outdoor imagery captured by outdoor and wildlife enthusiasts from across the state. The Photo Showcase issue is always among the most popular each year!

Each participant may submit up to three original digital images. The photographer will be asked to rename their entries. Photos must be in sharp focus, and image resolution should be at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) for high-quality magazine printing.

After the entries are in, Outdoor Oklahoma will select the "best of the best" to create a stunning visual journey for readers. So why not give us a shot — or your best three shots? Thanks for participating, invite others as well, and good luck!

Scan the code and follow the instructions to enter images. 



RICHARD WATERS/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2020



ANGLERS' GUIDE 2023

SMALLER BASS NOW,
LARGER BASS LATER

RULE CHANGE PUSHES BLACK BASS
HARVEST TO ENHANCE FISHERIES

September 2022 brought a notable revision to one of Oklahoma's longtime fishing regulations. For decades, the statewide standard rule allowed anglers to catch and keep six black bass daily if they were 14 inches or longer.

The recent change modifies the statewide size and bag limits for largemouth and smallmouth bass in lakes and reservoirs. Specifically, the limit for largemouth and smallmouth bass (in aggregate) remains six fish per day, but only one may exceed 16 inches in length.

Fisheries biologists proposed the modified limits to encourage anglers to keep more abundant, smaller black bass while limiting the harvest of larger bass.

Biologists anticipate a positive impact on the overall quality of Oklahoma's black bass populations in the longer term — if anglers will dial back the catch-and-release mind-set and actually harvest the smaller fish.

Cliff Sager, Senior Fisheries Biologist with the Wildlife Department, said the proposal is designed to give anglers a better chance to catch larger bass in the future.

"Catch and release has become very ingrained with bass anglers. In the most recent survey of Oklahoma anglers, 69 percent of bass anglers returned all, or nearly all, the bass they caught back to the water. The popularity of the sport combined with the cultivated practice of catch-and-release of smaller bass has impacted ODWC's ability to increase the abundance of larger bass."

The catch-and-release ethic is practiced today by most bass anglers. During the past four decades, the often self-imposed practice of catch-and-release for largemouth and smallmouth bass has become deeply rooted in fishing culture. It has been touted as a greatly successful fisheries management tool.

However, during a Wildlife Department study in the 1990s, up to 43 percent of fish released after being caught in fishing tournaments died within six days.

The Wildlife Department developed a statewide black bass management plan in 1991. Long-range management goals with specific objectives were set, including the eventual implementation of the 14-inch minimum length

limit on smallmouth and largemouth bass. At that time, less than 10 percent of bass fishing lakes sampled were considered a "quality" bass fishery. The regulation was heavily supported by anglers.

However, the 14-inch minimum limited anglers' overall opportunity to harvest any bass.

Oklahoma fisheries biologists are now concerned that catch-and-release has possibly gone too far, and not enough bass are being taken home for table fare.

"In the most recent survey of Oklahoma anglers, 69 percent of bass anglers returned all, or nearly all, the bass they caught back to the water. The popularity of the sport combined with the cultivated practice of catch-and-release of smaller bass has impacted ODWC's ability to increase the abundance of larger bass," Sager said.

Biologists have noted slowing growth rates and skewed size structures in black bass populations while surveying many lakes. This is concerning because they not only manage the state's fisheries resources so that natural reproduction will sustain populations, but they also manage these resources to create as many angling opportunities as possible.

"While much has been done by the Wildlife Department to promote fishing, including bass fishing, in recent years, the adjust-

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JENA DONNEL/ODWC

ment of management strategies aimed at influencing quality bass fisheries has been limited.”

Using data from more than 100 Oklahoma lakes, fisheries biologists have found that about 80 percent of largemouth bass in Oklahoma lakes are shorter than 16 inches. While reduced harvest of large bass is beneficial, harvesting bass under 16 inches can improve fisheries by reducing competition among bass, so individuals grow faster and larger.

With an abundance of smaller bass, biologists said there is often no need for a minimum length limit.

While catch-and-release may have benefits under a narrow set of conditions, harvest of smaller, more-abundant bass should contribute to healthy habitats, thus providing anglers with higher quality black bass fisheries.

And another reason to harvest more smaller bass is the fact that these fish make good table fare. Oftentimes the smaller black bass have less of a “fishy taste” than the larger bass, and the meat is usually lighter and more tender.

The new harvest limits do not apply to the state’s rivers and streams, Lake Texoma, or Doc Hollis Lake. And some other public fishing waters have special area regulations that differ from the statewide bass limits. For example, black bass harvest is not allowed in all Close to Home Fishing waters.

Now, it’s up to the state’s bass anglers.

Fisheries biologists hope the catch-and-release mind-set can be softened and that anglers will choose to harvest smaller black bass. In addition to charting a course for improved fishing in the future, it’s also a great way to tap into Oklahoma’s natural resources and store away some food security in the freezer.



FOCUSED OVERSIGHT

To maintain focused oversight of black bass and related species, the Wildlife Department established a Centrarchid Committee composed of 10 fisheries biologists with specialties ranging from reservoirs to hatcheries. Together, they have more than 160 years of experience in fisheries management. The Centrarchidae (sunfishes) are a family of North American native freshwater fish that includes several game fish familiar to anglers such as smallmouth and largemouth bass, bluegill, and crappie. Biologists will continue to survey and monitor population trends, and develop management practices that better meet the needs and expectations of Oklahoma anglers.

FOOD SAFETY

Some people are concerned about eating fish caught in Oklahoma waters. The state Department of Environmental Quality encourages Oklahomans to go fishing and enjoy eating the fish they catch. However, some fish pose a risk of mercury contamination. The general population, including men older than 15 and women beyond child-bearing age, faces little risk in consuming Oklahoma fish. These groups may eat a variety of fish, including predators such as black bass, as part of a healthy diet. DEQ offers these general guidelines:

- Eat smaller, younger fish.
- Eat more varieties of fish.
- Eat fewer meals of predator fish such as bass, flathead catfish, walleye, and saugeye.
- Women of child-bearing age and children 14 and younger should consume no more than one meal per week of predator fish, which includes largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, white, striped or hybrid bass, walleye, saugeye, and flathead catfish.

For complete details on fish consumption from DEQ, scan the code. 





BASS TOURNEYS ALLOWED BIGGER FISH VIA EXEMPTION

By Don P. Brown, Communications Specialist

Bass fishing tournaments have been highly popular among Oklahoma anglers for more than a half-century. But the 2022 bass harvest regulation changes, designed to improve the quality of the state's bass populations, actually weren't very friendly to the tournaments.

Tournament winners are typically based on the combined weight of a specified number of fish. Therefore, the largest fish caught during the tournament period are retained and weighed-in at the finish.

So, to support the bass tournament community under the 2022 rule changes, the Wildlife Department established a free Bass Tournament Directors Exemption Permit. Any angler who possesses a tournament exemption authorized by the Department may keep bass over 16 inches until weigh-in, after which the fish must be released.

Since the new black bass limits began, 407 tournament exemption permits have been issued.

Fisheries Chief Ken Cunningham said the exemption process allows bass tournaments to proceed, while potentially allowing Department biologists to collect more and better data about Oklahoma's black bass resource because of a post-tournament reporting requirement.

Only the tournament director will apply for an exemption and will distribute a copy of the single permit (paper or electronic copy) to all participating anglers. The permit must contain a six-digit code to be a legal exemption.


Tournaments must have six or more anglers participating to secure an exemption. Single-day and multi-day tourney exemptions are available. Weekly series (jackpots) require a permit for each week.

Other requirements under the black bass tournament exemption include:

- Exemption applications must be made at least three days ahead of the tournament.
- The daily bag limit allowed per angler, under the tournament exemption, is five black bass in aggregate per day, unless otherwise restricted by the conditions outlined in the permit.
- Each boat will have one or more functioning aerated live well(s). A functioning live well is defined as one that has a working aeration or oxygenation system or a flow-through system to pump fresh water into the live well. Anglers not meeting this requirement may not participate in the tournament.
- Kept bass that later die must not be culled by a participant and must be part of the weigh-in.
- All efforts shall be made to release fish unharmed or in a manner that does not cause injury or death to the fish.
- The tournament director shall submit a completed tournament activity report within 30 days following the event. Failure to submit the report will result in denial of future exemption applications.

Tournament exemptions do not allow:

- Fishing without a valid fishing license unless otherwise exempt by law.
- Exceeding the daily bag limit.
- Keeping any of the fish after the weigh-in.

Instructions on how to apply for a tournament exemption are found on the Department's website. The exemption application is available on the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app or at <https://gooutdoorsoklahoma.com>. 



THE BASS FAMILY (AND NEXT OF KIN)

Centrarchids are exclusive to North America and widely distributed statewide along the shallows of Oklahoma rivers, lakes, and ponds.



LARGEMOUTH BASS *Micropterus salmoides*

Found throughout the state in ponds, lakes, rivers and streams. Both state and federal hatcheries stock most Oklahoma waters with these powerful fighters. The Florida subspecies of largemouth bass have been stocked in many reservoirs and will interbreed with native largemouth bass. These hybrids grow rapidly and produce trophy-size fish. It is the most-sought-after game fish in Oklahoma.

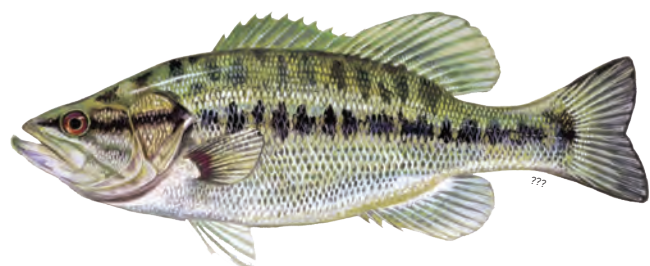
Oklahoma State Record: 14 pounds, 13.7 ounces.



SMALLMOUTH BASS *Micropterus dolomieu*

Smallmouth bass occurs naturally in many eastern Oklahoma Ozark and Ouachita streams and tributaries. Fishable lake populations exist in Grand, Tenkiller, Murray, Eufaula, Texoma, and Broken Bow. Smallmouth inhabits clear, gravel-bottom-streams in Oklahoma. The best areas to fish for smallmouth within streams are in riffles, pools, and the shallows above rapids. In manmade impoundments, smallmouth seeks clear, clean water usually with a rocky substrate.

Oklahoma State Record: 8 pounds, 7 ounces.



SPOTTED BASS *Micropterus punctulatus*

Common in both the Arkansas and Red river systems, spotted bass prefer clear lakes and streams in eastern Oklahoma. Spotted bass have not been widely cultured or stocked. The eyes are sometimes red. They are also known as Kentuckies or redeye bass. Spotted bass are usually caught much deeper than largemouth bass and are more inclined to school. Spotted bass inhabit flowing streams in eastern Oklahoma and are more tolerant of slow, warm, turbid water than smallmouth. In lakes, spotted bass are found in deeper water. They prefer rocky bottom areas.

Oklahoma State Record: 8 pounds, 2 ounces.



GREEN SUNFISH *Lepomis cyanellus*

Green sunfish are found statewide. They have a large mouth and light green wavy lines on the side of their head. Bluegill, redear, and green sunfish are the most common fish in Oklahoma. Because of its large mouth and voracious appetite, it can often be caught on lures intended for largemouth bass. Sunfish are the perfect choice for introducing a youngster to the sport of fishing. May and June are top months to fish for spawning sunfish. Although sunfish will feed throughout the day, peak activity often occurs early in the morning and later in the evening. They prefer small streams and ponds and can survive in habitats too small or temporary to support most other sunfish.

Oklahoma State Record: 2 pounds, 7 ounces.



LONGEAR SUNFISH *Lepomis megalotis*

Longear sunfish are known to everyone for their relatively small stature and abundant numbers. But they more than make up for their lack of size with their ferocity and willingness to bite a variety of baits or lures. They are brilliantly colored in various hues of red, orange, yellow, blue and green. Named for their elongated gill cover that is typically bordered in white, this and other types of sunfish are well known to most young anglers as being the first "perch" ever caught on a cane pole with a dangling worm for bait. Also dubbed "pan fish," "goggle eye" and "bream," the name "perch" is inaptly applied to sunfishes.

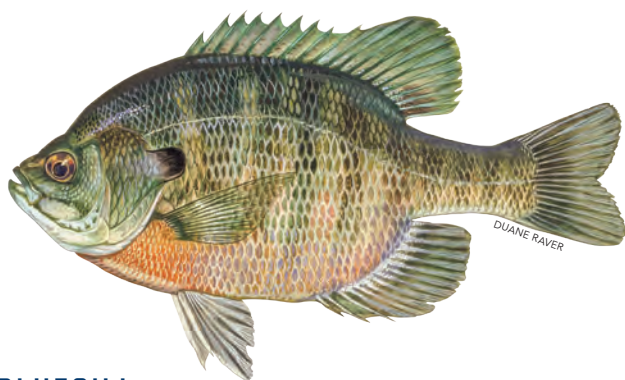


REDEAR SUNFISH *Lepomis microlophus*

Redear sunfish are found statewide. It has a red outer margin on

the opercular (ear) flap. Redear can attain lengths up to 12 inches and weight up to 2 pounds. They respond best to natural bait and are more difficult to catch than bluegill. Redear normally inhabits deeper water than bluegill and congregate around stumps, logs, and roots. They usually inhabit clear, slightly vegetated water. They prey on insects, crustaceans, larvae, and snails. Redear spawning habits are very similar to bluegill, although redear are not as prolific. Redear spawn in late spring or early summer when water temperatures reach 66–70°F.

Oklahoma State Record: 2 pounds, 1.25 ounces.

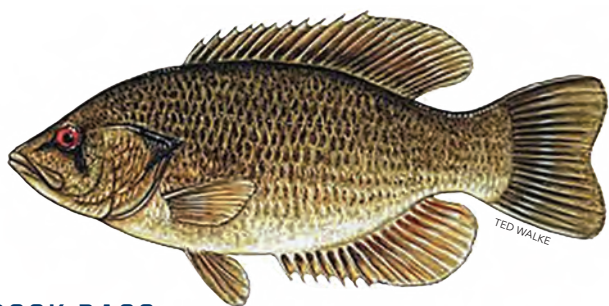


BLUEGILL *Lepomis macrochirus*

Due to widespread hatchery stockings, bluegill are found state-wide in all types of water. It's a relatively large, deep-bodied sunfish with a small mouth, black opercular (ear) flap, and a black spot at the rear base of the dorsal fin. Weed beds are ideal habitat for really big bluegill.

Stilwell City Lake is a top producer of large sunfish where anglers often latch onto bluegill weighing more than a half-pound. In late summer, slip-bobber rigs can be used to fish deeper waters. Young bluegill are important farm pond forage fish for bass and catfish. However, the high reproductive rate of bluegill often results in overcrowded populations of stunted fish. This problem can be controlled by restricting harvest of largemouth bass. Bluegill seldom exceed 12 inches long.

Oklahoma State Record: 2 pounds, 6.4 ounces.



ROCK BASS *Ambloplites rupestris*

They are similar in appearance to smallmouth bass but are usually quite a bit smaller. They have two dorsal fins that have spinous and soft-rayed united portions, a large mouth, six anal spines, red eyes, and rows of dark dots on their sides. The mouth has small conical teeth to eat prey. The average rock bass is between 6 and 10 inches long, and they rarely weigh over a pound. These fish have body coloring from golden brown to olive with a white to silver colored belly and have the ability to rapidly change their color to match their surroundings. Rock bass are usually found near rocky shorelines. Rock bass are frequently seen in groups, particularly near other sunfish.



WARMOUTH *Lepomis gulosus*

Sometimes called "strawberry perch," the warmouth is a dark, mottled brown fish with generally a golden color belly. The male has a bright-orange spot at the base of the dorsal fin. Three to five reddish-brown streaks radiate from the eyes, and the gill flaps are often red. They range in size from 4 to 10 inches but can grow to over 12 inches long and weigh up to 2.25 pounds. It is a highly aggressive and hardy fish, and can live in ponds, lakes, rivers, and backwater streams. The primary diet consists of insects, crayfish, and other fish. They are sight feeders, and can survive in polluted, low-oxygenated waters where other sunfish cannot.



BLACK CRAPPIE *Pomoxis nigromaculatus*

Found statewide in many lakes and rivers, this was originally a stream fish in Oklahoma. They do well in lakes of at least 500 acres. Black crappie require clear lakes, but is not suited for farm ponds because they tend to overpopulate small bodies of water. Black crappie will have only a sporadic, unrecognizable pattern to its black spots, and seven or eight bony spines in its dorsal fin. They form loose schools and can be caught year-round. The average crappie caught in Oklahoma weighs between a half-pound and 1.5 pounds.

Oklahoma State Record: 4 pounds, 10 ounces.



WHITE CRAPPIE *Pomoxis annularis*

Crappies are usually associated with standing timber and brushy cover in lakes. In spring, they inhabit the shallow ends of coves, later moving to water 15 or more feet deep. White crappie, the most prevalent crappie in the state, will have distinct vertical bands of blue/gray spots and 5 to 6 bony spines in the dorsal fin. Its sweet meat makes exquisite table fare. White crappie has adapted to slightly turbid lakes. The species is not suited for farm ponds because it tends to overpopulate small bodies of water.

Oklahoma State Record: 4 pounds, 15 ounces.

GREAT LAKES FOR BASS UNDER 16 INCHES

These lakes have been identified by ODWC's Fisheries Division as having an overabundance of bass under 16 inches.



DARRIN HILL/ODWC

American Horse Lake.

AMERICAN HORSE LAKE

American Horse Lake is in Blaine County 10 miles west of Geary (S5,T13N,R12W). It was built by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1966. Vegetation around the lake is post oak-blackjack forest and mixed-grass eroded plains types. The lake has one concrete boat ramp, several picnic tables, and one water well. Geary is the nearest town to get picnic and fishing supplies. The lake supports an abundant population of good-size bluegill and catchable-size largemouth bass.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 6.80 miles.

Volume: 2,200 acre-feet.

Maximum Depth: 75 feet.

Surface Area: 100 acres.

Nearby Campgrounds

Roman Nose State Park.

Management Practices

Largemouth bass spring electrofishing and fall hoop nets to evaluate fish populations. Cedar trees are added to refurbish existing habitats.

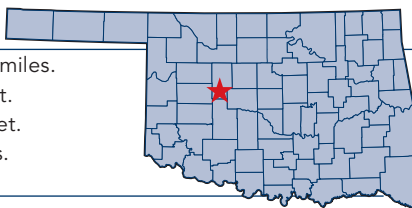
Special Area Fishing Regulations

Daily/Size Limits: Channel and/or blue catfish: six combined per day. Methods: Two rods and reels per person. Bowfishing allowed. All other methods are prohibited.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 474-2663.

Game Warden: (580) 623-0206.



BIRCH LAKE

Birch Lake is 2 miles south of Barnsdall on 8th Street. Hybrid striped bass are stocked.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 31 miles.

Volume: 19,000 acre-feet.

Maximum Depth: 52.50 feet.

Surface Area: 1,137 acres.

Recreational Facilities

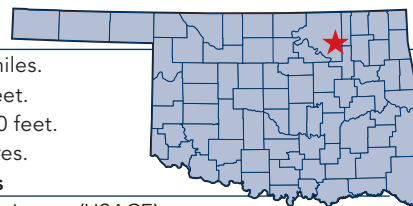
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) manages campgrounds, boat ramps, picnic areas and designated swimming areas.

Nearby Campgrounds

Birch Lake USACE

Skiatook USACE

Keystone USACE



RICHARD WATERS/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2019

Fishing on Lake Bixhoma on a foggy morning.

Keystone State Park
Oologah USACE
Copan USACE

Operator

U.S. Corps of Engineers.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 762-2248.
Game Warden: (918) 440-9880, (580) 761-4097, (918) 381-4099,
(918) 331-5798, (918) 331-5798.

BIXHOMA LAKE

Bixhoma Lake is 2 miles south of Leonard on Bixoma Lake Road.

Nearby Campgrounds

Okmulgee Recreation Area
Dripping Springs Recreation Area
Sequoyah Bay State Park
Sequoyah State Park
Keystone USACE
Keystone State Park

ADA Information

The northwest shoreline has a fishing dock.

Contacts

Fishing: (918) 299-2334
Game Warden: (918) 625-5796, (918) 625-5085
Wagoner County: (918) 366-3859.

LAKE CARL BLACKWELL

Lake Carl Blackwell is 8 miles west of Stillwater on State Highway 51. Oklahoma State University manages campgrounds with full RV hookups, cabins, boat ramps, fishing docks and designated swimming areas. An enclosed crappie dock is just north of the lake store. Hybrid striped bass are stocked. Saugeye are stocked to manage for quality crappie.

Nearby Campgrounds

OSU Lake Carl Blackwell.
Lake McMurtry.
ADA Information
Ski Point boat ramp is ADA compliant.

Special Area Fishing Regulations

Daily/Size Limits: Walleye, sauger and saugeye: six combined per day/18-inch minimum. Methods: Noodling is prohibited.

Operator

Oklahoma State University.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 762-2248.
Game Warden: (405) 747-0505.
Fees and Facilities: (918) 372-5157.

LAKE CARL ETLING

Lake Carl Etling is 26 miles northwest of Boise City in Cimarron County within Black Mesa State Park (S5&6,T4N,R2E). Vegetation around the lake is pinon-juniper-mesa type. The lake has two boat ramps, good picnic and camping facilities, and state park cabins. Lake Carl Etling was built by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1958.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 4.50 miles.
Volume: 1,717 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 38 feet.
Surface Area: 159 acres.

Nearby Campgrounds

Black Mesa State Park

Management Practices

Good populations of largemouth bass, flathead catfish, walleye, and smallmouth bass are present.

Special Area Fishing Regulations

Daily/Size Limits: Channel and/or blue catfish: six combined per day. Methods: Two rods and reels per person. Bowfishing allowed. Cast nets may be used to take bait for personal use. All other methods are prohibited.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 474-2663.
Game Warden: (580) 651-9133.

DRIPPING SPRINGS LAKE

Dripping Springs Lake is 6.5 miles southwest of Okmulgee on Dripping Springs Road. Dripping Springs Lake is a fishing-only lake (no water sports allowed). Dripping Springs Lake has one boat ramp, one boat dock, and one fishing dock. City of Okmulgee manages campgrounds with full RV hookups.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 22 miles.
Volume: 17,008 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 36 feet.
Surface Area: 1,055 acres.

Nearby Campgrounds

Dripping Springs Recreation Area

Okmulgee Recreation Area

Management Practices

Florida largemouth bass are stocked frequently.

ADA Information

Boat ramp and fishing dock are ADA compliant.

Operator

City of Okmulgee.

Contacts

Fishing: (405) 379-5408.
Game Warden: (918) 625-5971,
(918) 625-6013.
Fees and Facilities: (918) 756-5971.

DARRIN HILL/ODWC



Lake Carl Etling.



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

Konawa Lake.

HUGO LAKE

Hugo Lake is 7 miles east of Hugo on U.S. 70. U.S. Corps of Engineers and Little Dixie Community manage campgrounds with full RV hookups, cabins, boat ramps, designated swimming areas and trails for hiking, biking, and equestrian.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 98.60 miles.
Volume: 126,741 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 51.50 feet.
Surface Area: 11,592 acres.

Nearby Campgrounds

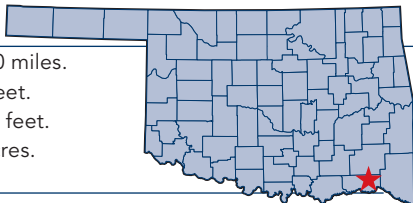
Hugo USACE
Hugo Lake State Park
Raymond Gary State Park
Lake Ozzie Cobb
Pine Creek USACE

Operator

U.S. Corps of Engineers.

Contacts

Fishing: (918) 297-0150.
Game Warden: (580) 317-5000.



KONAWA LAKE

Konawa Lake is just east of Konawa between State Highway 39, U.S. 377, State Highway 3 and 140 Road. Konawa Lake has three boat ramps and picnic areas. No fees. Camping not permitted. Konawa Lake was built by Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. and first opened to recreational uses in 1971. Fish stocking began shortly after with a focus on Florida largemouth bass, hybrid striped bass, and forage species. In 1994, a slot length limit for largemouth bass of 16-22 inches with only one bass over 22 inches was put in place to increase the numbers of trophy size bass. Bass regulations changed in 2003 to six bass per day of which only one may be 22 inches or longer. The purpose of this regulation was to encourage more angler harvest of smaller bass. Florida largemouth bass stocking

ceased in 2005 to further prevent overcrowding. These changes appear to be working with a sizeable decrease in largemouth bass abundance by 2006, however abundance has increased and varied slightly since. In recent years hybrid striped bass stockings have been reduced with the purpose of reducing competition for forage to maintain growth rates of largemouth bass. Konawa Lake is an excellent largemouth bass and channel catfish fishery. Fish attractors are maintained to help increase angler success.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 20.30 miles.
Volume: 23,000 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 40 feet.
Surface Area: 1,350 acres.

Special Area Fishing Regulations

Methods: Rod and reel, bowfishing, and noodling are allowed. All other methods are prohibited.

Operator

OG&E.

Contacts

Fishing: (405) 379-5408.
Game Warden: (405) 380-8995.
Fees & Facilities: (580) 925-2071.

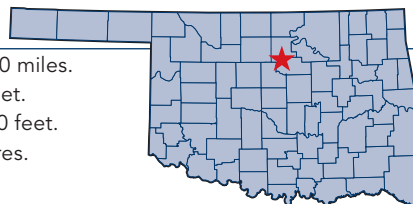


LAKE MCMURTRY

Lake McMurtry is 6 miles north of SH 51 via 180 Rd. An enclosed crappie dock is located on the west side of the lake. City of Stillwater manages campgrounds with full RV hookups and boat ramps. Brush piles are placed around the lake for anglers to utilize. Saugeye are stocked to help improve crappie size.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 23.60 miles.
Volume: 19,733 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 43.60 feet.
Surface Area: 1,155 acres.





Sunrise at Lake McMurry.

Nearby Campgrounds

Lake McMurry
OSU Lake Carl Blackwell

Operator

City of Stillwater.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 762-2248.
Game Warden: (580) 370-0700.

SKIATOOK LAKE

Skiatook Lake is 10 miles west of Skiatook on US 20. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages campgrounds, boat ramps and designated swimming areas. Florida largemouth bass, hybrid striped bass and walleye are stocked.

Lake Details

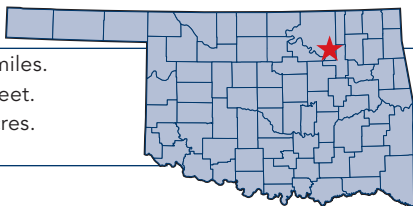
Shoreline Length: 187 miles.
Volume: 322,700 acre-feet.
Surface Area: 10,190 acres.

Nearby Campgrounds

Skiatook USACE
Birch Lake USACE
Keystone USACE
Keystone State Park

Special Area Fishing Regulations

Daily/Size Limits: Striped bass and striped bass hybrids (does not include white bass): five per day, of which only two may be 20 inches or longer.



Operator

U.S. Corps of Engineers

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 762-2248.
Game Warden: (918) 440-9880, (580) 761-4097, (918) 381-4099,
(918) 331-5798, (918) 331-5798.
Fees and Facilities: (918) 396-3170.

STROUD LAKE

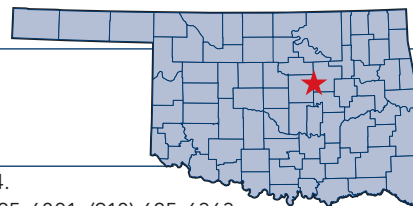
Stroud Lake is 7 miles northeast of Stroud on OK-99 N and E 840 Road.

Nearby Campgrounds

Stroud Lake
Chandler Lake
Keystone State Park

Contacts

Fishing: (918) 299-2334.
Game Warden: (918) 625-6801, (918) 625-6363,
(405) 240-1870.



LAKE VINCENT

Lake Vincent is in the Ellis County Public Hunting Area in Ellis County, 13 miles southwest of Arnett (S1&12, T18N, R26W). Vegetation around the lake is shinnery oak-grassland type. The lake has one boat ramp and picnic areas. Arnett is the nearest town to get picnic and fishing supplies. This lake is known for its redear sunfish along with largemouth bass, saugeye, bluegill, channel, and blue catfish, and crappie. Lake Vincent was built by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1961. It was renovated and restocked in 2000.

Lake Details

Shoreline Length: 5.10 miles.
Volume: 2,579 acre-feet.
Maximum Depth: 48 feet.
Surface Area: 160 acres.

Special Area Fishing Regulations

Daily/Size Limits: Channel and/or blue catfish:
six combined per day. Methods: Two rods and reels per person.
Bowfishing allowed. All other methods are prohibited.

Contacts

Fishing: (580) 474-2663.
Game Warden: (580) 860-4967.



Lake Vincent.

SMALLER BASS MAKE TASTIER TABLE FARE

HERE'S HOW TO CLEAN AND COOK YOUR CATCH

By Skylar St.Yves, Fishing R3 Coordinator

New harvest rules for largemouth and smallmouth bass are aimed at improving the overall size and health of Oklahoma's black bass population, primarily focusing on largemouth bass. ODWC recommends harvesting 8-inch to 15-inch largemouth bass, especially at lakes with an overabundance of these fish.

Largemouth bass in this size range are the best to eat for a number of reasons.

First, it helps to sustain a healthy size structure in a body of water through less competition, meaning more food to go around. Fish can become stunted in small bodies of water. Also, the health of the bass population as well as the prey source declines when there are too many similarly sized mouths to feed.

Second, fish continue to grow for their entire life, but grow the fastest in the first few years. Eating fish under 16-inches means that the fish has had less time to accumulate elements like mercury in their meat that can pose health hazards to humans. Fish over 16 inches are great for catch-and-release, photos, and trophy mounts.

Thirdly, smaller fish tend to have better tasting meat with a more desirable firm texture. Older, larger fish tend to have a fishier taste and mushier texture.

Fillets from bass that are 8 to 15 inches long are perfect for fried strips or bites. They also sear well in a pan for fish tacos. Whole fillets can be lightly seasoned and buttered then thrown on the grill, wrapped in foil, for a healthier option.

In addition to being delicious, bass in the best eater-size range are also fairly easy to catch. They inhabit shallow structure and cover near the bank, waiting for easy meals like bugs, invertebrates and small bait fish. Areas such as coves, marinas, rocky or woody banks are ideal fishing locations, making access to this resource available to all.

CLEANING TIPS

While many people enjoy fishing for sport, many others catch fish to use as food. Fish has always been an important part of the diet. And being able to clean and cook a fish that you caught is great, especially for those who enjoy the taste of fish!

When cleaning your fish, filleting means cutting out the meat of the fish without the bones. Larger fish, like largemouth bass, catfish, striped bass and walleye, are usually filleted. A filleted fish has its skin and all of its bones removed before cooking.

Fillet knives have a long, thin blade that's very sharp and specifically designed for filleting fish. To work properly, the knife must be really sharp. If you have any slime on your hands or the fillet knife handle, wash it off to prevent slipping.

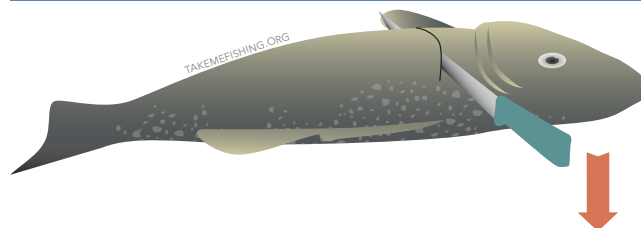
Tip: When learning how to fillet a fish, you can also wear metal- or rubber-mesh fish-cleaning gloves to protect your hands.

12 STEPS TO FILLET A FISH

STEP 1

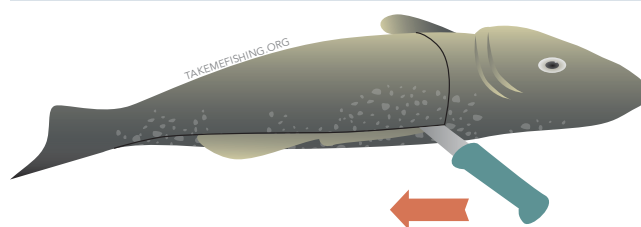
Place the fish on its side on a flat surface.

STEP 2



Cut the fish behind its gills and pectoral fin down to, but not through, the backbone.

STEP 3



Turn the fish so that its back (dorsal fin) is facing you. Make a long slice along the back of the fish from the cut you made behind the gills all the way to the tail.

STEP 4

Repeat this slicing motion until you can lift the meat partly away from the back bone with your thumb.

STEP 5

Once you can lift the meat partially away, continue to run the tip of the knife along the ribs of the fish till you lift the fillet most of the way off the carcass.

STEP 6

Push the blade of your fillet knife all the way through the body of fish from the dorsal (top) side through to belly at the anal vent, and pull the knife towards the tail to separate the fillet from the rest of the fish.

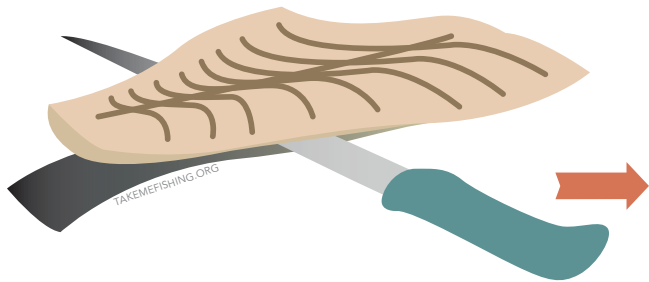
STEP 7

Repeat these steps on the other side of the fish.

STEP 8

Put the fillet on the table with the skin side down. Insert the knife blade about a half-inch from the tail, gripping firmly, and put the blade between the skin and the meat at an angle.

STEP 9



Using a little pressure and a sawing motion, cut against, but not through, the skin.

STEP 10

Remove the fillets from the skin.

STEP 11

Wash each fillet in cold water.

STEP 12

Pat dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. The fillets are ready to cook or freeze.

COOKING TIPS

Cooking is the next-to-last step in finishing a great fishing trip. Below is a simple recipe for cooking your fish fillet.

Pan frying is a popular way to cook fish, and it is the quickest and easiest way to cook your catch at your campsite, at the park or on shore.

6 STEPS TO PAN FRY FISH

STEP 1



First, coat the fish fillet with flour. Feel free to add your favorite seasonings to the flour before coating.

STEP 2



Dredge the flour-covered fillet in a beaten egg.

STEP 3



Coat the fillet with bread crumbs.

STEP 4

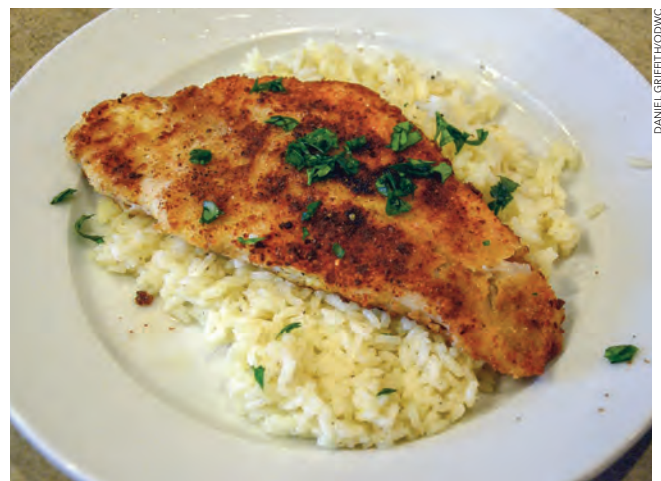
Heat some cooking oil in a skillet. Test the heat by dropping some bread crumbs into the skillet. If it sizzles, the oil is hot enough.


STEP 5



Add your fish to the skillet, cooking on each side for 3 or 4 minutes, or until the coating is brown.

STEP 6



The final step to a successful fishing trip is enjoying the taste of your catch. Enjoy with fellow anglers or family and friends. 



SMOKEY SOUTHWEST

Tiger Bass® fingerlings are released into Grand Lake.

POND OWNERS LONGING FOR LUNKERS MIGHT TRY SOME TIGERS IN THE TANK

Largemouth bass genetics has become an interesting subject among anglers and pond owners alike. By now, most anglers have heard of the Florida largemouth bass, thanks to their trophy potential. Florida largemouth bass exhibit a growth potential far beyond that of Oklahoma's native northern strain largemouth bass. However, there is a reason they are called Florida strain: They don't do well in cold water. If only there

was a way to get Florida largemouth bass growth potential in cooler climates.

Now, there may be.

Many states have been stocking Florida largemouth bass where they don't naturally exist since the early 1970s. The goal of these stockings is not to increase the number of bass in the population, but to increase trophy potential by introducing Florida strain genetics into the system. When a Florida largemouth bass spawns with a northern largemouth bass, a cross is produced. The resulting fish is most commonly called an F1 (first generation FLMB X NLMB), and carries traits from each of the parent species.

The desired F1 bass has the trophy potential of a Florida largemouth bass and the thermal tolerance of a northern largemouth bass. Although climate still has a major effect on growth rates, the potential for larger maximum sizes is increased.

It became apparent pretty quickly that these Florida largemouth bass stockings were successful, as states like Oklahoma boasted many new state-record largemouth bass throughout the 1990s and 2000s. However, it only worked as far north as juvenile, or fingerling, Florida largemouth bass could survive. This created the need for a commercially available F1 largemouth bass. Multiple com-



A hatchery worker holds a Tiger Bass®, a trademarked fish raised for its genetic ability to grow faster in northern areas.

mercial hatcheries across the south began propagating and selling F1s under many names, the most recognized being Tiger Bass®, a trademarked fish produced by American Sportfish Hatchery.

According to the American Sportfish Hatchery website, Tiger Bass® are bred for aggression and fast growth. Whether the Tiger Bass® is superior to other F1 largemouth bass available on the market isn't known, but a lot of science has gone into these fish.



Tiger Bass® are held in a wire pen to acclimate to the water of Grand Lake.


The hype about Florida largemouth bass/northern largemouth bass crosses is justified, as Oklahoma's current state record largemouth bass (14 pounds, 13.7 ounces) is a cross of some degree.

In March 2022, during Major League Fishing's REDCREST Championship, professional angler Kevin VanDam and the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation each donated \$5,000 to the Wildlife Department's Fisheries Division Northeast Region to begin a Tiger Bass® stocking program at Grand Lake.

Also jumping aboard were Flying Squirrel Farms with a \$10,000 gift, and the Swank Family Foundation, Whiskey Point at Grand Lake, and Southstone Construction, each giving \$5,000. OWCF Board of Directors member Raegen Siegfried secured an additional \$10,000 for the project, and the City of Grove has also indicated its willingness to contribute financially.

The Tiger Bass® will create an opportunity to increase the population of larger bass in the lake. Plans called for stocking two fish per acre, double the normal stocking rate seen in other parts of the country.

The VanDam Foundation also gave \$7,500 to create and place fish structure in Grand and Eufaula lakes. And ODWC received a sizable donation of habitat structure from Mossback Fish Habitat.

Any landowner interested in boosting the trophy potential of largemouth bass in a pond and truly growing giants may want to look into stocking F1s of some sort. Just remember, the work doesn't stop at stocking. Growing trophy bass requires ample forage, good habitat, and proper management. Get more tips and advice from the local ODWC fisheries biologist or check out the Wildlife Department's pond management page at <https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/pond-management>. 

LOG IN FOR FREE FISHING WEBINARS

The Wildlife Department's Fishing R3 Coordinator Skylar St.Yves is a treasure trove of knowledge when it comes to various types of fishing in Oklahoma. You are sure to learn a thing or two when you attend any of the live webinars he will conduct in the coming months. It's free to tune in and ask questions. Your registration at Go Outdoors Oklahoma is needed so we can send you the YouTube Live link.

Here's the webinar schedule at the moment:

MARCH

Wednesday, March 1, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Paddlefish Webinar

Friday, March 3, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for White Bass Webinar

Tuesday, March 7, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Crappie Webinar

Wednesday, March 8, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Bass Webinar

Tuesday, March 14, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Walleye/Saugeye Webinar

Wednesday, March 15, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing Tailwaters Webinar

APRIL

Tuesday, April 4, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Sunfish Webinar

Wednesday, April 5, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Catfish Webinar

Tuesday, April 11, 1 p.m.

Wet Wade Fishing Illinois River System Webinar

Wednesday, April 12, 1 p.m.

Fly Fishing for Warm Water Species Webinar


MAY

Tuesday, May 2, 1 p.m.

Topwater Fishing Webinar

Wednesday, May 3, 1 p.m.

Bank Fishing for Non-Game Fish Webinar

To register for any of these live webinars, scan the QR code and search for the topic. 



Conservation

Fun Outdoors!

Want to see the International Space Station pass over Oklahoma? Look to the southwest just before 10 p.m. CDT March 15. You should watch for the "bright star" moving northeast. ISS should be overhead about 10:04 p.m. then fade out as it approaches the Big Dipper low in the northeast. Bonus: Mars will be almost straight up, and Venus will be setting low in the west.

Hunting Tip

There's still a few days left to go rabbit hunting in Oklahoma; that season closes March 15. Youth spring turkey season will be April 8-9.

Fishing Tip

Get ready for spring fishing by organizing your tackle box! It can make for a more enjoyable day on the water. Here are a few tips: Use clear compartment boxes to store and organize terminal tackle such as lures, hooks, and sinkers; sort tackle by type such as topwaters, spoons, crankbaits, etc.; preserve soft plastic baits in the bags they came in; avoid mixing colors or placing soft baits with hard baits as the chemicals can cause damage and the colors can bleed; put pliers, line-cutters, and de-hookers in an easy-to-reach external pouch.

for Kids!

Word Search: Oklahoma Native Fish

L	O	N	G	N	O	S	E	G	A	R	T	W	K	O	N
U	R	U	K	I	G	M	Q	S	S	A	M	G	F	I	Z
R	N	E	H	Z	W	J	A	S	F	M	E	P	F	Y	W
E	J	W	T	Y	L	I	U	A	Q	T	H	W	R	T	J
N	N	V	G	R	E	R	S	B	H	P	O	G	I	K	A
I	W	Q	N	O	A	F	C	H	X	B	D	F	V	W	L
H	J	F	T	P	Q	D	A	T	J	N	I	Z	E	H	L
S	O	R	V	P	A	O	T	U	M	G	P	X	R	I	I
R	I	L	D	M	Q	V	F	O	K	V	J	V	R	T	G
E	E	D	Q	C	D	G	I	M	P	Q	E	I	E	E	E
V	Y	K	M	K	O	W	S	E	J	S	C	B	D	B	U
I	P	G	F	F	Y	S	H	G	J	V	D	R	H	A	L
R	L	E	E	N	A	C	I	R	E	M	A	E	O	S	B
V	B	U	F	F	A	L	O	A	T	U	I	D	R	S	I
Y	W	L	T	E	Z	J	G	L	A	R	I	M	S	K	R
D	N	F	I	R	B	R	J	X	J	D	B	O	E	F	C

Find and circle the names of these fish that are native to Oklahoma.

American Eel
Buffalo
Largemouth Bass
River Redhorse

Bluegill
Catfish
Longnose Gar
River Shiner

Bowfin
Drum
Redspot Darter
White Bass

COOL FACTS About the Red Fox:

- Red foxes have a reddish coat and bushy, white-tipped tail.
- Small rodents and rabbits make up most of their diet.
- Their size is like that of a small dog, with body and tail totaling about 3 feet long.
- They typically weigh 10-15 pounds.
- They are considered the most widely distributed carnivore in the world.
- They are highly adaptable and able to survive in semi-arid habitats, tundra, farmland, forests, and even in urban settings.
- They can live about eight years in the wild.
- They can chase prey at speeds around 30 mph and can maintain a gallop for long periods.
- They are among the most common spreaders of rabies and carry other diseases such as canine parvovirus and canine distemper.
- Their native range was originally only the northern United States and Canada.
- In the 1700s, Europeans brought red foxes to America and released them, after which they spread throughout the entire country.
- Red foxes in Oklahoma will breed from December to April.
- A female fox, or vixen, will prepare a den underground and will have a typical litter of three to six pups.
- Pups are born with dark gray fur, which turns to red after about three months.



Color a Critter: Red Fox





STATE'S LONGEAR SUNFISH:

ONE FISH TWO FISH,

**THREE
FISHES MORE**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRANDON BROWN, FISHERIES BIOLOGIST



Driven by environmental and chemical triggers we don't completely understand, many Oklahoma fish species invest a tremendous amount of work and metabolic energy into reproduction each spring and summer.

Some follow rising floodwaters and broadcast huge numbers of eggs over newly flooded vegetation. Others, like flathead catfish, leave their deep-water haunts for the shallows and excavate nest cavities under rocks and logs. Still others, like white bass and paddlefish, swim great distances upstream to lay their eggs.

But perhaps no other Oklahoma fish invests more time, work, and energy into reproduction than the longear sunfish. Each year, they devote weeks — even months — of round-the-clock effort into building nests, guarding territory, and caring for their young. The myriad fatherly duties constantly performed by the males make them the Energizer Bunnies of the fish world, and a colony of nesting longears is a dizzying display of color, motion, and energy. It all follows a precise set of rules innately known by the longears, but hidden from our understanding. They are arguably Oklahoma's most beautiful and hardworking fish.

Longear sunfish are among the most common and widespread, yet unique and interesting, of Oklahoma's 175 or so species of fish. Their species name *megalotis* is derived from their prominent gill flaps. Breeding colors are striking, especially for males, which can make for an absolutely stunning sight.

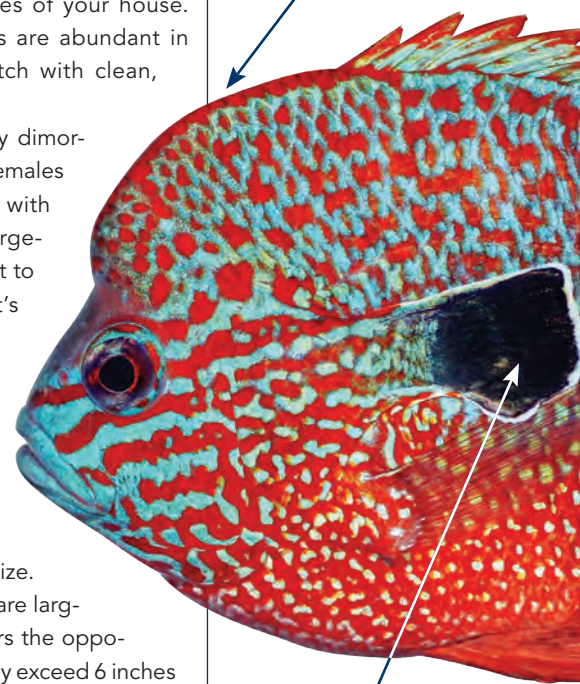
Longears belong to the sunfish family, a fairly large and popular group that includes well-

known species like largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted bass, as well as black and white crappie and an additional 11 species that most Oklahomans collectively but incorrectly label as perch. Although they can be found in our large lakes and rivers, longears are first and foremost creek fish. No matter where you live in Oklahoma (except the Panhandle), there's probably one swimming within a few minutes of your house. Even in urban areas, longears are abundant in almost any small creek or ditch with clean, permanent water.

Mature longears are sexually dimorphic, meaning that males and females look different. This contrasts with many kinds of fish, such as largemouth bass that can be difficult to differentiate. With longears, it's easy to see some obvious differences between the sexes. The length of the opercular flap (gill flap) is one example, with males developing longer and more pronounced flaps than females.

Another good example is size. For many fish species, females are larger than males. But with longears the opposite is true. Although males rarely exceed 6 inches long, they are noticeably larger than females. The development of a nuchal hump, an enlarged area of fat, soft tissue, and fluid best described as a swollen forehead, is another example and is most prominent in the oldest and largest males.

**NUCHAL
HUMP**



**OPERCULAR
FLAP**

Perhaps the best example of dimorphism in longears is the development of the male's striking breeding colors. These consist of varying shades of intense electric blues and turquoise greens, contrasting with deep reds and vivid glossy oranges. The exact patterns, markings, and combinations of these colors is quite complex and covers the entire face, body, and fins. These colors are most intense during summer and seem to glow and produce vibrant flashes of color in the right lighting conditions. By comparison, females are plain and ordinary-looking, with dull and muted colors.

Longears are colorful throughout Oklahoma, but what's interesting is that they look different depending on where they are found. While a largemouth bass caught in Mississippi looks just like one caught in Wisconsin, longears don't all look the same.



These differences in appearance are significant enough to raise the question of whether they are all fish of a single species. This has been discussed by a handful of ichthyologists over the years.

One of these is Bruce Bauer of Tennessee, who has studied Oklahoma's longear variations and is trying to finish his life's work unravelling North America's longear sunfish speciation.

Bauer's tremendous undertaking spans 50 years of collecting, identifying, and documenting differences in longear sunfish from across

the country. He's an encyclopedia of all things longear and has been cited in a wide range of fisheries books and publications during the last four decades.

Bauer began working with longears in 1973 at Eastern Kentucky University as an undergraduate, counting scales on longears from all over North America. "When we looked at the ones from the Little River drainage in southeast Oklahoma, they really stood out. And the longer we looked, the more they stood out."

After finishing his undergraduate degree in Kentucky, Bauer moved to Tennessee Tech for his master's degree and then on to the University of Tennessee to work on his doctorate project with longear and dollar sunfish. "We were looking at everything and measuring anything that could be different — things such as how many pectoral rays, which ray is the longest, how much longer is it, how many scales in the lateral line, how many scales above the lateral line, how many around the caudal peduncle, etcetera." These assessments were performed on literally thousands of fish, and the work continues even now.

Over the years, Bauer would set the project aside and pick it up again, but he never gave up on finishing it. A few years ago, he had an opportunity to look at longear variation using genomic-scale DNA sequencing. "It was really expensive, and some of the new DNA science stuff is over my head. But I was able to partner with some topnotch geneticists from Yale (Daemin Kim and Thomas Near) and finally take a closer look at some of these different forms of longears. My morphometric work said they were different, but I really needed to be able to confirm it with DNA, too."

The results confirmed much of what Bauer had believed for years. In 2021, he co-authored a paper on the findings: *Lepomis megalotis* wasn't one species with several different forms, but a complicated group of fish with enough genetic and morphological (size and shape) variation to warrant the recognition of six stand-alone species. Three of these occur in Oklahoma, with two of them being newly recognized and still yet to be formally named. Bauer said that work is in progress now and should be announced this year.

While Oklahoma's two new longear species were "unknown to science" and are just now being recognized, it doesn't mean they are newly discovered, as in "never seen before." All three of Oklahoma's longear species are common where they occur and well-known to anglers and biologists alike. But the research by Bauer and others

did answer the longstanding question: "Are all these different-looking longears really the same kind of fish?"

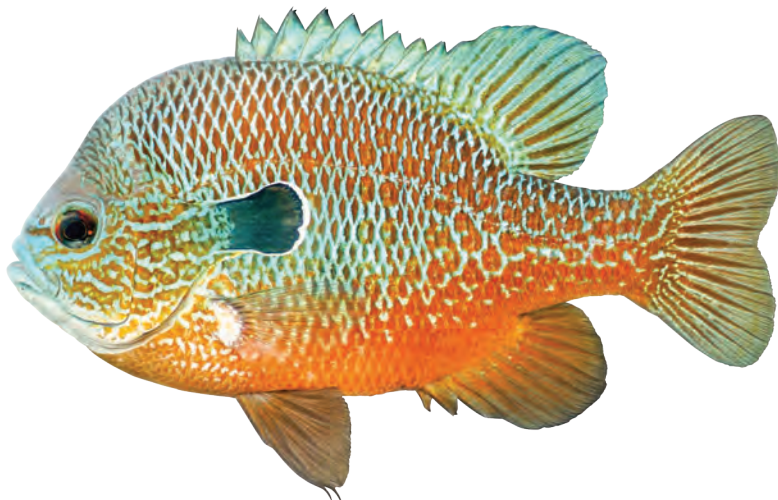
Bauer's research continues and he plans to receive several more specimens from Oklahoma. Altogether, he has examined 5,406 individual longears and 39 morphometric traits on each fish – that's a remarkable 210,834 data points.

The most widespread longear in Oklahoma is currently known as the **"plains longear"** or *Lepomis aquilensis* (although that common name may change). It's found throughout central and western Oklahoma and in lowlands of the Arkansas and Red rivers as far east as the Arkansas line. They are typically powder blue or turquoise green on the front half of the fish, transitioning to brick red on the back half. They are also stockier-bodied with stout "bulldog jaws" and are probably the largest of Oklahoma's three species.

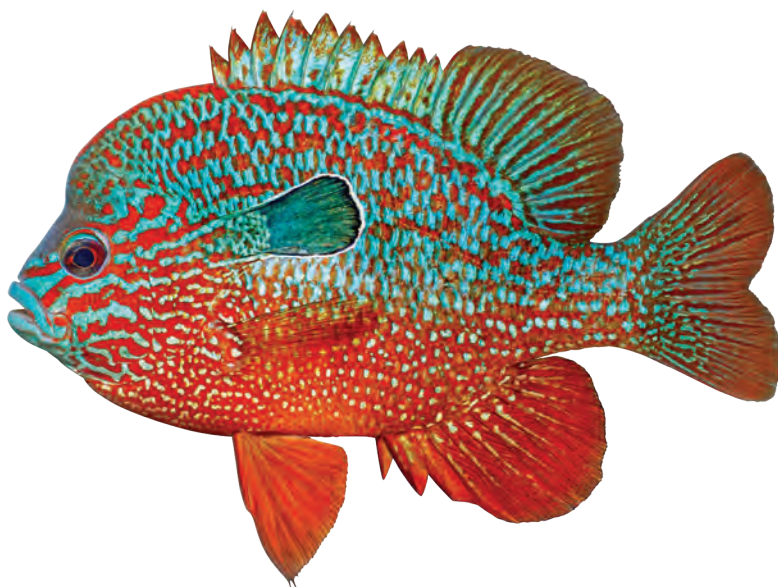
The tentatively named **"redstripe longear"** is one of Oklahoma's newly recognized longear species and is currently designated *Lepomis sp Ozark*. Its range is basically the Ozark region of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas, but it can be found in a few streams as far west as Ponca City and as far south as tributaries of the Poteau River. These longears are best known for their distinctive red stripe extending along the nape from the dorsal fin to the top of the forehead. Their coloration is brilliant blue intermixed with vivid orange-reds throughout the body, stomach, forehead, and fins.

The third Oklahoma longear species is also new and is currently referred to as the **"Caddoan longear"** or *Lepomis sp Ouachita*. These are perhaps Oklahoma's most genetically and morphometrically distinct longear, and one of the original forms that first got Bauers' attention 50 years ago. They are found throughout the Little and Kiamichi river drainages of the Ouachita Mountains and extend to near the Gulf coastal plain to the south. Their primary colors are shiny deep red or orange with iridescent blue markings on the face, and blue dots well-distributed across the body.

Longears are undoubtedly one of Oklahoma's most unusual and interesting fish species. Often caught on hook and line, they are decidedly too small for table fare, too pretty to use as bait, and too special and unique not to be appreciated for what they are. Perhaps their best purpose is to just be admired and appreciated for their unparalleled beauty, tireless energy, and the role they play as one of the true gems among Oklahoma's native fish. ♡



PLAINS LONGEAR



REDSTRIPE LONGEAR



CADDOAN LONGEAR

TIPS ARE APPRECIATED



GOBBLE UP THESE POINTERS
FROM A TURKEY HUNTING GURU

By Wayne Turner, Former Professor, Oklahoma State University

For about 25 wonderful years, I was a turkey hunting buddy of the late Dwain Bland, a local and national legend among turkey hunters and a fine friend. I was a professor at Oklahoma State University, and Dwain was an electrician. We harvest many birds and let a lot more walk away. He also called in our sons' first turkeys, so he was like a family member.

Dwain had a way with words, and his advice has stuck with me for years. So, I'd like to share some of his turkey hunting wisdom by quoting him as best I can remember. I used his advice to pull three wary toms from hens last year. Here's the first "Dwain-ism":

"Most birds are taken before opening day."

Dwain was a very ethical hunter, so those words stopped me in my tracks. I replied with the most intelligent statement I could think of: "Huh?" He laughed and told me I should have several birds totally patterned so that on opening day, I can choose which one to hunt or move to another if someone else was already there. I normally spend almost as many hours scouting before the season opens as I do actually hunting.

I've downed many cups of coffee sitting in my truck or on a log simply listening to the fly-down and trying to determine what the birds wanted to do. Many times, that tells me exactly where I ought to set up. I also carry a good set of binoculars. If I see birds in a field, I use the binoculars to watch them for a while. Often, they will clue me in about where I can set up the next day for success.

Finally, from one year to the next, different birds will often follow the same pattern. If I'm going back to an area where I took a bird in a previous year, that's the first place I'll check. Often, the next generation will follow the same pattern.

I call turkeys for a buddy, and we found a really hot area on his farm. I've called in quite a few birds for him over the years. Don't tell him, but I think we could just sit there quietly and harvest a bird every year because they often repeat the same patterns.

"It's a whole lot easier to call a bird to where he was going to go in the first place."

If I've patterned a bird, then I know where the bird is likely headed, and I should sit between the two points in a logical ambush spot and call. Knowing "what to say" and "how to say it" can be very important. Once I hear birds closing in, I use soft yelps and purrs, and they usually gobble. I follow with a sequence based on the bird's movements and calls. If I know where he will likely roost, I set up several hundred yards away on his path and don't call at all or use very soft flock talk.

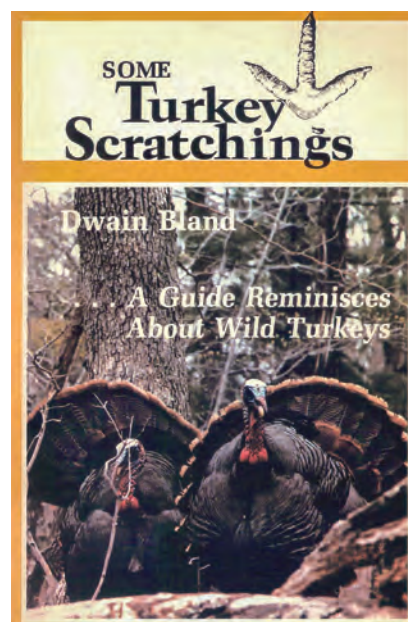
"If you shoot a bird, don't get up and run to it. Keep your shotgun on it; if it lifts its head, shoot again."

If you run out to get the bird while the other birds are still around, it gives those birds a Ph.D. in turkey-people wariness. When you stay put, those birds only know there was a loud noise and a buddy laid down. They will leave eventually, and that's when you should go to your bird.

In the meantime, if I shot the dominant bird, the sub-dominant birds will often



Dwain Bland, right, concludes another successful Oklahoma turkey hunt after calling in a tom for a fellow hunter.



Oklahoma turkey hunter Dwain Bland authored several books on the sport during his lifetime.



beat the poop out of the bird on the ground. However, I keep my shotgun on the one I just shot. If he lifts his head, I didn't get a good shot. If he pulls his legs under him, he may try to fly when I stand. I've lost a bird when it flew after I stood up.

"If the tom has hens with him, he's not about to leave several good-looking girls to go after one that he can't see. Get aggressive with cackle calls only after he gets hot."

This one is fun but seems to work only about half the time. I worked birds for an hour only to see them moving left to right with hens about 150 yards away. I used aggressive assembly calls and had their attention as they lifted their heads and looked in my direction at every call.

The assembly call is a series of 10 or so

yelps in a demanding fashion, much like a hen calling to her chicks. That usually draws gobbles, and it did. Immediately I cut off the gobble with an excited cackle, which brings another round of gobbling. Then I repeated.

It's important that I already had the birds hot. After the third set of these calls, I saw the birds say goodbye to the hens and start running in my direction. Rather comically, at this point, they were sure of love and it became a race that ended with a dead bird on the ground.

The other half of the time when I try this, the birds seem to say, "Hey, I've got pretty hens already here, but I'll come back later." If they do leave, I try to be patient in case they come looking later.

"If they are close, in strut, and following hens, call the hens and not the toms."

Sometimes I'll switch my calling to attract hens, not toms. If the hens come, the toms will follow as if on a string. The cackle call tends to run off the hens, so be careful.

To learn how to call a hen, I spent many hours sitting close to roost trees and listening without any calling. I've also done this in a turkey barnyard. Contented flock talk is a bunch of purrs, clucks, and very soft yelps, and it's steady. So, I softly start talking to them. It doesn't always work, but when it does, it's neat.

The lead hens are listening, but they don't really show me they are. They just sort of turn and head my way slowly. I like to use decoys for this situation. I have three hen decoys and a jake. I've created my own tom decoy with a real tail but am reluctant to use it close to me for safety reasons.



On a hunt in the Oklahoma Panhandle, a significant flock of hens with one dominant tom, two other mature birds, and a couple jakes strolled by me. The dominant tom would answer all my calls, but he wasn't about to leave those hens. When I switched to the soft flock talk, the hens slowly turned in my direction and fed right in. When I shot the tom, the two mature but lesser birds beat the poop out of the dead dominant bird.

"If you can hear them, it's impossible for them not to hear you."

I've spent time listening, and I noted turkeys are very soft talkers most of the time, especially when content. This also tells me not to call loudly unless I am locating toms. Even then, I've only felt they were decoy shy a few times. When I did, I brought in the decoys. I like crow calls better. Yes, I do walk through the woods yelping loudly at times, like in windy conditions. But once he answers, I talk softly every time.

"Listen to flocks wake up and learn to mimic."

I've spent many hours listening to flocks wake up and talk at first light. I don't gobble when they're in the tree, so this is only about the hens. My first call is usually a very soft purr using a small quiet slate. Shortly thereafter, I make a very soft yelp or two. Then I shut up. Normally I get a gobble in response if they are close, and I picture them saying to each other, "I didn't know she was there, did you?" They aren't very patient, so they may gobble a few more times. But I stay quiet.

About 10 minutes before normal fly-down time, I repeat but a bit louder, and now I stretch the yelps into a short series. At fly-down time, I've cackled and beat the ground with a wing or even my hand to mimic fly down. Then, I start my normal call sequence. I'm very careful of the fly-down cackle because I've had them shut up completely at that point and stay in the tree much later. (Yeah, maybe it's just my cackle.)

"Let the bird tell you how much to call."

When I started turkey hunting (about the same time Moses came off the mountain), the method was to use the box call and yelp three times to let him know where you are. If he answers, follow that with one more set of three yelps, then shut up and wait. I did a lot of waiting and not much harvesting. It was frustrating to have him gobble several times then not respond.

There are times now when I'm calling frequently and other times when I call very little, depending on what the bird seems to want. If he gobbles only once or twice but is moving my way, I play hard to get and stay patient. I think cackling to a bird

COURTESY NEARVA



JEREMY BOX/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2018





like that can scare him off, so I try to be seductive (difficult for an old guy). I've had birds not answer for 30 minutes, and so I stood up to move a little and there he was, approaching silently.

"Walk carefully away from the bird to convince him you are leaving."

This can work well with two people, a caller and a shooter. The natural order is for the hen to come to the gobbler. I'm trying to change that order. Thus, sometimes the bird decides there's no need to move and continues to answer and goes into strut. But the bird isn't about to come in. Some people gobble to add some competition, but I don't like to gobble as I can't outrun another hunter's shot. Thus, one trick is to leave a shooter in place, and the caller can slowly back away from there, putting more distance between the caller and the tom to simulate the hen leaving.

"Try again later when they're alone."

Typically around the second week of the season, the hens take off to nest about mid-morning. Until then, the dominant tom has hens and is probably not interested in pursuing another one. But sometimes lesser toms will break from the flock and come in. I once had nine jakes leave the flock and fly across a creek to me; this is highly unusual, but the dominant bird did not leave.

Another time, I called only twice when they flew down. My buddy didn't have a bird yet, and he was also calling to this flock, so I stayed quiet. About 9 a.m., a loud gobble sounded off about 30 yards away. Sure enough, two mature toms came up the creek looking everywhere for the hen that called only twice earlier. I think the hens had all gone to nest and the toms were out looking. This also explains why

birds are often easy to call at midday. A lonely tom is usually very callable.

"If you mess up calling, don't go silent; call again immediately."

I once lived close to a large flock of turkeys and spent many hours just listening to them. You can learn many things by doing this and one of them is that turkeys screw up also. People sometimes choke or stutter when talking to each other. Why are we surprised to hear that turkeys do also and that turkeys don't all sound alike?

When I call and mess up, my natural reaction is to shut up and compose myself. This is the worst thing I can do,

as it calls attention to my screwup. Thus, I continue calling and even call more right after a screwup. I've had birds go silent when I screw up. But, I've also had birds seemingly not notice if I quickly resume calling. If I continue to screw up, I know I should go home and practice.



JOE CUMMINGS/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2018

"If the birds are decoy shy, ditch the decoy for extra time."

The more we use decoys, the more chances we take that toms will become decoy shy. A few years ago, I picked up my box call and gave a series of three yelps (I believe a box call reaches farther than other calls). Far off, a gobble rang out, so I repeated the yelps. He gobbled again and was running straight to me. I told my buddy (the shooter) to get ready for it would be quick. Sure enough, the bird ran into our opening, saw the decoys, and ran for the woods without breaking stride. Luckily the shooter was quick and bagged the bird.

If we hadn't had decoys out, that bird might have stopped running to look around, giving the shooter a better chance. That was perhaps the oldest bird I've ever called in. He had curved spurs $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, a 12-inch beard, and weighed well over 20 pounds. To this day, that's the best set of spurs I've seen.

I've only felt that birds were decoy shy a few times. When I did, I brought in the decoys.



PROVIDED BY WAYNE TURNER

"Know your shotgun and load pattern."

I used to shoot 3-inch No. 5 shot out of a full-choke, double-barrel American Arms shotgun. Recently, I switched to a Hevi Shot mix of 5, 6, and 7 shot with very impressive results through a turkey choke. The smaller shot puts considerably more shot in the head and neck than larger shot. It's important to pattern the shotgun, which I do every year even though I've used the same gun for about 30 years. I shoot about $\frac{3}{4}$ the way up the neck, so $\frac{1}{4}$ of the neck and the head are seen above the shotgun barrel. At 20 yards, I don't put any pellets in the body, which pleases the family when we serve it.

Even though I pattern at 40 yards, I never take shots more than 30 yards. Most shots are at 20 yards. At 20 to 30 yards, I've only lost one turkey. This load at 20 yards puts the turkey down for good. The challenge is to pull the tom in close, and with good camouflage and calling, he likely will stick his head up at 20 yards.

True confessions: A few of these -isms are mine, but you wouldn't listen to me, so I'll leave you wondering. Dwain was a very special friend, and my family and I were very lucky.

Take your children, grandchildren, and even the neighborhood kids hunting with you to pass along the heritage of hunting. May all your birds have long full beards and long spurs. 🍷

COURTESY NEARVA





MAJOR RESEARCH INTO STATE TURKEY PLIGHT UNDERWAY

**By Don P. Brown,
Communication and
Education Specialist**

15 percent from the historic high seen around 2010. Many states are in the same situation as Oklahoma, trying to figure out what is driving the decline in wild turkey numbers.

In Oklahoma, wild turkey populations have declined over the past three years in all five regions where surveys are conducted. Those three-year declines range from 2.7 percent in the Northeast Region to a whopping 67.1 percent in the Southwest Region.

Some estimates put the total number of wild turkeys at 30,000 birds at the beginning of the last century — for the entire continent! By 1930, most Oklahomans would say there were no wild turkeys to be found here. The statewide population was probably less than 1,000 birds.

In 1948, the Wildlife Department embarked on an ambitious program to re-establish the wild turkey to its former range. By the early 1970s, America's population of wild turkeys was about 1.5 million.

Marcus Thibodeaux, the Wildlife Department's Rio Grande wild turkey project coordinator, said the estimated Oklahoma turkey population was just under 100,000 in 2016. Today, the estimate is 70,000 birds statewide, a drop of about 30 percent in a span of six years.

After several years watching and monitoring the surveys and hunting harvests, state biologists decided in 2020 that ODWC needed to act. The first goal was to immediately address the decline by tightening hunting regulations. The next goal was to conduct scientific research to learn what is causing the decline and what can be done long-term to best manage wild turkey populations.

Spring turkey hunting is a popular pursuit for hunters in Oklahoma and nationwide; in fact, the wild turkey is second only to deer as America's most-hunted game animal. In Oklahoma in 2021, an estimated 60,000 hunters harvested about 19,000 wild turkeys during the spring hunting seasons.

The banner year for turkey hunting in the Sooner State was 2003, when an estimated 75,000 hunters took about 42,000 birds.

But the state's severe drought in 2011 and 2012 negatively affected turkey numbers, especially in the western part of Oklahoma. The turkeys failed to rebound, and in the past five years or so, turkey numbers have gone dropped even more.

Turkey declines are being seen nationally, not just in Oklahoma. Biologists estimate the turkey population has dropped to about 6 million birds in the U.S., which is down about

The plight of the wild turkey in Oklahoma quickly became a priority for the Wildlife Department. It was time to embark on a major research project into what was causing the decline.

Research Supervisor Kurt Kuklinski said ODWC emphasized the importance of wild turkey declines by initiating a 4.5-year study.

"Just the fact that we're willing to put almost \$2 million on the line for a five-year project, that shows at the administrative level that this was important."

The research is focusing on demographic parameters of turkeys at sites in southeastern and southwestern Oklahoma, and genetic variation in wild turkeys across the state. Specifically, researchers are examining nesting success, nesting site characteristics, and cause-specific mortality of poults and hens.

The genetic analyses will focus on evaluating genetic heterozygosity, gene flow, and metapopulation dynamics of regional turkey populations. Biologists anticipate information from this study will assist in determining priority areas for turkey conservation and provide recommendations for specific wild turkey management.

Entering its second year in 2023, researchers have already trapped and tracked wild turkeys in southeastern Oklahoma, and are preparing for the first trapping season in the southwest. They are also preparing the first batch of collected biological samples to undergo extensive genetic analysis.

The project involves ODWC, the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, the federal Wildlife Restoration Program, other state and federal entities, and private landowners who are working together to address wild turkey population dynamics.

Stated research objectives are to:

- Evaluate nest initiation rates, clutch size, nest success, nest site characteristics, and habitat selection of nesting wild turkey at sites in southeastern and southwestern Oklahoma.
- Evaluate brood ecology by monitoring poult survival and habitat selection for wild turkey broods.
- Determine seasonal movement and habitat selection of wild turkey.
- Determine survival of wild turkeys for breeding and nonbreeding hens based on VHF data. Leg bands are being used to estimate harvest rates for male turkeys.
- Determine how fragmentation and landscape features influence gene flow and genetic diversity among turkey populations.
- Determine if any populations are isolated or have low genetic diversity.
- Determine patterns of hybridization and introgression between genetic stocks founded by the Rio Grande and Eastern wild turkey subspecies.
- Provide best management practices for wild turkey management and incorporate research findings into public outreach and extension programs.

When this major research project wraps up in June 2026, biologists expect it will provide a better understanding into the cause of current wild turkey population declines, and will add to the collective science and best management practices for wild turkey management in Oklahoma and across the nation. 🍷

To receive regular reports about the ongoing turkey research project, sign up to receive the Upland Update e-newsletter; just scan this code:



Turkey Hunting Rules Allow One Tom in Spring

Oklahoma's 2023 spring turkey hunting season's regulations are unchanged from the 2022 season, when the bag limit and season dates were changed in response to a decline in wild turkey numbers.

Hunters planning to pursue any of the three subspecies of wild turkeys found in Oklahoma are reminded of these spring season regulations:

- Wild turkey hunting season dates are April 16 to May16, statewide.
- The spring turkey season bag limit is one tom turkey per hunter. A tom is defined as any bearded turkey.
- Rifles and handguns are illegal methods of take in the spring season. Archery and shotgun (conventional or muzzleloading) are permitted.
- The 2023 youth spring turkey season will be Saturday, April 8, and Sunday, April 9, for hunters 17 or younger (accompanied by an adult).
- A turkey taken during youth spring turkey season counts toward the regular season limit of one turkey per hunter.
- Unfilled spring youth turkey license remains valid during the regular spring season.

TICKS DO HAVE ROLES IN OKLAHOMA ECOSYSTEMS

DANN THOMAS/FLICKR

RESEARCHER FINDS FASCINATION WITH THE LITTLE SUCKERS

BY JENA DONNELL,
COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST



JAMES GATHANY/ODC

The black-legged tick, often called a deer tick, is among several tick species found in Oklahoma.

When Jes Farquhar's family moved from Arizona to Oklahoma, ticks were one of her bigger concerns. A decade later, Farquhar had overcome her apprehensions and was a graduate researcher with Oklahoma State University studying the ticks that parasitized black bears.

"Once I started researching ticks, I developed a respect for them," Farquhar said. "They're not my favorite, and I certainly don't want a tick bite, but they're fascinating animals."

Farquhar said ticks play three main roles in our ecosystem.

"First, they're a food source. We know different reptiles, amphibians and birds feed on them. Second, they can serve as a type of natural control for wildlife populations because they can carry and transmit diseases. Third, they can be thought of as an ecological indicator of other wildlife populations and their relationships. An increase in the tick population could indicate an increase in a host (species), like mice. That increase could be due to a decrease in predators, like snakes or carnivores."

THE TICK LIFE CYCLE

As part of her early research, Farquhar learned about the ecology of Oklahoma's ticks and their different stages of life.

"There are a few alternate life cycles, but the normal process starts when a batch of eggs hatches into the larval form, or seed ticks. Sometimes we call this mass of seed ticks a tick bomb. If you walk by the tick bomb, you can get hundreds of tiny ticks on you."

Once the larval tick, or seed tick, finds a host it takes a blood meal. Larva can remain attached to the host for about three days if left undisturbed.

"Ticks secrete a cement of sorts that helps them stay attached to the host for the entire feeding period. When seed ticks are done feeding, they drop off and find a dark, moist place to hide and molt into nymphs."

JAMES GATHANY/CDC

Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*)



Adult Unfed Female



Adult Engorged Female

Similar to the larval tick, the nymph must find a host and take a blood meal. Nymphs can feed for three or four days if left undisturbed. Once they drop off the host, they again molt and become adult ticks.

"Just like the larval and nymph stages, the adult tick must also take a blood meal. Once the adult finds a host, it feeds for seven to 10 days if undisturbed. During this time, females produce a lot of pheromones to attract a male tick and eventually mate. Once the mated female completes its meal, it drops off the host, lays eggs, and dies."

Gulf Coast Tick (*Amblyomma maculatum*)



Larva



Nymph



Adult Male



Adult Female

U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Ticks have four basic life stages; cycling from the egg to a six-legged larva or seed tick, to an eight-legged nymph and finally to an adult.

TWO CLUES TO HELP IN TICK IDENTIFICATION

"When I'm identifying a tick, I use two main characteristics. I look at the coloration and patterning on the back, and the length of the mouthparts. Shape isn't very helpful in identification because it changes based on the amount the tick has fed. Even a slightly fed tick will start to expand."

"Hard ticks" are the most likely encountered group of ticks. These ticks have a hard but expandable outer layer that protects their

organs. A dorsal shield, or scutum, further covers the tick's back. The coloration and patterning on the shield differs among species and sexes, and shield size varies between males and females.

Ticks are arachnids, more closely related to spiders than they are to insects. Unlike insects, ticks do not have a segmented body and lack a distinct head. Instead, what we think of as the head are actually mouthparts.

"After I've looked at the coloration and patterning on the dorsal shield, I typically look at the length of the mouthparts. The American dog

Gulf Coast Tick (*Amblyomma maculatum*)



Adult Male

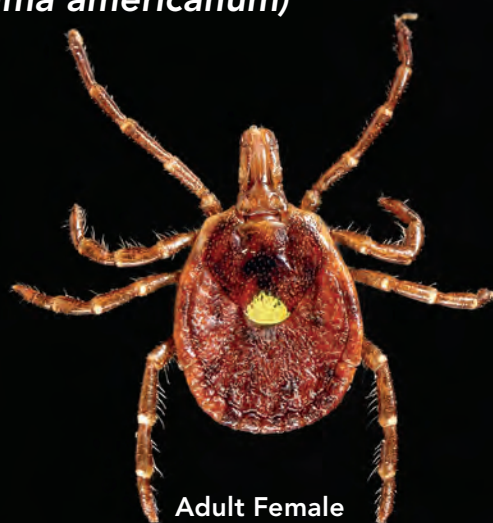


Adult Female

Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*)



Adult Male



Adult Female

The coloration and size of the dorsal shield can help in tick identification. The shield of both male and female Gulf Coast ticks (top) are mottled whereas the shield of a male lone star tick (bottom left) is mostly unmarked with white dots on the bottom edge of the tick, and the shield of a female lone star tick (bottom right) is marked with a single dot at the base of the shield. The shield covers the majority of the body in males of both species and only covers the front of the body in females of both species.

JAMES GATHANY/DOE

tick has really short and blunted mouthparts, while the lone star tick has longer mouthparts.”

A NOTE ON FEMALE TICKS

“When I was growing up, I thought a fully fed female was a different species than the little bitty ticks. I just lumped all the fully fed females together as a single species.”

Instead, a fully fed female of one species can appear similar to a fully fed female of another species. And a fully fed female can appear different than an unfed female of the same species.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING TICKS

“It’s not fashionable, but I recommend tucking your pants into knee high socks when in medium to tall grass or in wooded habitats. This can help keep ticks from gaining access to your skin.”

In addition to tucking shirts into pants and pants into socks, outdoor adventurers can also wear light colored clothing to help make crawling ticks more visible. The ticks can then be removed from the clothing before they can attach to the skin.

“If you know you’re going into a heavily infested area, spray yourself down. You can also treat your clothes to help repel ticks.”

Tick repellants containing DEET can be applied on the skin or on the clothes while permethrin should only be applied to clothes and shoes and allowed to completely dry before use.

“My advice to those that venture into tick prone areas is to do a thorough tick check. If you do have an attached tick, remove it as quickly as possible by grasping the tick close to the skin and slowly pulling backwards. If you have any concerns about the tick bite, check with your doctor.”

“When you’re growing up, you learn more about mammals and birds and reptiles, so ticks are completely alien. Learning about ticks is a bit like peeling back the onion. Once you start studying arachnids and insects, it opens a whole new world.” 🐢



The female lone star tick (top) has longer mouthparts than a female American dog tick (bottom).

TICK RESOURCES

To learn more about ticks, scan these codes:



Common
Ticks of
Oklahoma
and Tick-
Borne
Diseases



TickEncounter
Resource
Center



The Tick App



Each year, a Wildlife Department crew offers a fish fry for lawmakers at the State Capitol as an enjoyable way to discuss issues that affect wildlife conservation.

ODWC HOSTS LEGISLATORS ON EDUCATIONAL OUTINGS

Every year, the Oklahoma Legislature typically considers several bills that directly impact either the management of the state's fish and wildlife, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation that oversees that management (ODWC), or the Department's constituents (often hunters and anglers).

Bills are proposed for various reasons, sometimes by ODWC and sometimes by legislators or their constituents who ask them to propose legislation.

Of the 149 Oklahoma legislators, there are many who can provide expert-level knowledge on many topics such as education, healthcare, etc. But few have expert-level knowledge on wildlife management.

Many appointees to the Legislature's wildlife commit-

tees have experience as ODWC constituents, spending time hunting and fishing. And often many have experience with habitat management on their personal properties. However, few legislators have in-depth knowledge of the critical and unique funding model of the Wildlife Department, landscape-level wildlife management, and management of populations vs. individual animals.

While non-expert constituents can offer helpful perspective and dialogue about proposed legislation, it's also important that experts with ODWC provide legislators with context for legislation they propose or vote on, and provide understanding of ODWC's operations so legislators can determine the impact of proposed legislation before casting a vote.



Rep. Eric Roberts experiences snagging for paddlefish.



Rep. John Waldron and his son catch a white bass.



Rep. John Talley and his grandson keeping black bear cubs warm.



Sen. Blake Stephens and his wife look at a black bear den.

The Wildlife Department takes this task to heart by inviting legislators into the field to directly experience the work that the Department does. These activities vary, from participating in long-term research projects to experiencing wildlife resources — just as ODWC’s constituents — by hunting or fishing.

Often, these opportunities give legislators an opportunity to see ODWC work taking place in their legislative districts, meet local ODWC staff, and learn about local issues. Most importantly, it provides the opportunity for ODWC staff to share more about the mission of the Wildlife Department away from the distractions of the State Capitol.

During 2022, ODWC hosted several legislators for educational experiences across the state. 🍷



Sen. David Bullard and his family attend a bear den research visit.

Grab a Team, Shoot Some Clays, Support Conservation



THE CEDAR GATE



THE CEDAR GATE



THE CEDAR GATE



THE CEDAR GATE

The first annual Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation **sporting clays shoot** will be held Friday, May 12, 2023, at The Cedar Gate near Kingfisher. Join us and support fish, wildlife, and their habitat while having a great time on the gun range with your friends.

Registration is limited, so register your four-person team today for either a morning or afternoon shoot. The cost is \$1,500 per team, with proceeds benefiting the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation through the OWCF.

Trophies will be awarded to first-place and second-place teams. The team coming in last place will receive free shooting lessons following the event.

Food and beverages will be provided. For more information or to register, go to <https://www.okwildlifefoundation.org>.

OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT




Rack Madness public scoring event culminated with a drawing for a lifetime combination hunting and fishing license, provided by the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation.

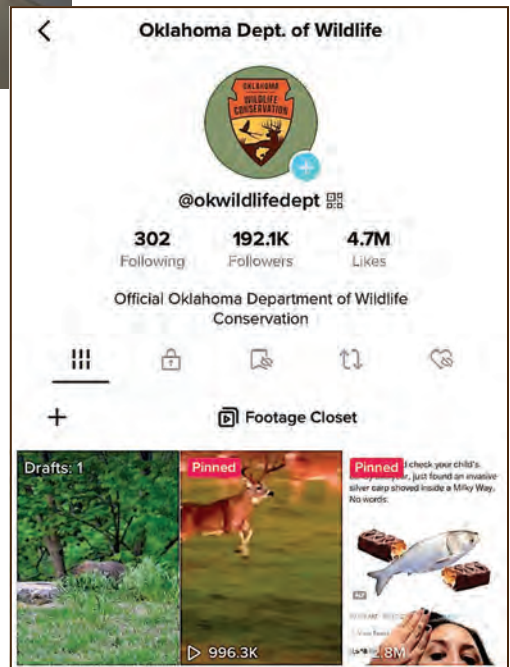
OWCF was a proud supporter of this year's **Rack Madness** scoring event for the public in February at Wildlife Department headquarters in Oklahoma City. The grand prize of a lifetime combination hunting and fishing license was purchased by the Foundation and donated to the event.

The Wildlife Department's social media presence has drawn national attention and accolades, especially the agency's TikTok feed. ODWC upped its game during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and quickly capitalized on some clever ways to communicate with nontraditional audiences via social media. Communication Specialist Sarah Southerland is the genius behind the effort, and her work has generated millions of impressions and attention from celebrities, influencers and the mainstream media.

When Gov. Kevin Stitt issued an executive order to remove TikTok from all state-issued devices, Southerland was afraid ODWC was going to lose a valuable

avenue it uses to communicate and educate. That's when the Foundation stepped in.

Rather than lose the ground-breaking presence that ODWC had built on TikTok, the Foundation ponied up the funds to buy a separate device and internet service so the ODWC account could continue its presence on TikTok without using any state-issued devices or internet service. It was just another way the Foundation was able to jump into a situation quickly and provide the funds needed for a solution allowing ODWC's vital conservation messaging to continue unfettered across the nation and around the world. 



THE OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (OWCF) is engaged in a five-year program to raise \$5.2 million to further the strategic mission of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Since the Wildlife Department has operated on a limited budget for more than 100 years and doesn't receive appropriated state tax dollars, funds raised by the Foundation are among the best methods to more rapidly advance the Department's strategic plan. Because many ODWC projects qualify for a 3-to-1 or 9-to-1 federal dollar match, donations to OWCF can be multiplied and bring more and better projects to Oklahoma more quickly.

Funds raised by OWCF support wildlife research and management, multi-year conservation projects, community outreach programs, and outdoor recreation projects. OWCF's mission cannot be achieved without the support of community partners, philanthropic foundations, and donations from individuals who want to make a difference for future generations.

All donations are tax-deductible. To learn more about OWCF and how to help, go to www.OKwildlifeconservation.org, www.facebook.com/OKWildlifeFoundation, or email Grundman at rgrundman@okwildlifeconservation.org, or call (918) 323-5566.



OUTDOOR STORE

license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com

Sign in or shop online as a guest. Some items also available in person at ODWC headquarters, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd. in Oklahoma City.

***Prices listed on these pages do not include \$3 online ordering convenience fee.*



NEW ODWC LOGO DRINKWARE

Double-wall high-grade stainless steel 16-oz coffee mugs and 20-oz tumblers made by Yukon with DuraGrip powder coat finish featuring the new ODWC arrowhead logo. Tumblers come in navy, white, and bottomland camo; mugs come in olive drab and navy. They are vacuum-insulated and BPA-free. (Online sales only.) — \$20



OKLAHOMA HABITAT DONOR WINDOW DECALS

Show your support of the Wildlife Department's Land Acquisition Fund with these striking window decals. All proceeds are earmarked to help provide hunting and fishing access to the public. — \$10 each



NEW OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA CAPS

These sleek fabric caps sport the latest Outdoor Oklahoma logo design! They are the Richardson 112 model, mid-pro shape, pro-curved visor, adjustable snap-back, 60% cotton/40% polyester. Various colors and styles will be available (subject to availability). (Online sales only.) — \$20



OKLAHOMA WATERFOWL HUNTING STAMP

Oklahoma "duck stamps" are always popular with collectors and hunters. While each year's stamp features a different handsome design sure to add appeal to any stamp collection, funds from stamp sales are used for many kinds of waterfowl management projects. Specify year when ordering. — \$10



WILDLIFE LICENSE PLATES

Dress up your vehicle while showing your support of our great state's wildlife resources by getting a wildlife license plate. Nine Wildlife Conservation Plates are available to serve as your regular, rear-bumper license plate. The plates cost just \$40 (original or replacement) or \$36.55 (renewals) above your regular annual registration fee with proceeds going to Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity Program. The forms are available at local tag agencies, or online at tinyurl.com/WildTags.



HABITAT DONOR CAPS

Top-quality, American-made caps display the Habitat Donor Patch of your choice, which designates you as a contributor to the Department's Land Acquisition Fund. Wearing this hat means you care about future generations and the great hunting and fishing tradition. Specify hat style on order form. — \$20



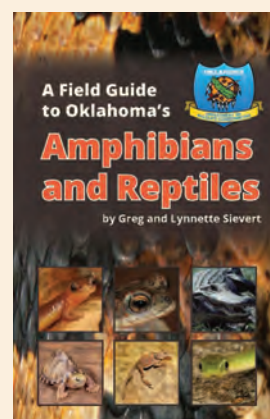
OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

The Wildlife Management Area Atlas presents maps of Oklahoma's WMAs and ODWC-owned fishing lakes. At 109 pages, the atlas features lands purchased before 2018. Each map shows special features such as parking sites, camping areas, and food plots. Your atlas purchase comes with a bonus one-year subscription to the award-winning *Outdoor Oklahoma* magazine. — \$25

NEW EDITION!

A FIELD GUIDE TO OKLAHOMA'S AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Get an introduction to Oklahoma's 140 species of salamanders, frogs, turtles, lizards, snakes and alligator in the 4th edition of our guide to the state's amphibians and reptiles. Six species accounts have been added and range maps have been updated throughout the guide. — \$20



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EASTERN DOBSONFLY

BY THERON BLUNCK, EDUCATION INTERN

Although scary looking, adult male dobsonflies are harmless to people. It is also thought that adult dobsonflies don't even feed during their three- to 10-day lifespan.

It's a mid-summer Friday evening down at river's edge. You and your sweetheart are relaxing in the back of your pickup, listening to the sounds of nature and watching

the bats come out in the receding twilight. Suddenly you catch sight of the most ferocious looking winged creature you've ever seen! Beside you is an insect about the size of your hand, with large mottled wings, long whipping antennae, and the biggest set of

pincers you're certain have ever existed!

What is this creature of nightmares you ask? It's the eastern dobsonfly (*Corydalus cornutus*).

The eastern dobsonfly is in the family Corydalidae, which also includes the fishflies. They are found throughout most of eastern and central North America, including Oklahoma.

This insect appears in its adult form as a large winged insect that measures up to 5.5 inches long with a wingspan of about 5 inches. It has a soft, drab-gray, black, or brown body. The four wings are covered with white and black splotches. The wings are usually kept folded on its back when at rest.

The males and females vary in appearance most prominently by the size and shape of their mandibles (pincers). Males have sickle-shaped mandibles that can measure up to 1.6 inches long. Despite their threatening look, these mouth parts are just for show, used in courting.

Female dobsonflies have short, nubbed mandibles that can be used to deliver a painful bite.

Larval dobsonflies, known as hellgrammites, spend most of their lives in the water under

rocks in the fast current of streams and rivers. They appear as a flattened centipede-like critter with three pairs of legs on the thorax (middle body segment) and four pairs of leglike appendages along their abdomen, each with a fuzzy tuft-like gill at its base. The end of the abdomen has a pair of leglike hooks that allow them to hold on to a rock in the fast-moving current. Hellgrammites also sport a pair of nubby mandibles that can also deliver a painful bite.

The eastern dobsonfly spends most of its life hiding under stones in the water, feeding on other water insects and small fish. After a couple of years, the larva emerges from the water in search of a moist soil area to pupate. This is typically under a log, rock, or leaf litter. The pupa will grow from eight days up to a month before emerging as an adult.

Adult male dobsonflies vie for the attention of a female by fiercely fluttering their wings and using those long mandibles to attempt to flip over other males in a courtship competition. The successful male is allowed to approach the female, which will receive the male after showing a display of aggression. Eggs are deposited in coin-size masses that are covered in a hard, chalky substance for protection. Egg masses are usually placed on vegetation or objects hanging over or near the water. When the larvae emerge, they drop into the water, where they begin their life cycle.

Although scary looking, adult male dobsonflies are harmless to people. It is also thought that adult dobsonflies don't even feed during their three- to 10-day lifespan. The hellgrammite, however, spends its time eating, but also is a food item for many fish. Many anglers seek out hellgrammites because they are excellent bait. But, the mouth parts that make them fierce predators also make them hard biters, so anglers should keep that in mind when collecting them as bait. ♡



Inset: eastern
dobsonfly larva

TYLER ALBERTSON/IPS 2019



Like many snakes in Oklahoma, the orange-striped ribbon snake becomes more active and visible in the early spring. This harmless reptile grows up to 30 inches long and ranges across the entire state except the western Panhandle. More than 50 species and subspecies of snakes can be found in Outdoor Oklahoma.

Outdoor Oklahoma

