

# Outdoor Oklahoma

MAY / JUNE 2023 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR

**IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

## **Celebrating Wildlife Diversity**



**INSIDE**

**Nongame Grant Funding  
Now in 3rd Decade**

**You've Got Questions?  
We've Got Answers**

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



# PANORAMAS



Kurt Kuklinski

Welcome to this May/June 2023 issue of Outdoor Oklahoma! It's a special issue for several of your Wildlife Department employees, because this one devotes many pages to the Department's Wildlife Diversity Program.

We are a small part of ODWC, but we are focused on a great number of species found in the state.

Raptors, rodents, darters, frogs and snakes are all interesting and ecologically important. They're also nongame wildlife. Of the 800-plus species documented in Oklahoma, about 90 percent are considered nongame.

Oklahoma's Constitution mandates the Wildlife Department manage all fish and wildlife of the state as a public trust for the benefit of all people. The most visible aspect of ODWC's management activity is often associated with game animals and sportfish, primarily because of the public's participation in hunting, fishing and trapping.

The Wildlife Diversity Program keeps the Department on course in addressing the needs of the 20-plus species considered endangered or threatened, as well as those common species not hunted, fished or trapped. The program has an endangered species biologist who is focused on protecting and preserving animals listed as threatened, endangered, or in special need of conservation. A senior wildlife biologist maintains the Oklahoma Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the guiding document that sets the priorities for the program. We have a wildlife biologist dedicated to implementing research projects via grant funding. A communications specialist is on the team as well to share the program's work and accomplishments. And I supervise the program, keeping a lot of the paperwork in order and participating in field activities as often as I can.

Some notable aspects of the Wildlife Diversity Program over the years include its partic-

ipation in acquiring two wildlife management areas: Sandy Sanders and Beaver River. A comprehensive database of Oklahoma's nongame mammals was created. Since 1984, the free The Wild Side newsletter has been published regularly to keep the public informed, and in recent years program information has been shared on ODWC's social media outlets.

Please take a look inside this special edition of the Wildlife Department's magazine. You'll learn about the history of the Wildlife Diversity Program; about the all-important funding of research and conservation activities through grants; and about some of the specific activities that support the goals of the program (in this case, a look at the use of prescribed fire to help the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, and a visit to a historic lake to survey some fascinating dragonflies).

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention how people can help support this program. You may buy "A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles" or make a directed donation when you click the "Shop/Donate" tab at [www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com). The Oklahoma income tax form allows people to donate part or all of their state tax refund to this program. Or you might enjoy putting a wildlife conservation license plate on your vehicle.

Conserving and reintroducing endangered species while keeping others from being so designated are extremely important. So, too, is educating Oklahomans on the value of nongame wildlife. ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Program will continue to help protect our wildlife and maintain Oklahoma's rich biological heritage for present and future generations. ♡

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Kurt Kuklinski".

**Kurt Kuklinski**, Research and Diversity Supervisor  
Wildlife Division, ODWC

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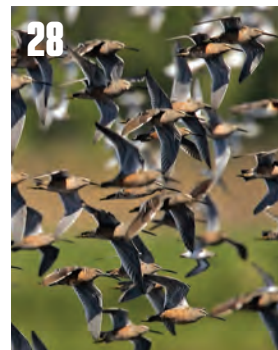
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## ON THE COVER:

Oklahoma is a permanent or temporary home for many hundreds of species that are not hunted or fished. This Wilson's phalarope visiting Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area, imaged by Jeremiah Zurenda, is a great example. This Outdoor Oklahoma issue focuses on ODWC's Wildlife Diversity

Program. Learn about the program and some of its varied activities starting on Page 28.

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OKLAHOMA

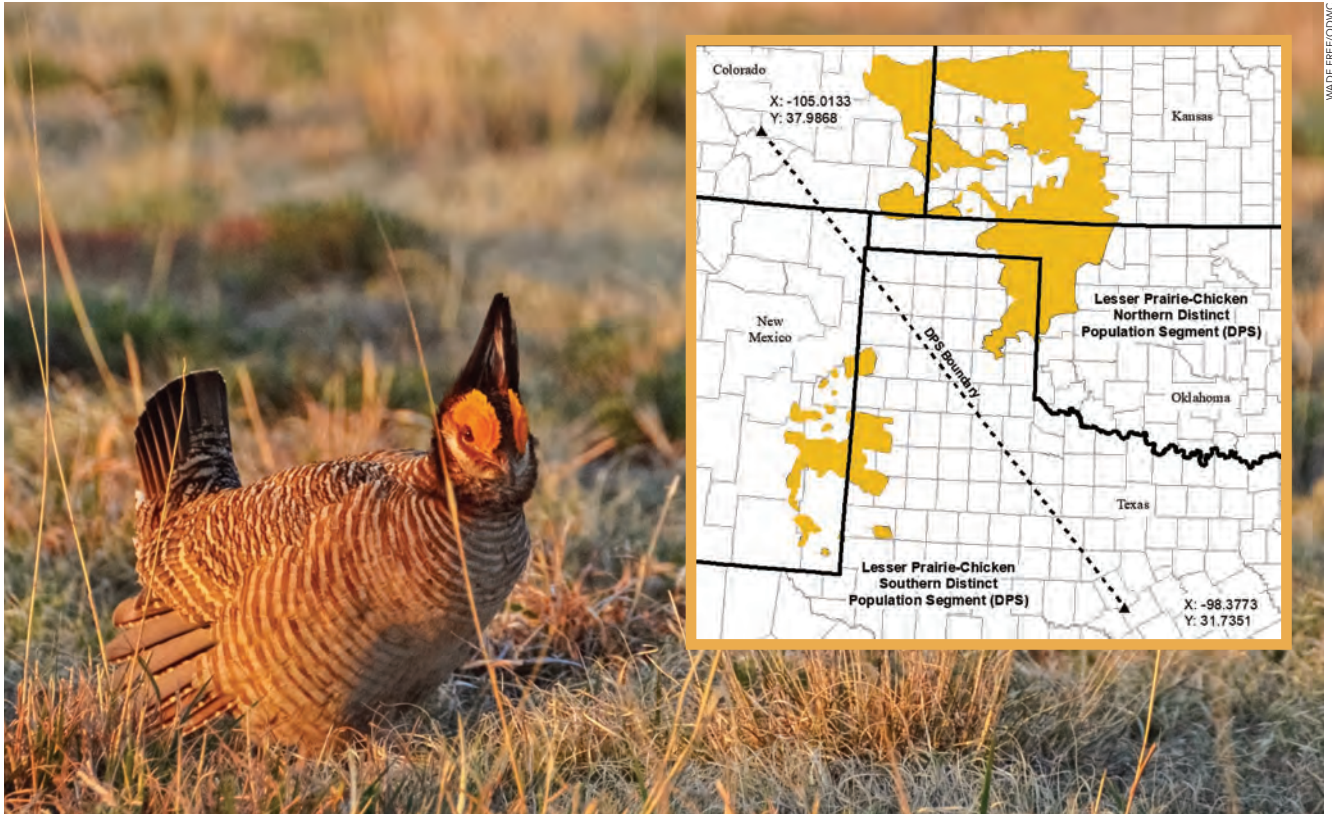




# OFF THE BEATEN PATH

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

## BIRD, BAT AMONG FEDERAL ENDANGERED LIST UPDATES



*Lesser prairie-chicken and map of its range.*

An important part of ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Program involves looking out for the species in Oklahoma that have been included in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. This well-known list has evolved since its creation with the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Two of the list's recent changes involve Oklahoma species: the lesser prairie-chicken was classified as "threatened" on March 27, 2023, and the northern long-eared bat, initially classified as "threatened" across its range in 2015, was reclassified as "endangered" on March 31, 2023.

"Oklahoma's federally listed species span six taxa groups," said Curtis Tackett, Endangered Species Biologist for the Wildlife Department. "We have threatened and endangered plants, fish, mussels, birds, mammals, and insects.

"Some of those species, like the lesser prairie-chicken, are especially sensitive to disturbances like habitat loss and fragmentation. Some, like the northern long-eared bat, may see significant declines because of factors like disease. And other species are thought to be historically rare."

Regardless of the reason for listing, the status of each species is carefully reviewed after having been petitioned by a citizen or group. The USFWS may also internally initiate a review. This rigorous process collects the best available science to determine if a listing is warranted.

### LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN

The lesser prairie-chicken has a near 28-year history with the Endangered Species Act. It was first petitioned for listing in October 1995, became a candidate for listing in 1998, received a "threatened"





status in April 2014 which was then vacated in 2015, and was listed by distinct population segments in March 2023. The northern distinct population, which includes birds in Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, and portions of the Texas Panhandle, has been listed as “threatened,” while the southern distinct population, which includes birds in New Mexico and portions of Texas, has been listed as “endangered.” These populations are separated by at least 95 miles and are considered genetically distinct.

“A threatened listing means that without significant conservation actions, the species may become endangered in the foreseeable future,” Tackett said. “An endangered listing means that without significant conservation actions, the species may become extinct in the foreseeable future.”

This stocky grouse species is found in five Great Plains states and requires large, intact, ecologically diverse grasslands to complete its life history and maintain healthy populations. Studies estimate the bird’s historic range has been reduced by more than 83 percent because of habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation.

### NORTHERN LONG-EARED BAT

This bat has a 13-year history with the Endangered Species Act. It was first petitioned for listing in January 2010, received a “threatened” status in May 2015, and was reclassified as “endangered” in March 2023.

“The northern long-eared bat doesn’t have the same habitat issues as the lesser prairie-chicken,” Tackett said. “A lot of the bat’s wintering habitat is protected, and the trees they use in the summer to roost and raise pups aren’t considered limited. Instead, the Service has determined a pathogen has caused their population to significantly decline.”

The bat can be found in 37 states. In Oklahoma, it is thought to occur in seven eastern counties. The impact of white-nose syndrome, a disease caused by a fungal infection, was the prime factor that influenced the listing decision.

ODWC has shared data with USFWS for other species recently proposed for federal listing, including the **alligator snapping turtle**, **tricolored bat**, **western fanshell mussel**, and **pyramid pigtoe mussel**.

Data are being shared on Oklahoma’s known populations of other petitioned species, including the **Kiamichi crayfish**, **regal fritillary**, **little brown bat**, **southern plains bumble bee**, and **peppered shiner**.

USFWS used data on the **Ozark emerald**, **Oklahoma salamander**, and **seaside alder** provided by ODWC to decide listings for these species weren’t warranted. ♡

—By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist

*Northern long-eared bat and map of its range.*

# TAGGED PELICAN PHOTOGRAPHED 950 MILES FROM NEST

## OKLAHOMA PHOTOGRAPHER REPORTED TAG, LEARNED OF BIRD'S ORIGIN

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Nature photographer Stephen Ofsthun likes to use his images to surprise people with Oklahoma's natural diversity and beauty. But a few images, taken in February 2022 at Lake Thunderbird State Park, surprised even him.

"I had gone to Lake Thunderbird to look for bald eagles and found about 200 pelicans instead," Ofsthun said. "I got several photos of the birds in flight, but it wasn't until I got home and looked at the images that I realized one of the birds was tagged!"

The bird had a purple tag with the number 348 on each wing and a metal leg band that had rotated so that the 9-digit identification number wasn't visible in the photographs. Ofsthun later reported the tag and sighting details to the U.S. Geological Survey's Bird Banding Laboratory, North America's central repository for banding records.

"They sent a certificate that showed the bird had been banded in Idaho in 2020 when it was too young to fly!"

American white pelicans are most numerous and noticeable in Oklahoma during their spring and fall migrations to and from their more northern nesting grounds, but small numbers of nonbreeding birds can be found in the state year-round.

While the exact journey of the tagged pelican from Idaho to Oklahoma remains unknown, the Bird Banding Laboratory did shed light on this tagged bird's origin story.

American white pelican "348" was hatched in 2020 at a colony in Chesterfield Reservoir, Idaho — a straight-line distance of 950 miles from Lake Thunderbird. That summer, Idaho Department of Fish and Game banded and tagged the bird, along with 210 other young pelicans, as part of a study of Idaho's pelican population.

"We discovered a new pelican colony at Chesterfield in the spring



of 2020," said Colleen Moulton, the Avian Ecologist for Idaho Department of Fish and Game. "We have banded young pelicans at other colonies in Idaho since 2007, but No. 348 likely represents one of the first pelicans to fledge from this location. It's exciting to hear that the bird is still alive and well, as we have not received any other sightings of it since it was banded.

"Although most members of its cohort have been spotted in the southwest U.S. and Mexico, a handful of them have shown up a bit farther east. In fact, one of its fledging mates was also spotted in Oklahoma, back in November 2020, at Salt Plains."

Learning the origin story of this banded bird has inspired Ofsthun to look for and report other banded birds he might see.

"I've never spotted a tagged or banded bird before," Ofsthun said. "I'm definitely going to keep my eyes open and check my other bird photos for a band. This has all been a pretty cool experience!"



Ear tags are a familiar sight on Oklahoma's livestock but are a bit more surprising to see on wildlife. Photographer Stephen Ofsthun captured this image of a tagged American white pelican while visiting Lake Thunderbird State Park in early 2022.



The pelican Ofsthun photographed was tagged in Idaho, almost 1,000 miles northwest of Lake Thunderbird.



# GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

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



Oklahoma Game Wardens in Districts 4 and 5 in central and south-central Oklahoma recently trained to handle active shooter scenarios in schools (photo above). ODWC Director **J.D. Strong** was invited to role play in the training. Afterward, he wrote, "I have more respect than ever for the stress that law enforcement faces to subdue suspects, save lives and go home each day in one piece. Nothing but mad respect and awe for these men and women!"



In March, Game Warden Lt. **Chad Strang** based in Cleveland County, became aware of an injured bald eagle in a shopping center parking lot in Moore. Strang and some bystanders chased the fleeing eagle and boxed the eagle, which was then taken to the Grey Snow Eagle House in Perkins for rehabilitation.

Grey Snow Eagle House wrote, "Thank you Game Warden Lt. Strang for helping get this injured bald eagle to us. Radiographs show the eagle has a broken radius (wing bone) and will need to spend some time resting and healing."



Game Warden Chad Strang

(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.

## KEEP WILDLIFE WILD

BY LINDSAY THOMAS JR., NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

Imagine you have found a fawn all alone. This could easily be in an urban area, not just in the wild. Thoughts of "rescuing" the animal enter your mind.

Stop! Take the best advice from science: Leave the fawn where you found it. If you already removed it from the woods, take it back immediately to its hiding spot, or place it in good forested cover as close as possible to where you found it.

Here are facts proved by research:

**It's likely not abandoned at all.** Until a fawn is old enough to be fully mobile and able to outrun danger, the doe spends most of each day separate from the fawn to avoid attracting predators by her own presence and scent. Next time you are fortunate enough to encounter a fawn,

take a quick photo to remember this amazing moment, then be on your merry way.

**Captive-raised fawns rarely make successful returns to the wild.** In one study, more than half of "rescued" fawns that were returned to the wild when ready didn't survive more than 30 days.

**The doe won't reject the fawn if you've touched it.** So, if you now have a wild fawn in your care, take it back to the woods quickly.

**It's often illegal** to keep and try to raise wild animals in captivity. Wild animals seldom make good pets, especially deer. Once a fawn becomes habituated to people, the long-term outcome is rarely good. 🦌



# TAKING STATE'S REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS REQUIRES LICENSE

Oklahoma's hunting and fishing licenses have been around for generations. But it wasn't until 1948 when the Wildlife Department's *Oklahoma Game and Fish News* clarified that "the license also is required for hunting any kind of bird, animal or reptile and is not confined to game species alone."

As with other laws, regulations surrounding reptiles and amphibians have evolved through the years. Today, the license required for taking or attempting to take reptiles and amphibians depends on where the animal is collected or harvested.

Oklahoma residents 16 years or older must have a valid hunting license to collect or capture a land-dwelling reptile or amphibian. A valid fishing license is required for water-dwelling animals. Those younger than 16 are exempted from either license. Landowners, lessees, or occupants of lands are also exempted from a license when reptiles other than those listed as endangered or threatened are creating a nuisance.

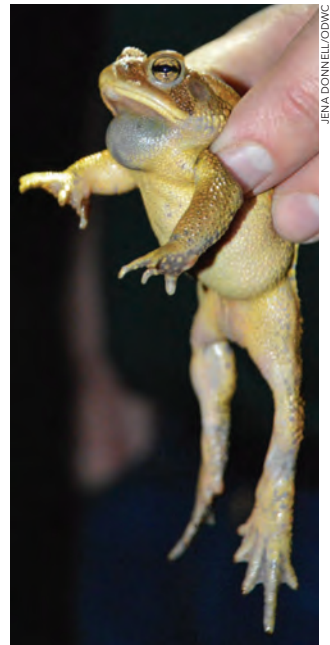
Most reptiles and amphibians have a statewide, year-round open season, but 12 reptile species and 13 amphibian species have a statewide closed season and can only be collected with a valid Scientific Collector's Permit. This allows research teams to legally study rare or declining species such as the Texas horned lizard, alligator snapping turtle, Oklahoma salamander, and groto salamander. Scientific

Collector's Permits are issued based on collection purpose and the species sought, and have an annual reporting requirement before the collector can apply for the permit in the following year.

In addition to the license requirements, collectors must also be aware of daily limits and any closed seasons or area closures. Most reptiles have a limit of six per day or in possession, while most amphibians have a limit of four per day or in possession. One notable exception: The American bullfrog, Oklahoma's state amphibian, has a collection limit of 15 per day or in possession. Other exceptions and reptile and amphibian laws can be found in the current *Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations*.

A copy of the current regulations may be accessed at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com) or through the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app. Hunting or fishing licenses and "A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles" are sold in the app's "Shop" tab. 🐾

—By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist



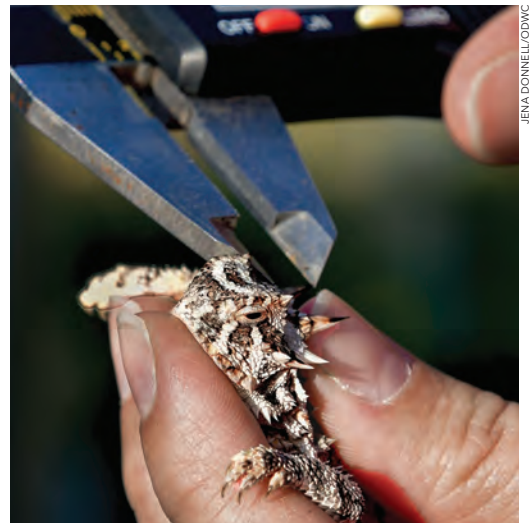
American toad captured at Cookson WMA.



Hog-nosed snake captured on Beaver River WMA.



Six-lined racerunner captured at Cimarron Hills WMA.



Texas horned lizard being measured at Cooper WMA. These lizards have a statewide closed season and may not be handled without a Scientific Collector's Permit.

# WILD ABOUT COOKING

## FRIED FROG LEGS

Just in time for this issue's Wildlife Diversity theme is this simple yet tasty recipe for fried frog legs. Often considered a dining delicacy in the South, the light meat is said to have a mild flavor like chicken, or perhaps the slight taste of fish. People sometimes compare them to chicken wings; it takes more than two frog legs to make a meal.



### INGREDIENTS

12 pairs of frog legs

6 Tbsps. paprika

½ tsp. salt

1-½ cups flour

2 cups milk

Vegetable oil

### DIRECTIONS

- Wash frog legs under cold water.
- Soak frog legs in mixture of milk, salt, and 3 tablespoons paprika for 5 minutes.
- Heat vegetable oil to 375 degrees.
- Season flour with 3 tablespoons paprika and dip frog legs in seasoned mix. Shake off excess flour.
- Fry legs for 3 to 5 minutes depending on size of legs. Turn legs frequently to keep from burning.

**Note:** Paprika is optional as it doesn't affect the flavor. However, the meat takes on a more appealing golden-brown color as it fries.

— Capt. Tracy Daniel, Game Warden Supervisor (Ret.)

### IT'S THE LAW: BULLFROG HARVEST REGULATIONS

Do you need a fishing license or hunting license when taking bullfrogs? It depends on your method of take. Bullfrogs taken with a firearm requires the shooter to have a resident or nonresident hunting license. Bullfrogs taken with hook and line, gig, spear, bow and arrow, or other methods that do not employ a firearm require the angler to have a resident or nonresident fishing license. Bullfrogs may be taken year-round. The daily limit is 15. Bullfrogs may not be sold or shipped out of state. Bullfrog harvest is not allowed on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. ♡

— Lydia Gearhart, Communication Intern

### WAYS TO SUPPORT WILDLIFE DIVERSITY

Donating \$5, \$15, or even \$25 to the **Wildlife Diversity Fund** is just one of the many ways you can get involved in conservation efforts of our state's fish and wildlife. The Wildlife Department can use these donations to learn more about where our nongame fish and wildlife live and identify potential strongholds for rare or declining species.

And, we're able to nearly triple every donation when we leverage them with available federal funds. This means we can fund more time in the field to research our state's species of greatest conservation need.

Adding a Wildlife Conservation **specialty license plate** to your vehicle is another way to help the Wildlife Diversity Program fund surveys of rare or declining nongame fish and wildlife. Twenty dollars of the \$39 fee (\$36.50 for renewals) goes to the Wildlife Department. Specialty license plate fees are in addition to annual registration fees.

Lastly, you can donate all or a portion of your **state tax refund** to the Wildlife Department's Wildlife Diversity Program. So next tax season, look for the Wildlife Diversity Program on Schedule 511-H, the donations list of your income tax form.

To donate to the Wildlife Diversity Fund, scan the code. ♡



# 2022 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

## "WHAT I SAW NEXT BROUGHT TEARS TO MY EYES"

**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 senior category male winner Aaron Chesnut, 16, from Rush Springs High Schools



### By Aaron Chesnut

It all started in 2017 when I finally was able to convince my father to take me deer hunting. I remember seeing pictures of my cousins and uncle with their big bucks, and I knew immediately that I wanted to shoot one of my own. We have trained bird dogs and bird hunted for as long as I can remember, but that was all we did. That was all Dad and my grandfather had ever done, and they were satisfied with that, so they naturally leaned more toward bird hunting rather than deer

hunting. I finally told Dad that I was going to ask my uncle to take me, which got Dad's attention and instead (he would) take me.

Later on opening day of rifle season, Dad and I were sitting in our stand at the back of our property. We watched a few does move through for about two and a half hours before any real activity took place. All of a sudden, the does eating at the feeder were spooked and took off into the trees at the opposite end of the field. Not a minute later, a buck comes running out of the trees and up the tree line. I was 11 years old, so I could not tell if his rack was amazing or not, I just wanted to take him down. He stopped, turned perfectly broadside about

100 yards away, and I pulled the trigger.

About 30 minutes later, we climbed down and began to search for blood where he had been standing. We looked for a good 30 minutes in that area, and we started to get doubtful. I remember dad still standing there with the flashlight looking for blood as I walked into the trees where I had seen him enter the woods. I walked for another 10 yards and what I saw next brought tears to my eyes and joy to my heart. I saw the deer draped over a log with its head propped up on a branch. I quickly called Dad over, and we dragged him out of the woods so we could see him better. Upon further examination, we determined that this was not just any buck, but this was a nontypical buck with 19 points. All I remember was Dad hugging me and telling me how proud he was of me. I am reminded of that night every time I walk in the door and see the buck on the wall.

Ever since then, I was different. Dad and I would go hunting every chance we got. Before I had only gone duck hunting when it was not too cold. Even when I did go, I would not really hunt. I would always pet the dog and blow my call annoyingly. Now, I assist in training our dogs and want to pursue wildlife ecology as a career.

It is safe to say that hunting and the memories provided have changed my life and brought my family closer together. 🍖

*I walked for another 10 yards and what I saw next brought tears to my eyes and joy to my heart.*





# 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](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the_dock) or scan the code:



Sidney S., paddlefish, Arkansas River, April 3, 2023.



John B., blue catfish, Grand Lake, Jan. 27, 2023.



Ashley Deemer, largemouth bass, Murray County, March 29, 2023.



Riley Garrett, crappie, Tenkiller, April 11, 2023.



Grant S., hybrid striped bass, Skiatook Lake, April 10, 2023.



Daniel Christian, saugeye, Custer County, March 7, 2023.



# 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](mailto:donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov).

Dear **Keith Thomas**, Central Region Fisheries Supervisor, and Fisheries crew,

Thank you again to you and your staff for an amazing day of replenishing the structure in Lake Arcadia. We appreciate the partnership we have and hold it in high value. I am proud to share with our fishermen that you added 80 cedars to our lake. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can help or work together in the future.

Our Arcadia Lake Commission was excited to host you and your group. Thanks again for all the work, especially when the weather didn't play especially fair and we all left with wind-blown rosy cheeks. You are a great benefit to our city and our lake.

**Rocky McElvany**, chairman, Edmond's Arcadia Lake Commission



Keith Thomas

Dear Wildlife Department,

I had a blowout yesterday about 30 miles south of Norman on Interstate 35. A Game Warden stopped and helped me change my tire, and I was so overwhelmed I forgot to get his name!

I know it's a long shot, but I just wanted to reach out and see if you could connect me with him. He was on his way to Oklahoma City for something job-related, but that's really all the information I have. Thank you!

**Kiarra Bombard**



Game Warden Zane Arnold

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** A survey of the Department's Law Enforcement Division quickly provided the answer. Game Warden **Zane Arnold**, based in Coal County, was the helper on the highway. Thank you, Kiarra, for writing in to let us know.

### ERRATA

On page 7 of the March/April issue, a mugshot photo labeled as Wildlife Biologist **Hayden Savage** was incorrect. The correct photo of Savage appears here.



Hayden Savage

# OUTDOOR CALENDAR

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.  
[GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX](http://GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX)

NOTICE: Events listed are subject to change.

## MAY 2023

- 6** Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required. Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program Family Festival, The Cedar Gate, Kingfisher. Register: "Events" at [www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com).
  - 7** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 12** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation benefit sporting clays tournament. The Cedar Gate, Kingfisher. [www.okwildlifefoundation.org](http://www.okwildlifefoundation.org).
  - 14** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 21** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 22** Outdoor Oklahoma Adventure raffles ticket purchase deadline; [www.wildlifedepartment.com/outdoorok/adventures](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/outdoorok/adventures). Controlled Hunts application deadline; [www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/controlledhunts](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/controlledhunts).
  - 28** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events set in Norman, May 4. Info: [www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events](http://www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events).
  - **Friends of NRA** event info: [www.FriendsOfNRA.org](http://www.FriendsOfNRA.org).
  - **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Ardmore, May 20. Info: [www.nwtf.org/events](http://www.nwtf.org/events).
  - **Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever** events set in Okemah, May 15. Info: <https://pfqf.myeventscenter.com>.

## JUNE 2023

- 3** Growing Up Wild workshop for educators, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., UCO Boathouse at Arcadia Lake. Register: "Events" at [www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com). Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
  - 4** Project Wild workshop for educators, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., UCO Boathouse at Arcadia Lake. Register: "Events" at [www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com). "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 5** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma](https://www.youtube.com/OutdoorOklahoma).
  - 11** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 15** Controlled Hunts results announced; [www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/controlledhunts](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/controlledhunts).
  - 18** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
  - 25** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events set in Weatherford, June 9. Info: [www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events](http://www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events).
  - **Friends of NRA** event set in McAlester, June 10. Info: [www.FriendsOfNRA.org](http://www.FriendsOfNRA.org).
  - **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set Kingfisher, June 2; Claremore, June 10. Info: [www.nwtf.org/events](http://www.nwtf.org/events).
  - **Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever** event info: <https://pfqf.myeventscenter.com>.

\*\* FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO  
[www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons) \*\*



DARRIN HILL/ODWC

Scouts pour concrete into a hole that will serve as the base of a bat box mounted on a pole.

## EAGLE SCOUT PROSPECT CHOOSES PROJECT TO BEFRIEND BATS

BY DARRIN HILL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Recently, a group of Scouts (male and female youths) gathered to plan, build, and install three rocket-style bat houses at ODWC's Arcadia Conservation Education Area.

Scout Emerson Wyrick, 16, from Troop 79 in Edmond led the project, which was his capstone for earning the Eagle Scout rank within Scouts BSA.

To advance in rank, Scouts are required to complete conservation and community service projects, and to demonstrate ability to lead adults and youths alike in a service project that gives back to the community.

Wyrick wanted his project to be conservation-related, so he asked Scoutmaster Darrin Hill, a producer for the Wildlife Department's "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV show, to serve as his project adviser.

Wildlife Biologists Mark Howery and Melynda Hickman advised Wyrick and recommended bat boxes be installed at the Arcadia location. They offered Wyrick some ideas and information where to get the bat box plans.

Hill said projects such as this help instill in youths the habit of helping others and improving the environment.

"My favorite thing to see was the Scouts working together to upright and install the bat boxes. They had guy lines and plenty of communication as they lifted the poles to be placed in their resting places. It reminded me of ... the famous picture of the U.S. Marines installing the U.S. flag at Iwo Jima.

"Conservation and Scouting go hand in hand and historically have benefited from each other. And both movements are as diverse as ever and continue to move forward while learning from the past." 🛡️



DARRIN HILL/ODWC

Scouts work together to raise a bat box at ODWC's Arcadia Conservation Education Area.



# SQUIRREL HUNTING PUTS URBAN SPIN ON RECRUITING

BY ERIC M. MORRIS, N.ONT.YPICAL OUTDOORSMAN TV



Chasing bushytails can be an excellent way to introduce urban and inner-city people to hunting.



## Let's face it:

Squirrel hunting has never been as popular as deer hunting. But chasing bushytails can be an excellent way to introduce urban and inner-city people to hunting.

Despite what some might believe, urban and inner-city people do have an interest in hunting. While city dwellers may be more accustomed to seeing a squirrel sitting on a park bench, they will be surprised to learn that squirrels make delicious table fare.

Furthermore, squirrel hunting offers a lower price of entry and increased likelihood of a new hunter returning to the woods on their own.

Since you are likely someone already involved in hunting or interested in introducing others to the sport, let's look at why squirrel hunts are ideal for introducing city dwellers to hunting.

First, we need to find our audience. This can be easy if you know where to look. Schools, social organizations, churches, and social media

offer a buffet of potential hunters. The ability to set aside social perceptions and stigmas is critical. Folks from the city may look, dress, and talk differently, but their mutual interest in hunting is what we should hone in on.

A common tactic I use is to seek opportunities to stand before groups, kids and adults alike, and ask two simple questions: "Who has ever been hunting?" and "Who would like the opportunity to go hunting?" These questions usually spark discussion and interest, and produce a pool of people ready to go hunting.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle when introducing city people to squirrel hunting is getting them to see squirrels as a source of food and to overlook the fact they are rodents. One can usually close the deal by talking about "survival." The urbanites interested in going hunting are traditionally the more adventurous types and those with an innate interest in being self-sufficient. 2020 served as a wake-up call for many. Plenty of Americans were raised on squirrels. In an actual survival situation, we



will be eating squirrels, birds, and opossums more than we will be eating deer, elk or turkey. Why? Because small game such as squirrels is more plentiful and easier to acquire.

Sometimes we need to coax people to go hunting. Taking a freshly cooked batch of battered and seasoned squirrel meat may be what's needed to win over a hesitant potential hunter.

Don't dismiss the opportunity to let your audience taste what they will be hunting.

One of the biggest perks of squirrel hunting is having fun with friends and family. Unlike big game hunting, where one must be quiet and constantly aware of the wind, a squirrel hunter can be more relaxed and partake in a few jokes. This within itself makes squirrel hunting perfect for introducing new people to hunting.

Another benefit of a squirrel hunt is that it can be done just about anywhere, and gaining access to hunting land can be easier when



The urbanites interested in going hunting are traditionally the more adventurous types and those with an innate interest in being self-sufficient. 2020 served as a wake-up call for many.



compared to deer hunting. Some landowners will gladly allow hunters to reduce the number of squirrels ravaging their fruit or nut trees.

If you have issues finding private land, public hunting land opportunities can usually be found within a couple of hours of most major cities. Wildlife management areas (WMAs) or national wildlife refuges (NWRs) might be better options for taking groups squirrel hunting. Groups are another advantage over big game

hunting. Squirrel hunting allows groups to walk through the woods or to position individuals throughout the woods in search of squirrels. Hunters can interact with each other in ways that big game hunters cannot. Odds are better of getting city people to go hunting if they can bring a friend or two.

It doesn't take much to get started in squirrel hunting. Everyday clothes, some good durable shoes, a method of take, a blaze orange hat





and vest, and a hunting license are needed. It doesn't get much simpler than that.

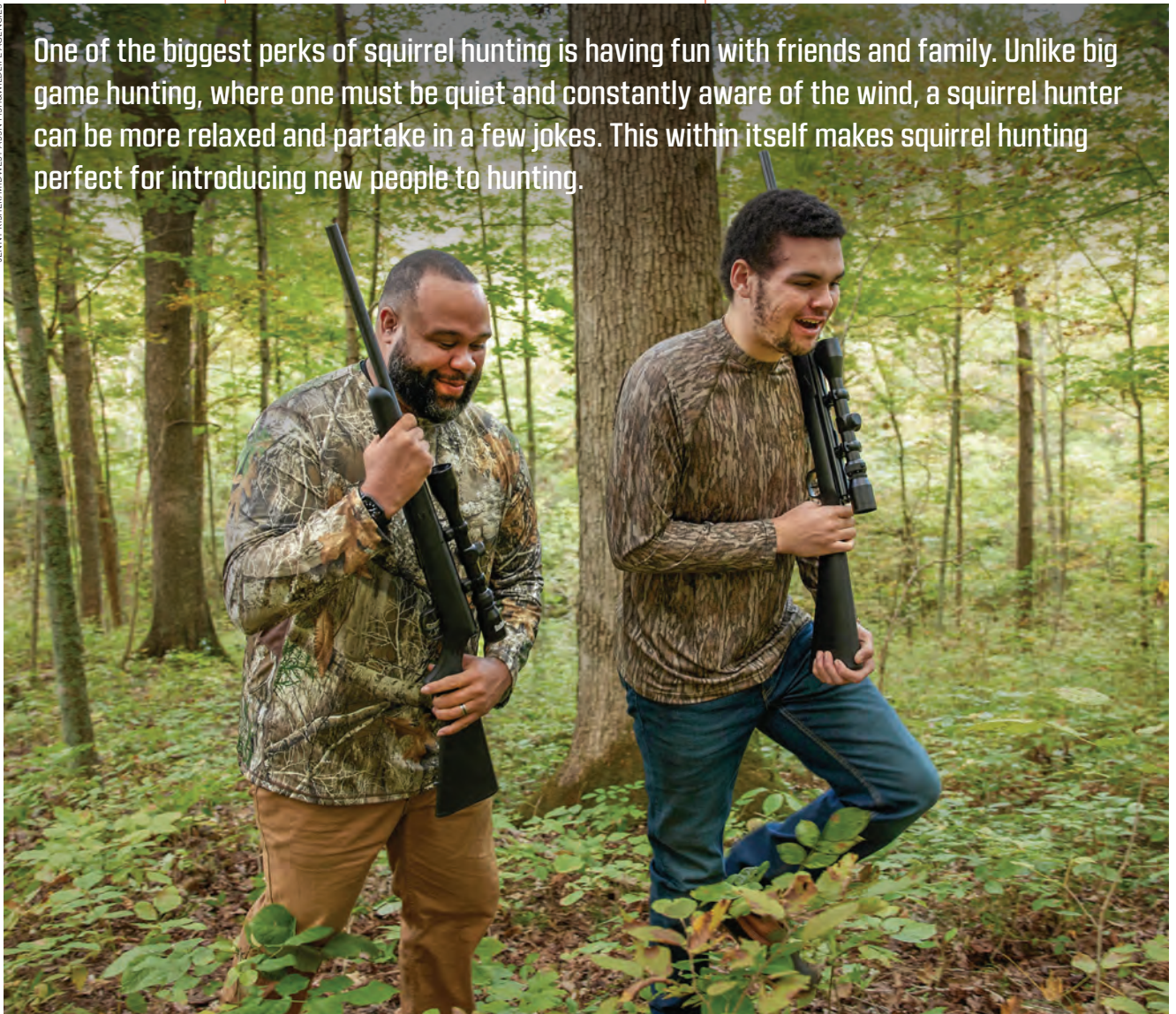
The selection of a method of take is perhaps the most crucial choice a new hunter will have to make. Shotguns are hard to beat for squirrel hunting, as they allow hunters to hit a running bushytail as it moves from tree to tree or tries to use leaves for concealment during the early part of the season. A .22-caliber rifle is ideal for harvesting squirrels. It has taken millions of squirrels in the U.S. since its introduction in 1887. Air rifles, or pellet guns, are another popular option for hunting squirrels, as thousands of American youths, particularly those in urban environments, likely used an air rifle when they learned how to shoot.

Slingshots and bows and arrows are also legal methods for squirrel hunting, but an inexperienced urbanite probably should not try to use those methods.

Under no circumstances should a person just be given a gun and taken to the woods to hunt. It is wise to schedule a range session for the new hunter to learn about the firearm and marksmanship. Doing so will increase safety and chances of success on the hunt. Don't be surprised if city dwellers already own a gun suitable for hunting.

A new hunter looking for a place to hunt may have better luck gaining access in some areas if they hunt with an air rifle or shotgun, because of their limited range. Most people

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JENNY RISHER/MIDWEST ASSN. FISH&WILDLIFE AGENCIES



If you have issues finding private land, public hunting land opportunities can usually be found within a couple of hours of most major cities. Wildlife management areas (WMAs) or national wildlife refuges (NWRs) might be better options for taking groups squirrel hunting.



will dismiss an air rifle as a toy or marginal for squirrels at best, but a pellet gun can be highly effective. A squirrel dinner is almost guaranteed if one can get a .177 or .22-caliber pellet at 700 to 1,100 feet-per-second velocity to connect on a head or shoulder

ble. This is when adding a dog to the hunt can up the action. If one wants to give city dwellers a squirrel hunt to remember, find someone with a good squirrel dog and let the amazement begin. Most city people have never seen a hunting dog in action.

Beagles may be the name of the game when it comes to rabbits, walkers or blueticks may be the choice for raccoons, but it is hard to beat a treeing fiest or cur when it comes to squirrel hunting. Success rates will go way up, as the dogs can track the scent of squirrels.

Although urban dwellers live in cities, they realize the importance of being self-sufficient and being able to feed their families if the need arises. Learning to squirrel hunt can provide the skill set needed to do just that. Squirrel hunting is an activity that can be easily duplicated after one's first experience. And squirrels are delicious. It doesn't matter if they are fried, baked, sautéed, grilled, or roasted over an open fire.



COURTESY VOICE OF LEADERSHIP PANEL

shot. More advanced air guns shoot pellets up to .35-caliber or larger and can quickly drop squirrels.

When introducing people to hunting, it's vital to make it as fun and productive as possi-



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The important thing we can do is to use an overlooked and sometimes mocked game animal to introduce more people to the sport of hunting. ♥

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Eric M. Morris is producer and host of N.onT.ypical Outdoorsman TV and executive director of N.onT.ypical Outdoorsman Inc., an organization that creates and promotes outdoor diversity and inclusion while engaging in outdoor education, conservation, hunting, outreach, hunting legislation, self-sufficiency. He served in 2021-22 on The Voice of Leadership Panel, a collaboration of the NRA Hunters' Leadership Forum and The Hunting Wire featuring an appointed group of outdoor industry leaders who volunteer their voices on key hunting and outdoor recreation issues to inform, inspire, and educate.



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COURTESY VOICE OF LEADERSHIP PANEL

## SQUIRREL HUNTING IN OKLAHOMA

**Season Dates:** May 15 to Feb 28, statewide. (Year-round for falconry; special areas may vary from statewide regulations.)

**Shooting Hours:** A half-hour before sunrise until sunset.

**Daily Bag Limit:** 25 gray or fox squirrels combined.

**Method of Take:** Shotgun (conventional or muzzleloading), rifle (conventional or muzzleloading), handgun, archery equipment, legal raptors, hand-propelled missile, air-propelled missile and slingshot.

**License Required:** Current resident or nonresident hunting license, unless exempt.



# UNcommon

## WE GET QUESTIONS;



*Canada geese are often reported as a nuisance in urban areas. Conflicts may be reported to a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator.*



# Knowledge

## HERE ARE ANSWERS

Compiled by Don P. Brown, Communication and Education Specialist

The vast majority of outdoor recreationists and everyday citizens want to do the right thing when it comes to wildlife. But occasionally they realize they don't have all the answers. So, a simple phone call or Internet search usually will put them on the path toward the right answers.

We get a lot of questions each day here at the Wildlife Department, either on the phone, via email, or in the field. So, as a public service, we compiled the answers to some of the most-common questions our various divisions receive day in and day out.



## LICENSING

### Q: If I am 65 or older, is my license free?

**A:** No. While the Senior Citizen Lifetime License isn't free, it is a deeply discounted lifetime license. The Senior Combination lifetime license costs only \$25, while the lifetime Senior Fishing or Senior Hunting licenses individually are \$15.

### Q: I have lost my license. How can I replace it?

**A:** You can print free paper replacements of licenses at [www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com), or any license dealer can print a paper replacement for \$1.50. You now have an option to upgrade your licenses onto a durable collectors' license card, which can be ordered for \$6 at [www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://www.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com) or anywhere licenses are sold.

### Q: How do I get a boat and motor license? Or a lake fishing permit?

**A:** Licenses offered by the Wildlife Department are mainly related to hunting, fishing, and wildlife resources. Other state entities oversee the types of

licenses or permits mentioned in this question. For boats and motors, contact the Oklahoma Tax Commission at (800) 522-8165, go to [www.tax.ok.gov](http://www.tax.ok.gov), or call your local tag agency. For specific lake fishing permits when those are required, contact the manager of that lake, which is often a local city government.

### Q: How do I reserve a camping spot or rent a cabin?

**A:** The Wildlife Department oversees wildlife management areas for hunting and angling opportunities and wildlife conservation. Limited short-term camping is available on these areas. More than likely, this question concerns camping at state parks, or federal recreation areas. Contact the area's controlling agency. For state parks, it would be the Tourism and Recreation Department at (800) 652-6552 or [www.TravelOK.com](http://www.TravelOK.com). For U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes, go to [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or [www.pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov).



Camping inquiries about state parks and federal lakes should be directed to the area's managing entity, normally either Oklahoma's Tourism and Recreation Department, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### Q: I bought my license online at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com, but I'm trying to buy my child's license and I don't see that option. Is this possible?

**A:** Licenses are purchased through the specific Go Outdoors customer account of the person obtaining the license. To buy your child's license, you'll need to log out of your account and log in to the child's account, or create a new account for the child.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Q: Am I required to have hunter education certification? Can I still hunt without it?

**A:** It depends. Anyone of any age can hunt, but the type of hunting license a person can buy depends on the person's age and hunter ed status.

People 31 and older may buy any hunting license and are not required to be hunter education certified. People 30 and younger who



Any child 9 and younger may hunt with an apprentice-designated license, along with anyone 30 or younger who is not hunter-education certified.



are not hunter ed certified may buy an apprentice-designated license and must abide by accompanying hunter requirements. The hunter ed course is offered for free on ODWC's website, [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com). In-person classes are offered across the state throughout the year and are listed on [www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com) when scheduled.

**Q: Is it legal for me to take the antlers or meat from a road-killed deer?**

**A:** It is unlawful for any person to possess any meat, head, hide, or any part of the carcass of any wildlife not legally taken. A road-killed deer is considered as game taken illegally by an unapproved method of take. Game Wardens may issue a special disposition if requested, provided the reporting party adheres to all instructions.

The Wildlife Department does not remove dead animals from roadways. Contact the street or highway maintaining authority to report the road kill.

**Q: Can I cross the fence to recover the deer I shot?**

**A:** It is illegal to trespass onto private property. Hunters will need to get landowner permission before entering to recover any game harvested. If you cannot find the landowner to ask permission, the county Game Warden might be able to help.

**Q: Does a Game Warden have the right to enter private property to check licenses?**

**A:** Game Wardens can legally go anywhere they need to enforce the wildlife codes of the state. Game Wardens are granted full police powers so they can enforce laws other than those found within the wildlife codes. Usually this is done in cooperation with county sheriff officers, Highway Patrol personnel, and local police. Game Wardens are well-trained professionals and will help a citizen every chance they possibly can. But the primary function of a Game Warden is to enforce the laws that regulate sport fishing and hunting. Nearly 95 percent of Oklahoma's land is privately owned, and Game Wardens would not be able to conduct their appointed tasks without private property access.

The public can help Game Wardens be more effective by providing valuable information about game and fish law violators through Operation Game Thief. Anonymous reports can be made by calling (800) 522-8039 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Information leading to a conviction could earn the caller a cash reward.

## WILDLIFE

**Q: I found a baby rabbit, (or any other kind of animal) what should I do with it?**

**A:** The best practice is to leave young wildlife alone. Chances are the parents are nearby keeping an eye on their young.

Unfortunately for many fledglings, their first attempts to fly land many of them on the ground. They are not abandoned. The parents continue to care for them and usually in a short time these young birds are able to fly and fend for themselves. If you are able, put them back in the nest. If you can't reach the nest,



Dead animals should be reported to road maintenance agencies for removal.



Fishing streams that flow through private land is legal as long as anglers don't contact the property under or alongside the water.



Game Wardens may enter private property to enforce federal and state wildlife codes.



*It may be tempting to return partially feathered fledglings to the nest. But most of the time, young wildlife are best left alone.*

you can put them under nearby bushes. The parents will continue to care for the young.

But by touching some young mammals, you may be serving their death warrant. The stress from human handling can quickly become irreversible, even if the animal is released, and could easily lead to an otherwise healthy animal's death.

Encounters with clearly injured wildlife can be reported to a certified wildlife rehabilitator, listed at [www.wildlifedepartment.com/law/rehabilitator-list](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/law/rehabilitator-list).

ODWC offices are not equipped to accept injured wildlife.

**Q: A pair of Canada geese have a nest by my house and are aggressive; what can I do?**

**A:** Canada geese are migratory birds regulated by the federal government under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The best option is to give geese their space during nesting season from late February to early May. Geese may appear aggressive as they are trying to defend their offspring. Never feed geese; doing so could lead them to gather in large numbers and potentially become a nuisance.

Landowners, homeowners associations, land managers, and local governments may sign up for the Canada goose depredation order permit through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR>. This permit allows the groups listed to remove goose eggs and nests from their respective properties. Control activities under this permit must be reported to USFWS through their portal. Landowners looking to take a more hands-off approach should contact a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator. These are private businesses authorized to deal with these situations. A list of NWCOS is found at [www.wildlifedepartment.com/law/nwco-operators](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/law/nwco-operators).

**Q: What can I do to control the feral swine tearing up my crops?**

**A:** Outside of deer gun seasons, a landowner, agricultural lessee, or a designated agent with written permission from the landowner or agricultural lessee, may control nuisance or damage by feral swine without a permit at day or night to protect agricultural materials, when they have a current agricultural exemption permit issued by the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

Also, the Wildlife Services program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is authorized in federal and state law to take necessary action in assisting any landowner in management and control of rodents, nongame birds, feral pigeons, and furbearers on their property. The most requested Wildlife Services activities are reducing feral swine damage to crops, animal health, and natural resources;



*Addressing feral swine damage is handled by the Wildlife Services division of APHIS/USDA.*



protecting livestock from predation; reducing beaver damage to agriculture, property, and human health/safety; and assessing and reducing public health threats from wildlife diseases such as rabies, swine brucellosis, and pseudorabies. To learn more, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage).

### **Q: How can I improve my land for wildlife?**

**A:** There is no clear-cut answer, as each case is different. All animals have basic requirements to live: cover, food, water, and living space. Ensuring those resources are available and of good quality is a good start. However, to take it to the next level, ODWC has a staff of biologists available to you for free, and programs dedicated to helping landowners reach their goals for wildlife management and habitat improvement. Contact the biologist covering your county to set up a visit to discuss your goals and objectives and help identify what practices and what programs may be of help to accomplish those. Go to [www.wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/landowner-programs](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/landowner-programs) for more.

## **FISHERIES**

### **Q: How can I get ODWC to stock fish in my pond?**

**A:** Largemouth bass, channel catfish, and bluegill are available to pond owners if they meet and adhere to the requirements for participation: 1. The pond must be at least a quarter-acre in size. 2. Fish will not be provided to private ponds that charge for fishing. 3. No pond that has an existing fish population will be stocked. 4. All applicants must have a current Oklahoma fishing license. 5. You must allow law enforcement personnel to check licenses of those fishing in your pond. 6. A Game Warden must inspect your pond prior to stocking.

Those who meet the requirements will submit an application for each pond and have it on file with ODWC before June. If your application is accepted, you will be notified of the time and place you may pick up your fish.

If you want to buy fish to stock in your pond, call (405) 522-6128 for a list of commercial hatcheries. You can also go to <https://ag.ok.gov/aquaculture-program/> for a list of Aquaculture License holders in Oklahoma.

### **Q: Can I catch and keep trout when it's not trout season?**

**A:** Yes. Trout season refers to the period during which trout are stocked. You may catch and keep trout year-round. See trout regulations for daily bag limits and size restrictions. It is possible to catch trout year-round in the Lower Illinois River and Lower Mountain Fork River.

## **OTHER QUESTIONS**

If you have Wildlife Department-related questions and didn't find answers here, try using the search window on the homepage of the Department's website: [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com). You may also use the online contact form at [www.wildlifedepartment.com/contact](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/contact) or use the phone directory on the same webpage to contact a specific division.

While your buddies often mean well when sharing "what they know," they might not always get it right. In today's high-tech world, all kinds of information is available at your fingertips. It's always best to ask questions, do some quick research, and find out the correct answer for yourself. 🐾



Landowners may apply to ODWC's Farm Pond Stocking Program to receive bass, sunfish, and catfish for their pond.

# Conservation

## Fun Outdoors!

Late spring is when you can find a bunch of bugs and start your own insect collection. You will need to learn how to properly capture, kill, mount, and label the insects. Creating your own insect collection gives you a chance to learn about the wide and wonderful world of insects. A collection preserves insects and helps you to identify them, recognize body parts and learn how they live their lives. To learn more, to <https://tinyurl.com/collectbugs>.

## Hunting Tip

If you are a youngster wanting to have a great time outdoors, ask a parent or a trusted adult to take you squirrel hunting. Oklahoma's squirrel season is open from May 15 to Jan. 31. These hunts will help you develop safety, marksmanship, and confidence. Squirrels are smart, so you'll surely develop patience, too.

## Fishing Tip

Using minnows for bait often leads to angling success. But keeping minnows fresh and lively can be tough as days get warmer. Keep minnows in an insulated bucket (not in the lake) with water about 55 degrees. A great way to do this is to freeze some plastic bottles of water ahead of time, then put one in the minnow bucket when you buy your bait. When the bottle thaws, replace it with a new frozen bottle.

# for Kids!

## Word Search: Nongame Fish and Wildlife

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

Find and circle the names of these nongame wildlife and fish species found in Oklahoma.

Chipmunk  
Mouse  
Pallid Bat  
Swift Fox

House Finch  
Neosho Mucket  
Redspot Chub  
Toad

Killdeer  
Osprey  
Sculpin  
Woodchuck



## COOL FACTS Three-toed Box Turtles:

- Box turtles are named after their ability to close their bottom shell up against their upper shell to completely hide and protect its head and limbs.
- Its name refers to its hind feet, which commonly have three toes each. The front feet can have four or five toes each.
- Shell color pattern can be quite variable but they are typically a tan or brown with some yellow spots or light stripes.
- These turtles can live 50 to 100 years.
- Box turtles removed from their home areas rarely adapt to new areas and often don't survive.



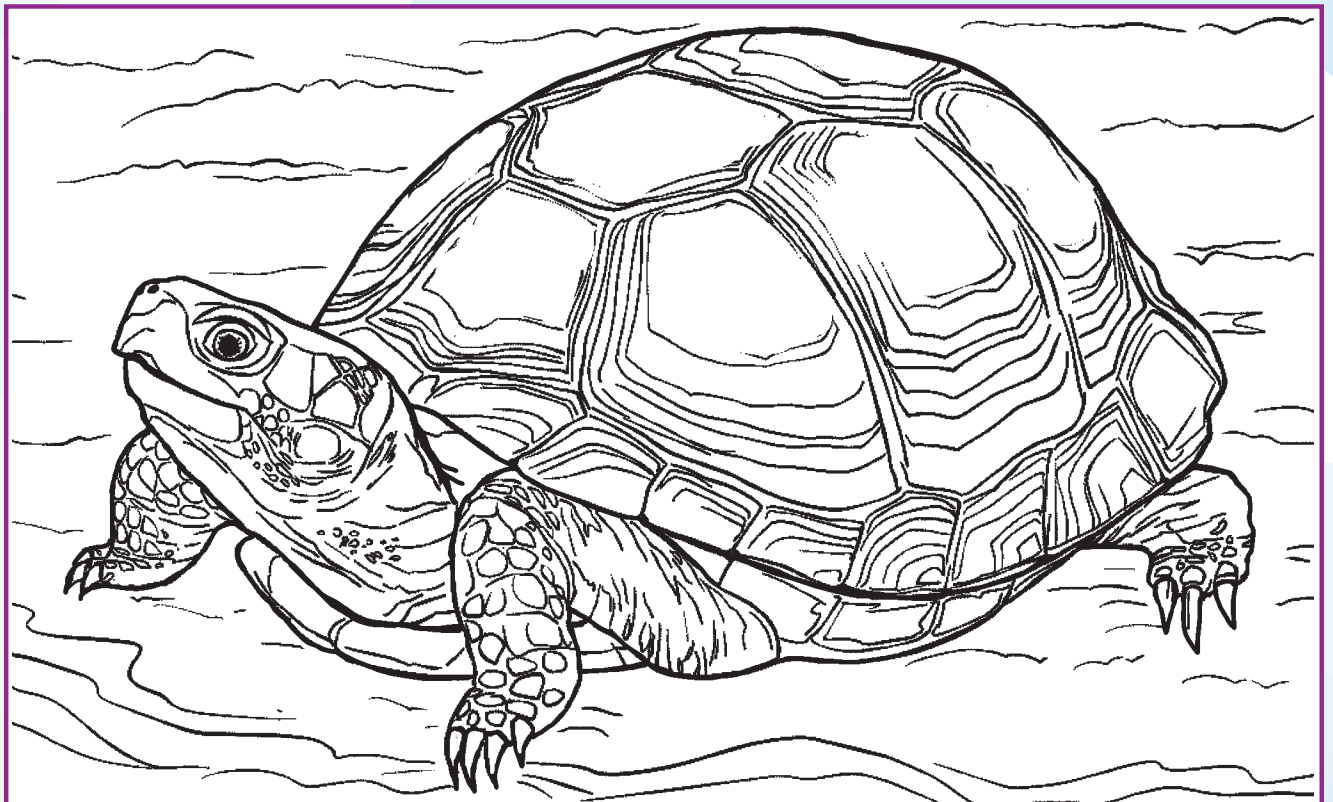
STEVE WEBER

- Oklahoma's other species of box turtle is the plains box turtle.
- They bury themselves and go dormant during winter.
- They are active from April through October.
- Box turtles eat insects, worms, mushrooms, and fruit.
- Males have red eyes and some orange on the head and neck, while females have yellow-brown eyes.
- They are primarily land turtles but can easily swim across ponds or creeks.



RJ BALTERRA/NATURALIST CC-BY-NC

## Color a Critter: Three-toed Box Turtle



# CONSERVATION EFFORTS SOAR WITH A DIVERSE FLOCK



BILL HORN

*Long-billed dowitchers, stilt sandpipers, Wilson's phalaropes and other shorebirds take flight over an Oklahoma wetland.*

## By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist

To meet its constitutional directive to manage and conserve the bird, fish, game and wildlife resources of the state, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has

gathered a large and diverse flock of experts. Biologists maintain fish and wildlife populations and their habitats on the state's Wildlife Management Areas and lakes; Game Wardens enforce hunting and fishing regulations; a communications and education team shares stories and knowledge

about the outdoors; and administrative personnel manage conservation grant programs and sell licenses to hunters and anglers.

Because the Wildlife Department is largely funded by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, much of the agency's flock is dedicated to management and conservation of game species. But a small wing of the Department, the Wildlife Diversity Program, concentrates its efforts on species that aren't hunted or fished, with a special focus on species considered to be of greatest conservation need.

The Wildlife Diversity Program officially started in 1981 when the Oklahoma Legislature opened a revolving fund for the purpose of "preserving, protecting, perpetuating and enhancing nongame wildlife in this state." But the program didn't really take flight until 1983, when the first staff members were hired.



JENA DONNELL/ODWC



In the four decades since, the program has added three additional staff members and considerably bolstered the larger Wildlife Department flock by joining forces with dozens of conservation partners. Through these partnerships, fish and wildlife populations have been documented and assessed; a developing base of knowledge has been shared with the public; and nongame conservation priorities have been identified in a statewide comprehensive strategic plan.

As the Wildlife Department looks to the future, it will continue to lean on this Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, which serves as a guiding document for the Wildlife Diversity Program. The strategy not only identifies Oklahoma species that are rare, uncommon, or declining, but also identifies their key habitats and conservation issues, and proposes a variety of actions that could restore those species and their habitats.

By maintaining strong partnerships with conservation-minded individuals, agencies, and organizations, and fostering new connections, the Wildlife Diversity Program aims to fulfill the goals in this strategic planning document and meet the combined goal of conserving Oklahoma's wildlife heritage. 🐾



JENA DONNELLO/DWC

## WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM TIMELINE

**1981**

The **Nongame Wildlife Improvement Program Act** is signed into law, creating what is now the Wildlife Diversity Program. The act also created a Nongame Wildlife Improvement Fund to support the program. Wildlife enthusiasts first contributed to the fund by donating a portion of their state tax refund, an opportunity that continues today.



**1983**

The first Nongame Program **staff members**, two biologists and an information specialist, are hired.

**1984**

**Nongame News**, a seasonal newsletter offering program updates, is published for the first time. Stories about Oklahoma's fish and wildlife and the people that work to conserve them are now shared in the monthly e-newsletter, **The Wild Side**. Subscribe at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com).



**1995**

The Oklahoma Tax Commission releases the first **wildlife conservation license plates**, a new fundraising opportunity for the Wildlife Department. Today, wildlife enthusiasts can choose from nine plate designs.



**1996**

The Nongame Program gets a name change. The **Wildlife Diversity Program** was thought to describe the broad scope of the program more accurately.

**2002**

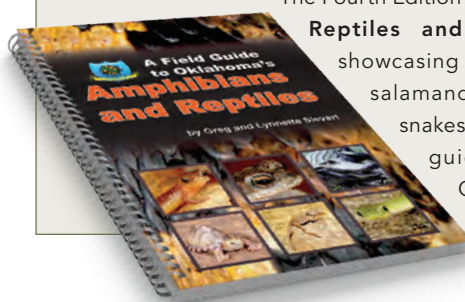
The Wildlife Department begins receiving **State Wildlife Grant** funding. *To learn more about the conservation work funded by this program, turn to page 30.*

**2016**

The state's **Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy** is updated, identifying 313 species of greatest conservation need. This strategy directs the Department's conservation efforts and priorities, and is updated on a 10-year schedule.

**2021**

The Fourth Edition of **A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Reptiles and Amphibians** is published, showcasing the state's 140 species of salamanders, frogs, turtles, lizards, snakes and alligator. This customized guide is available at [www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://www.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com).





# PIONEERING GRANT PROGRAM NOW IN ITS THIRD DECADE

## WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT CELEBRATES 20-PLUS YEARS OF DEDICATED RESEARCH AND SURVEY FUNDING FOR NONGAME SPECIES



JARED WOOD

On July 6, 2022, this appeared on the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's social media feeds: "Don't mind us — we're just sliding into your feed to let you know the Wildlife Department has kicked off two alligator research projects at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area with our partners at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Southwestern Adventist University. For the next two years, we'll be studying the native population, tracking individuals, and developing a long-term management plan for the species. Courtesy Jared Wood, Southwestern Adventist University. Trail camera videos from the project can be found on the Wildlife Department's YouTube channel @ outdooroklahomadwc."

### By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist

The Wildlife Department made a splash last summer when it announced on social media the launch of two of its latest research and survey grant projects, focused on the small population of American alligators in and around Red Slough Wildlife Management Area. The landmark work will provide the Department with its first official assessments of the state's alligator population. It also marked a 20-year milestone in the Department's fish and wildlife conservation history.

"The Wildlife Department has a rich heritage of conservation, but we haven't always had a dedicated funding source for conserving or assessing the state's alligator population or other species that aren't hunted or fished," said Kurt Kuklinski, research supervisor for the Wildlife Department. "That type of committed funding has only been available for the last 20 years."

States have traditionally funded conservation by way of federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program grants that originated with the popular Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 and the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950. These measures established a funding model that pairs a federal excise tax on most outdoors-re-



The Texas horned lizard was not eligible for direct conservation funding until the creation of the State Wildlife Grant Program. Surveys of the lizards, including an ongoing project funded in 2019 and led by the University of Oklahoma, have increased knowledge about where the species can be found in Oklahoma and the status of the species.



lated products with states' hunting and fishing license sales to help pay for the conservation of wild birds, mammals, fish, and their habitats.

Species other than birds, mammals, and fish have indirectly benefited from work underwritten by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program for decades but weren't the focus of a direct funding program until the early 2000s, when the State Wildlife Grant Program was approved by Congress. This relatively new program provides federal reimbursement grants, distributed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to state fish and wildlife agencies to enhance species in greatest need of additional conservation attention.

To be eligible for the funding, the Wildlife Department created a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy that identifies more than 300 species of greatest conservation need, including not only the traditional birds, mammals, and fish, but also amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. Nearly half of the species approved for State Wildlife Grant Program funding could not be directly addressed by the earlier grant program.

"The State Wildlife Grant Program is dedicated to collecting data and lets us focus on the state's species of greatest conservation need," Kuklinski said. "We can



A state wildlife grant project funded in 2011, led by the University of Tulsa, focused in part on the distribution and diversity of Oklahoma salamanders. The resulting surveys were paired with work conducted in Missouri and led to withdrawal of a petition urging the federal government to list the species as threatened or endangered.



now fund surveys that collect those species' distribution and range information as well as population stability information."

These survey-based assessments not only help the Wildlife Department in its conservation mission but come with the added benefit of providing data to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during its species status assessments, especially when the federal agency has been petitioned to add protections for a species through the Endangered Species Act.

"When a species has been petitioned for listing, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service looks to state agencies during the status assessment process. A lot of times now, because of work funded by the State Wildlife Grants Program, we're able to provide the information and data collected in Oklahoma, and the Service can make an informed decision."

## 20-PLUS YEARS OF NONGAME CONSERVATION AT A GLANCE: PLANNING, PARTNERSHIPS ... AND SO MANY SURVEYS

When the Wildlife Department received its first round of State Wildlife Grant funding in 2002, it activated its network of conservation-minded partners to help identify the state's species of greatest conservation need and outline actions that could benefit those species. Twenty-one years later, more than 100 grants have been completed, spanning conservation planning efforts, the purchase of habitat to enhance wildlife populations, and species assessments such as the American alligator projects that began in 2022.

*An early state wildlife grant project, funded in 2003 and led by Oklahoma State University, inspired a series of additional alligator snapping turtle projects that resulted in the reintroduction of the species into several watersheds by the Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery with support from Missouri State University.*



JENA DONNELL/ODWC





In fact, more than half of the completed grants have focused on species or community-based assessments. These surveys have illuminated the cave life found in northeastern Oklahoma, tallied the mammal communities found on western Wildlife Management Areas, and mapped winter bird occurrences across the state. While most projects are limited to a two- to four-year funding period, others spark a series of projects that more fully implement the state's conservation plan.

Mark Howery, a senior wildlife biologist who was instrumental in shaping Oklahoma's State Wildlife Grant Program, said, "Grants often build upon earlier work. A prime example is a project that looked at the genetic variation among populations of alligator snapping turtles.

"We learned these turtles aren't very genetically diverse, which means biologists can responsibly take an alligator snapping turtle whose parents came from the Arkansas River watershed and release it in the Red River watershed because the two populations are so genetically similar. This project has been foundational for the reintroduction work now occurring at the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge."

The planning efforts necessary for identifying survey and research needs have similarly inspired long-term conservation work.

"Planning grants can provide the information needed to move project-level funding into program-level funding," Howery said. "For example, a paddlefish research project, along with other work funded by the Sport Fish Restoration

Project updates are regularly shared in **The Wild Side** monthly e-newsletter. Subscribe at [www.tinyurl.com/ODWC-wild-side](http://www.tinyurl.com/ODWC-wild-side). To review final reports from many surveys and research funded by the State Wildlife Grants Program, scan this code:





Program, led to the development of the Wildlife Department's paddlefish research and conservation program.

"And a planning-oriented grant was used to help start the Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture. They now have a grassland enhancement program that will pay landowners to implement prescribed burning and other practices to diversify grasslands."

To read the Oklahoma Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, scan this code:



The Wildlife Department has also used State Wildlife Grant funding to buy six parcels of land, totaling more than 18,000 acres. Two of the larger properties became Wildlife Management Areas, Cimarron Bluff and Cross Timbers, while the other purchases added inholdings and adjacent lands to the existing Beaver River, Cimarron Hills, and Cookson WMAs. Each property is managed for wildlife, while also offering hunting or fishing opportunities.

"Land acquisitions have the potential to benefit a lot of species — in some cases, entire communities — at one time," Howery said. "And the Wildlife Department makes these purchases in perpetuity, which can protect the land from any kind of future conversion."

"It comes with a lot of responsibility on our part and sets the platform for future work."

That future work will be driven by the same passion to conserve Oklahoma's

*Lands purchased through the State Wildlife Grant Program, such as portions of Cimarron Hills Wildlife Management Area seen here, provide habitat for dozens of species of greatest conservation need, including the lesser prairie-chicken, and black-tailed prairie dog.*





species of greatest conservation need that has fueled the state's nongame conservation work for the past two decades. And it will depend on the extensive network of conservation partners that has been instrumental in the funding program's first 20 years, Kuklinski said.

"Something like 75 percent of our projects are coordinated with outside partners. Research partners have come from major universities like Oklahoma State University or the University of Oklahoma, but the expertise needed for some projects has also been found at smaller regional universities.

"The depth of our partnerships — at least 17 grant partners over the course of 20 years — tells me the Wildlife Department is open to ideas coming from a variety of sources."

Howery said, "The State Wildlife Grant Program and our many partnerships have really helped the Wildlife Department expand nongame conservation in the state. We know there's a lot of work left to do. Still, we know considerably more about our species of greatest conservation need than we did 20 years ago." 🍷





# HERE BE DRAGONS

## BIOLOGIST VISITS HISTORIC DRAGONFLY LOCATION, COMMEMORATING A DAY OF DRAGONFLY DISCOVERY



*Naturalist E.B. Williamson documented some of Oklahoma's first dragonfly and damselfly records in 1907. Our state's known diversity has since grown from the 22 species collected on his expedition's first day to 176 species today.*

### **By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist**

An early chapter in the story of Oklahoma's dragonflies and damselflies begins at Cavanal Lake, located just outside of Wister, in southeastern Oklahoma. Months before statehood, on June 3, 1907, Bluffton, Indiana banker E.B. Williamson documented the first known Oklahoma records of 22 dragonfly and damselfly species, the highest one-day count of state odonate records, while making a brief stopover in the area.

During his party's three-day stay in the community, Williamson also documented the first Oklahoma records of three additional dragonfly and damselfly species. From these specimens, he described multiple species he thought were new to science, but only one dragonfly, the orange shadowdragon, is still considered a full species. Another specimen collected during his trip helped to describe the damselfly now known as the vesper bluet.

"Williamson was one of the first to document Oklahoma's dragonflies and damselflies, and quite possibly the first to do so," said Brenda D. Smith, con-



# CAVANAL LAKE



JENA DONNEL/ODWC

1909



2022



servation biologist with the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory (<http://www.oknaturalheritage.ou.edu>).

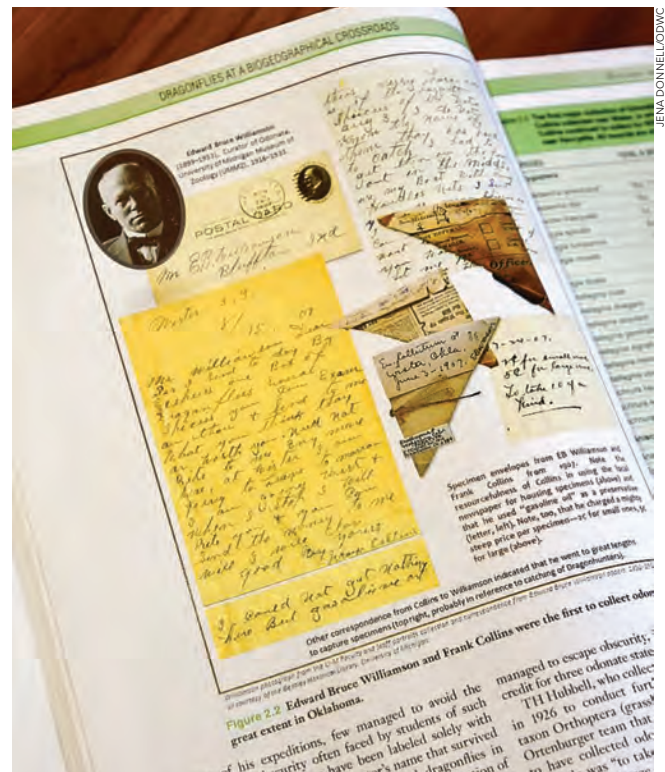
While Williamson's discoveries were remarkable for such a brief stopover in the state, a connection made while at Wister helped the naturalist stay involved in Oklahoma's dragonfly world and make additional contributions after he returned to Indiana.

"Williamson met and hired a young man named Frank Collins while in Wister," Smith said. "Collins, who lived in Indian Territory, continued to collect dragonflies along the Poteau River and around Henryetta in the summer of 1907 and later mailed the specimens to Williamson. Though he didn't have any formal entomological training, Collins really was quite the collector."

Collins collected the first Oklahoma records of 14 additional species and sent them to Williamson to be identified and reported. All told, Williamson and Collins collected the first Oklahoma records of 39 species of dragonflies and damselflies in 1907. That represents 22 percent of the state's current odonate diversity!

Smith captured early Oklahoma records like Collins and Williamson's, and created detailed historical and biological species accounts for each of the state's 176 odonates in "Dragonflies at a Biogeographical Crossroads."

Some of Oklahoma's first dragonfly and damselfly records were collected at Cavanal Lake, a small lake created along the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway to power the steam engines. Today, Cavanal Lake can be accessed by the 6.5 mile Old Frisco Trail, a part of the Rails-to-Trails network.



JENA DONNEL/ODWC

Williamson's historic trip and a summary of the state's 176 species of odonates are captured in the 738-page "Dragonflies at a Biogeographical Crossroads."



To celebrate the diverse dragonfly and damselfly communities memorialized on the pages of her book, and commemorate Collins and Williamson's discoveries, Smith journeyed to the historic site, now owned in part by the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

"I've had so much fun digging into the history of Oklahoma's odonates, and it's a treat to come out to the place where it may have all started," Smith said.

"I think it's really important to recognize and think about the history of organisms. We can build on the work of others in history to get trends and understand why some organisms are where there are."

## THE CONTINUED SEARCH FOR OKLAHOMA'S DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

Smith has long been interested in dragonflies and was able to continue Williamson's early work of documenting Oklahoma's dragonfly and damselfly communities shortly after

she arrived in the state. While her work has since involved other groups of animals, including tiger beetles and black rails, she's been able to add dragonfly and damselfly records from various regions of the state while working on other projects.



Net in hand, Brenda Smith makes her way to the edge of Cavanal Lake to commemorate a day of dragonfly discovery.



Smith often relies on binoculars during dragonfly field work but keeps a net at the ready in case she would like a closer look or would like to collect a potential new record.



"If I'm in a wetland, I'm going to be looking for dragonflies," Smith said. "Sometimes I'm out there for a completely different reason, and it's fun to mix taxa. I may be focused on a bird, but I can still try to add new dragonfly species or records while I'm out there."

Smith's methods of documenting species remain similar to those of Williamson, but there have been a few changes in the century between Williamson's expedition and Smith's commemorative trip to Cavanal Lake.

"Because we have such a long history of specimen collection and such a long history of records in the state, I don't need to collect as many specimens as Williamson. The strategy at the time was to collect as much as they could capture. Records show Williamson and Collins collected 583 specimens in the summer of 1907.

"Today, I can just walk around an area and identify dragonflies with binoculars and record what I see. That allows me to conduct a much more thorough search without spending a lot of time or energy capturing individuals. Someone studying dragonflies in the early 1900s would have spent 20 minutes trying to physically capture a single dragonfly, where now I can spend 20 minutes documenting multiple individuals or multiple species."

Smith often starts her search at or near a waterbody, as dragonflies and damselflies spend much of their life underwater and remain near water as adults. She not only looks for dragonflies actively flying around, but also those perched on stalks of vegetation or on the ground.

*Male and female dragonflies may have different colorations or patterns and may prefer different habitats. Unless seen in a copulating flight, or "in-wheel," biologists may need to rely on different field marks or look in different habitats to find both genders.*



JEREMIAH ZURENDA



"Males are more often associated with water. They're territorial, and want to keep a spot open for the females to fly in. But if I'm specifically looking for females, I tend to move away from water and crash through the brush and vegetation to see if any fly out.

"It takes a lot of practice to identify dragonflies on the wing, but identification also takes a lot of patience. Sometimes it's best to wait until the dragonfly lands to look for certain marks or features."

Despite decades of practice and patience, Smith still gets frustrated when identifying dragonflies and damselflies.

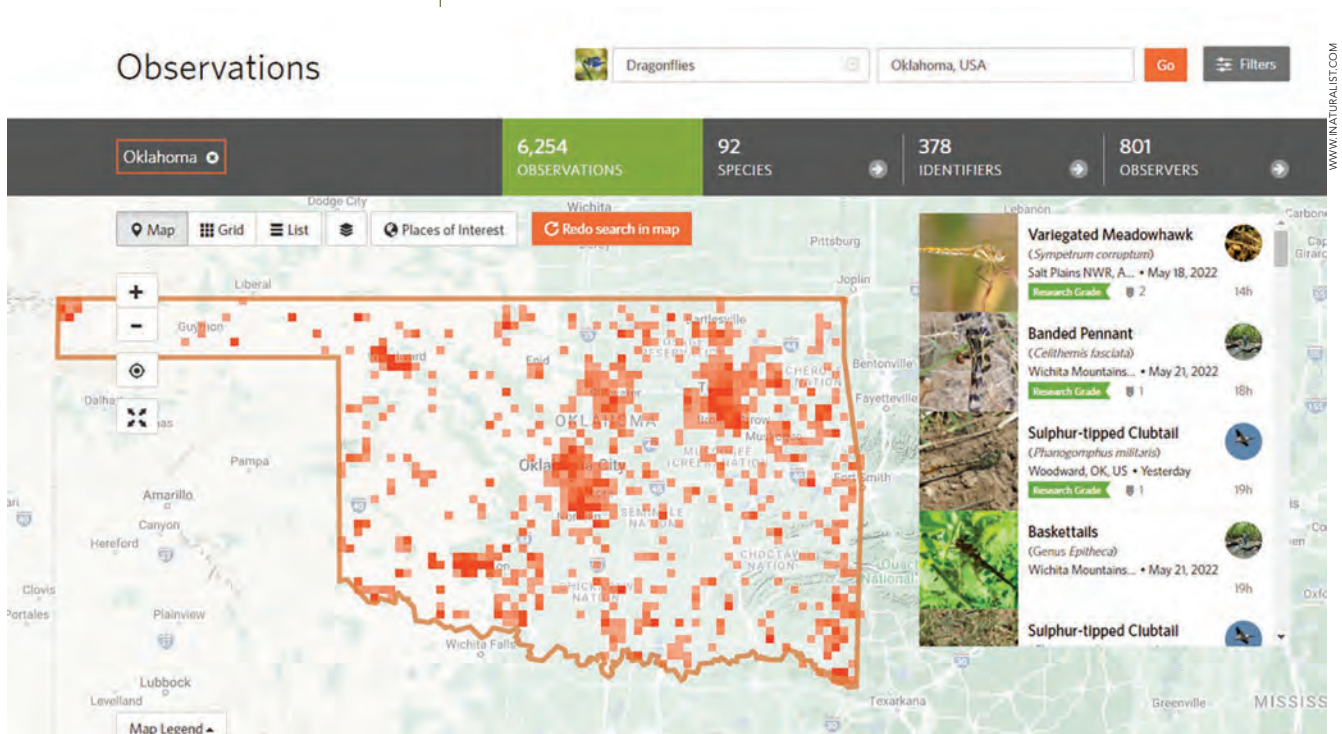
"Some of the species near and dear to my heart are the ones I've spent the most time searching for. I've visited a lot of forested seeps looking for the Ouachita spiketail and have spent a lot of time looking for the first known nymph of the Ozark emerald. For these species, there's been a lot of effort made for very little data because they are so cryptic.

"But that effort can be really rewarding. It can make you feel like a Williamson. You're learning about a species that nobody has information about. You're learning where they may be breeding or finding the answers to other really important questions."

## WILLIAMSON'S LEGACY LIVES ON IN OTHER NATURALISTS

Biologists like Smith aren't the only ones continuing Williamson's legacy. Though a dedicated dragonfly enthusiast, Williamson was a banker by profession until the Great Depression. Similarly, other dragonfly enthusiasts have helped shape Oklahoma's odonate story without being biologists by trade.

"A lot of entomological knowledge has been built from citizen scientists," Smith said. "We've collected dragonfly and damselfly records from probably



Outdoor enthusiasts have logged 92 species of dragonflies and 47 species of damselflies in Oklahoma using the popular and free iNaturalist platform. Sharing photos and sighting details allows everyday Oklahomans to continue the legacy of Williamson and the biologists that have followed in his steps.



KAY WILLIAMS/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2021

150 people in the past 13 years, many of whom have a strong interest in dragonflies but have careers in other fields.

Those 150 people have been instrumental in a larger project Smith launched in the early 2000s.

"When we first started studying Oklahoma's odonates, there wasn't a lot of data. So, we created a spreadsheet and just started adding records from known specimens and literature references. Then we started adding as many records as we could vet from anyone who was interested in dragonflies. In 2009, this spreadsheet formally became the 'Oklahoma Odonata Project' ([https://biosurvey.ou.edu/smith/Oklahoma\\_Odonata.html](https://biosurvey.ou.edu/smith/Oklahoma_Odonata.html)). It's since grown into an unwieldy 60,000-plus records. That's what can happen with citizen science data."

Because she's seen the power of citizen science firsthand, Smith is a strong advocate for anyone interested in nature to get outside and get involved.

"People tend to think they can't contribute because they aren't a scientist. But just going out to a local pond and getting a species list or abundance data is worth it.

"It's been pretty awesome to work with enthusiastic people who love nature. There's just an energy from people who are excited to see and learn about anything."

Smith welcomes dragonfly and damselfly questions and records to be considered for inclusion in the Oklahoma Odonata Project at [argia@ou.edu](mailto:argia@ou.edu). Nature enthusiasts can also share sightings of all organisms on the free platform, iNaturalist. 🌿

*Citizen scientists have helped fill in the known distribution gaps for many of the state's dragonflies and damselflies. Several species, including this blue dasher dragonfly, have been documented in every Oklahoma county.*



*Though a dedicated dragonfly enthusiast, Williamson was a banker by profession until the Great Depression.*



# RENEWAL EMERGES LIKE PHOENIX AFTER FLAMES

## BIOLOGISTS USE PRESCRIBED FIRE TO ENHANCE HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER



Wildlife Biologist Clay Barnes uses a drip torch to start a prescribed fire on the McCurtain County Wilderness Area in southeastern Oklahoma.

**By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist**

"It's so much easier to use fire than to *fight* fire."

Fire torch in hand, Wildlife Department biologist Clay Barnes sets off down a steep slope of the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, igniting one edge of a 4,352-acre prepared burn unit as he goes.

"Today, we're using fire to improve wildlife habitat," Barnes said. "The ground will be black for a few weeks, but it won't take long for native grasses and wildflowers to start coming up through the black. Prescribed fire helps keep those grasses and wildflowers in the forest's understory



instead of being taken over by young pines and hardwoods.”

The Wilderness Area and its individual management units are on a staggered prescribed burn schedule to maintain the open spaces between its towering pines and provide habitat for Oklahoma’s only remaining population of federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Barnes has taken part in management efforts on the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, the Wildlife Department’s oldest management area, for about 20 years and has seen the benefits of prescribed fire firsthand.

“Without fire, we would quickly lose suitable woodpecker habitat due to hardwood and midstory encroachment,” Barnes said. “We generally get enough annual rainfall, which promotes significant vegetative growth, that we also need to do some level of mechanical thinning on top of our regular burn rotation.”

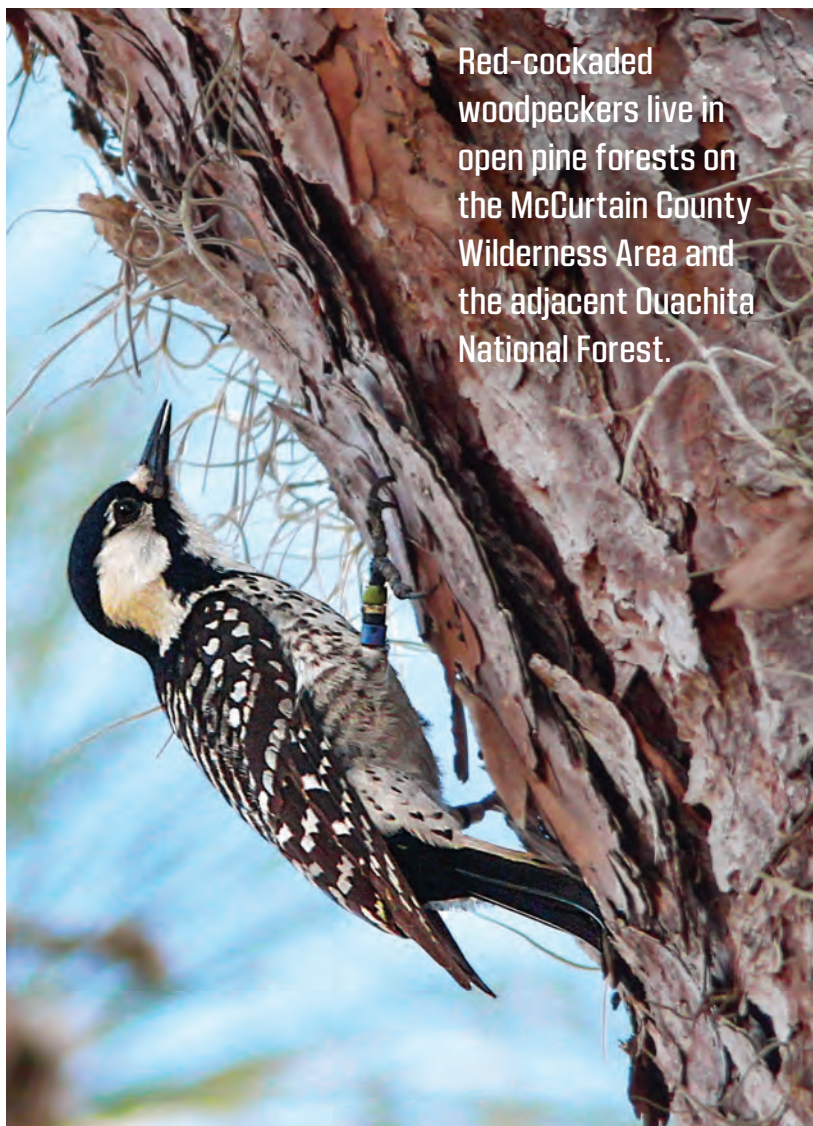
Red-cockaded woodpeckers live in and forage for insects on mature shortleaf pines, but they prefer an open pine forest with big trees spaced far apart. That allows the birds to freely maneuver across the habitat and better avoid predators like raptors. Widely spaced trees also help prevent climbing snakes from accessing the nest or roost trees by way of overlapping tree branches.

“Fire is a much more effective — and cheaper — management tool than some of our other options for keeping the forest open. It would take years to set back as many growing saplings by hand or by machine as we can with one day of prescribed fire.”

## TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

A properly managed forest benefits everyone, so the Wildlife Department joins forces — and resources — with the adjoining National Forest Service on burn day.

Ignition and suppression crews from both agencies work together to start the



Red-cockaded woodpeckers live in open pine forests on the McCurtain County Wilderness Area and the adjacent Ouachita National Forest.

ALAN SCHMIDT/FELICKER CC-BY



MARTIAN LAMMERTINK/USFWS

Red-cockaded woodpeckers prefer habitats with clumps of trees for nesting along with open areas allowing quick escape from predators.





The 4,352-acre burn unit encompasses 3,430 acres of the Wildlife Department's McCurtain County Wilderness Area, shown in green, and 922 acres of the Ouachita National Forest, shown in pink.

Scan this code to learn more about the Wildlife Department's McCurtain County Wilderness Area:



fire according to the predetermined ignition plan and to make sure the fire stays within the burn unit.

"We've been assigned most of the western and southern legs of this burn unit," Barnes said. "And Forest Service crew members — including a few hotshot crews from as far away as New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana — are responsible for the northern and eastern legs.

"Once we get the edges blacked in, a Forest Service helicopter crew will then fly over the bulk of the unit and drop something called Delayed Aerial Ignition Devices — which are basically flammable Ping-Pong-size

balls — to ignite the bulk of the burn unit.

"The helicopter saves us a lot of time and lights fuel within the burn unit's roughest terrain," Barnes said. "If it weren't for the Forest Service crew and their helicopter, we wouldn't be able to burn like we do. It just wouldn't be possible."

## PREScribed FIRE: CORNERSTONE OF MANAGEMENT

For many people, the word "fire" is associated with destruction. But for those managing wildlife and habitat, fire is most often associated with regrowth.

"So many of our wildlife species are adapted to and thrive with the benefits of fire," Barnes said. "Fire releases nutrients into the soil, promotes plant growth, and creates a diverse and viable habitat for wildlife. It's all connected."



Trees with nest or roost cavities used by red-cockaded woodpeckers are marked by white paint and are visited by biologists prior to a prescribed burn. Leaves, pine needles, and other fuels have been raked away from a 3-foot radius of this cavity tree. A low-intensity fire was also lighted around the tree to further protect it from any inadvertent damage of the larger prescribed burn.

While fire is a natural part of Oklahoma's many ecosystems, Barnes and his fellow biologists across the state still strategize how to best use fire to get the greatest good for wildlife populations and their habitats, especially when sensitive habitats are involved.

At the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, mature pine trees used by the red-cockaded woodpecker for nesting or roosting are among the most sensitive of habitats. The birds form family groups and live in cavities in a group, or cluster, of trees. When that cluster is within a scheduled burn unit, Barnes takes extra precautions to protect the trees from any inadvertent fire damage.

"These older shortleaf pines are really tough and withstand a fire really well. But we still visit the cluster before burn day and rake around the individual trees to reduce the fuel loads right next to the trees. And we'll go back to the cluster on the day of the burn to light a low-intensity fire around the trees for added protection."

Barnes also strategizes the timing of the scheduled prescribed burns to maintain the woodpeckers' habitat.

"Right now, we're burning in the dormant season. But we're considering the benefits of adding smaller scale growing-season burns into the rotation. Those units would be less than 1,000 acres in size and would be burned sometime between July and September instead of December through March. A growing season burn would be more effective in managing hardwood encroachment, as it wilts the leaves and ruptures the bark of sapling trees."

While the wilderness area's primary focus is maintaining and improving habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker, the same management efforts that benefit the woodpecker also benefit many other species.

"A lot of songbirds will nest and feed in the same areas as the woodpeckers. And the newly burned areas will have lots of green grass and flowering plants later this spring and summer. That will be great for turkey hens and poults, and does and fawns."

To ensure habitat is available to species beyond red-cockaded woodpeckers throughout the year, the Wildlife Department staggers its prescribed burning efforts.

"We burn our units on a three-year rotation," Barnes said. "That means almost every unit gets the benefit of a prescribed fire in a three-year period, but that also means we're leaving unburned habitat for turkeys to nest in, and does and fawns to bed in every year."

"A prescribed fire really is the best tool we have to manage so many acres. We have to strategize the best way to apply it as a management tool, but the results to our wildlife populations and habitats are proof that it works." 🍷

*(Prescribed burning efforts on the McCurtain County Wilderness Area are funded in part by the Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program grant F21AF02826.)*



A red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally endangered species found in the Wildlife Department's McCurtain County Wilderness Area, perches outside its cavity nest on a pine tree.

Scan this code to learn more about red-cockaded woodpeckers:





# 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

## Outdoor Gear



## YUKON FLOATING GUN CASE

Welded waterproof construction, thick foam padding for protection, 500d tarpaulin exterior shell, carry strap and handle, universal fit for shotgun or scoped rifle. (Online sales only.) — \$70

## YUKON ODWC BACKPACK COOLER

Double Duty — Works as Cooler or Padded Gear Bag, Keeps Ice For Days, Air Tight Zipper, Rugged Welded Construction, 20 can with Ice capacity. (Ships separate from other Outdoor Store items) — \$140.00



## 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

## DURABLE COLLECTOR'S CARDS

Every hunting and fishing license holder can upgrade to a customized hard plastic card that won't be damaged by water, sun, dirt, or regular wear and tear like paper documents. Cards hold customer and license information on one side; the other side features artwork from Oklahoma artists that changes periodically. Several designs available. (Account sign-in required.) — \$6



## 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





## 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](http://tinyurl.com/WildTags).

## 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

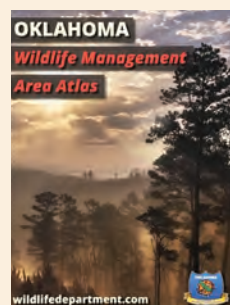


## DURABLE FIELD TAGS

A three-pack of plastic field tags with name and customer ID printed on one side, and places to write your harvest date/time and the E-Check confirmation number on the other. Reusable. (Account sign-in required.) — \$6

## HABITAT DONOR CAP

Top-quality, American-made cap displays the Bass Habitat Donor Patch, 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. — \$20



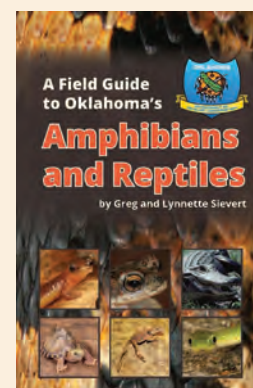
## OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

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

## LATEST

## 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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# RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

BY CAMERON CRANFORD, EDUCATION INTERN

Hummingbirds are Oklahoma's smallest birds and are unique in many respects. They are the only birds that can hover, fly backward and upside down as easily as they fly forward. Of the four species of hummingbirds known to visit Oklahoma, the ruby-throated is the most wide-

spread. Their feathers appear different shades of colors in varying degrees and angles of light. Back and crown feathers are basically green but may appear brown or gray. Adult male gorgets, or throats, may seem black until struck by sunlight, which turns them fiery red-gold. The female ruby-throat's gorget is

clear or faintly dotted, and her outer tail feathers are tipped with white. Immature ruby-throats look like females until young males begin to acquire a few red feathers in their gorgets.

Ruby-throats measure 3 to 3.75 inches from bill to tail and weight 2.5 to 3.5 grams (nine birds weigh a total of one ounce); the birds weigh more during migration.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are considered Neotropical migrants, which means they nest in North America and winter in Central and South America. The ruby-throats' range extends from southern Canada throughout the eastern half of the United States to Central America. They are able to fly across the Gulf of Mexico after gaining significant weight during late summer.

After arriving in Oklahoma, ruby-throats quickly mate and construct a nest, usually in mid-April. Their cup-shaped nests are not much larger than a walnut half and are made of spider webs, plant down and lichens. Nests are built 10–20 feet above ground, often in a fork of a downward-sloping branch. Females lay two white eggs about the size of navy beans, usually

one day apart. The young hatch in 14–16 days and are ready to leave the nest about 21 days later. Occasionally, two broods are produced in a season. During spring migration, hummingbirds begin to arrive in Oklahoma in mid-March and early April, with males arriving first. In fall, males migrate first and usually are gone by mid-September. Females and young are mostly gone by mid-October, although some stragglers will remain.

A simple way to attract hummingbirds is by setting out a sugar-water feeder. Use a formula of one part sugar to four parts boiled water to produce a solution that approximates that found in natural flower nectar. Never use artificial sweeteners or honey. Place the feeders outside by early April and leave them up until at least Nov. 1. This will provide for both early spring ruby-throats and late fall migrants, as well as the other three species of hummingbirds. Other birds such as orioles and chickadees also may be attracted to your hummingbird feeder. Feeders may be left out with fresh nectar as long as birds drink from them. The hummingbirds will migrate when they are ready, so leaving feeders up later will provide an additional energy source for any stragglers. Sometimes, hummingbirds will not use feeders during part of the summer. During this time, they are feeding off nectar from flowering plants and gleaning insects from flowers or the air for their young.

Place feeders in the shade. If more than one is used, place them far apart to avoid competition from the territorial hummingbirds. During cool weather, replace nectar and clean feeders at least once a week; during warm or hot weather, replace nectar and clean feeders every three or four days.

A great way to attract hummingbirds is by planting flowers. Flowering plants also provide protein in the form of aphids and other small insects and spiders. In general choose plants with tubular-shaped flowers that are reddish or pink in color. Recommended plants include coral honeysuckle, red buckeye, American columbine, Indian paintbrush, beard tongue, bee balm, and trumpet creeper. 🌱

*A great way to attract hummingbirds is by planting flowers. Flowering plants also provide protein in the form of aphids and other small insects and spiders. In general choose plants with tubular-shaped flowers that are reddish or pink in color.*



Male ruby-throated hummingbird

BILL CROWREADERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2014



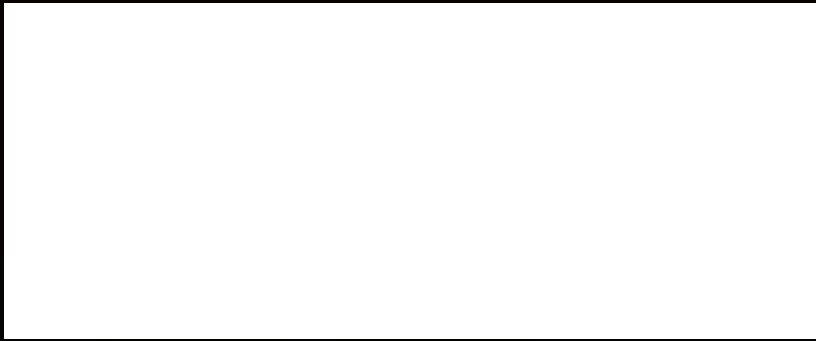
To watch and listen  
to ruby-throated  
hummingbirds, scan  
the QR code.



Female ruby-throated hummingbird

JEREMIAH ZURENDA





NATHANIEL VELD/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2022

It's feeding time for this family of scissor-tailed flycatchers, a species that exemplifies the tremendous diversity of wildlife found in the Sooner State. We celebrate the often unnoticed work done through ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Program inside this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

# Outdoor Oklahoma

