

Outdoor Oklahoma

JULY/AUGUST 2016 - ONLY \$10 A YEAR

2016 Readers' Photography Showcase

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



Panoramas

Just a few short weeks remain. Before you know it, the hunting seasons will be here again! If you will be heading to the forest or field, start preparing now to avoid possible headaches the night before opening day!

Sept. 1 is the traditional kickoff for Oklahoma's hunting seasons. Dove season opens that day. And depending on whether you are venturing into unknown territory as a new hunter or you've ridden in this rodeo often, success is often tied to preparation.

Here is a "Hunting Basics" checklist before heading out to the dove fields when the season opens:

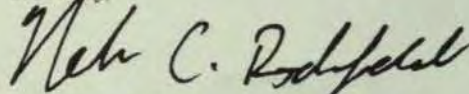
- ✓ **Do you have hunter education certification if required?** Anyone between ages 10 and 30 must successfully complete the Oklahoma Hunter Education Course before he or she can get a regular hunting license. Anyone who doesn't have Hunter Education certification may still hunt with an apprentice designation on his or her license and must follow the enhanced safety rules required of an apprentice hunter. To take the Hunter Education Course, click the "Education" tab at wildlifedepartment.com.
- ✓ **Do you have the proper licenses and permits?** Some people are exempt from the basic hunting license, such as any resident younger than 16. For migratory birds such as dove, most hunters are required to obtain a Harvest Information Permit. Find out what is required by clicking the "License" tab at wildlifedepartment.com.
- ✓ **Do you have a place to hunt?** If you are new to the game, you might believe that your choice of hunting spots is little to none. But that isn't true. You have more than a million acres of public land in Oklahoma where you can hunt. For a list of Wildlife Department-managed and -owned areas, click on the "Hunting" tab at wildlifedepartment.com.
- ✓ **Do you know the regulations?** Ethical hunters abide by the hunt-

ing regulations that are in place to manage the game species for everyone's enjoyment. Each year, we put out the "Oklahoma Hunting" regulations guide. It is a summary of all the rules hunters must follow in the field. Most rules cover the entire state, while some rules govern specific hunting areas. Be sure to check whether your chosen hunting site has special regulations. Now you can get the regulations guide as a free mobile app. Just search for "Oklahoma fishing hunting guide" online at iTunes or Google Play.

- ✓ **Do you have your gear ready to go?** Make sure your firearms or bows are in good working condition before your hunting trip. Get the proper legal ammunition allowed for the game you will pursue. Replace those old, ripped camo pants that you'd forgotten about after last year. And ensure that you wear the proper amount of daylight fluorescent orange clothing when required.
- ✓ **Do you have a plan to deal with unexpected situations?** Remember: Safety first. Being prepared for unforeseen circumstances puts you in a better position to deal with whatever arises. Think about first aid, extra water, a change of clothes, etc. Notify someone when and where you'll be going, and when to expect your return. Carry a mobile phone and important items (licenses, cash, etc.) in a plastic bag. Be safe, not sorry.

It's almost time to make some memories in the field. Spend some extra time preparing, and make all of your memories happy ones. Good luck!

Sincerely,



Nels Rodefeld,

Editor

Outdoor Oklahoma

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DARIN HILL/ODWC

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ON THE COVER:

Oklahoma is blessed with beautiful sights of nature across the state, such as this lush view of Turner Falls in south-central Oklahoma captured by Tommy Evans of Midwest City. His photo was selected among the best from more than 700 photos entered in our 2016 Readers' Photography Showcase. See the cream of the crop in this issue of "Outdoor Oklahoma."

Have you decided to take up hunting? Read the article by Micah Holmes to learn about preparing yourself for success. PAGE 8

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Barry Bolton, Chief, Fisheries Division

Alan Peoples, Chief, Wildlife Division
Nels Rodefeld, Chief, Information & Education Division
Bill Hale, Assistant Chief, Law Enforcement Division

Nels Rodefeld, Editor
Micah Holmes, Associate Editor
Don P. Brown, Managing Editor

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Tracy Daniel, Brooke Powell, Michael Zimmerman.

Outdoor Oklahoma editorial offices:
P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152

PHONE
(405) 521-3856

WEBSITE
wildlifedepartment.com


E-MAIL
donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES: (800) 777-0019

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Off the Beaten Path

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

COMMISSIONER IS APPOINTED TO FULL EIGHT-YEAR TERM



Leigh Gaddis

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin appointed Leigh Gaddis of Ada to a full eight-year term on the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission. Gaddis was completing the unexpired term of Harland Stonecipher, who died in November 2014. When Gaddis was first appointed, she became the first woman to serve as an Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commissioner.

"I'm extremely honored. I very much appreciate the confidence Gov. Fallin has placed

in me by appointing me to the commission for the next eight years. It's something I take very seriously.

"To me, serving as a Commissioner is an opportunity to give back to my state, in an area which I'm passionate about," she said. "I'd like to continue to see the advancement of policies and regulations that benefit the wildlife and natural resources of our state. Oklahoma has been blessed with a tremendously diverse landscape as well as wildlife, and I hope that we can continue to balance the interests of our resources, landowners, sportsmen, and the state of Oklahoma."

Gaddis occupies the Commission's seat for District 4, which includes Creek, Lincoln, Okfuskee, Seminole, Pottawatomie, Pontotoc, Hughes, Johnston and Coal counties. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology education from East Central University. She is a financial adviser at Gaddis & Gaddis Wealth Management, a financial planning and investment firm, and she is a lifetime member of the National Rifle Association, a member of Safari Club International, and an annual participant in the Oklahoma City Gun Club's Women on Target Shooting Clinic.

The eight members of the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission are confirmed by the state Senate. Commissioners serve in an unpaid capacity as the advisory, administrative and policy-making body for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The Commission governs all Department operations and financial transactions. It oversees land and equipment purchases, wildlife management areas and fish hatcheries, plus the state's hunting and fishing regulations. **✕



TRY THESE TACKLE HACKS

Sometimes anglers can save time and money by making a few modifications to traditional tackle or by using everyday household items. Check out these five traditional fishing tackle and gear hacks that might help make your life easier.

Use wine corks as an easy, snag-free way to transport flies. Sure, there are fly vests and fly bags that you can use, but if you prefer to fish with just a couple of your favorite flies, stick the flies into a wine cork, then slip the cork into your pocket.



Add a streak of "blood" to your fishing lures using red nail polish. If you have a few old lures, why not give them a touch of red nail polish to see if they happen to get a few more strikes? You might be surprised by better results when fishing in shallow areas.

Once you've rigged and re-rigged your soft plastic stick baits a few times, your hook will no longer hold in the plastic on one end. Just flip the soft plastic stick bait around and rig it through the opposite end. You can even get more use out of it by rigging it wacky-style through the center.

Remove treble hooks on your fishing lures and replace with circle hooks to help increase fish survival rates. Remember not to set the hook when fishing with circle hooks — all you need to do is reel.

Use nail clippers as line cutters. It's convenient to keep an extra pair of nail clippers in your tackle box. **✕

(TakeMeFishing.org)

90.7-POUND FLATHEAD SETS RECORD AT PINE CREEK LAKE

Several new lake-record fish have been added to the Wildlife Department's official database in recent weeks. Here are snapshots of those big ones that didn't get away!



Pine Creek Lake Record Flathead Catfish

Weight:
90.7 pounds.
Length:
52.25 inches.
Girth:
40.25 inches.
Angler:
Clint Johnson of Avery,
Texas.
Method of Catch:
Trotline.
Date Caught:
April 16, 2016.
Area Caught:
North of South Swim Area.



Durant Lake Record Crappie

Weight:
4.2 pounds.
Length:
17 inches.
Girth:
17.25 inches.
Angler:
Michael Lawson of
Kingston.
Method of Catch:
Baitcast rod and reel.
Date Caught:
March 29, 2016.
Area Caught:
At the dam.



Canton Lake Record Striped Bass

Weight:
33.3 pounds.
Length:
43 inches.
Girth:
27 inches.
Angler:
Dalyn Figgins of Ulysses,
Kan.
Method of Catch:
Baitcast rod and reel.
Date Caught:
April 30, 2016.
Area Caught:
At the dam.



Scott King Lake Record Crappie

Weight:
2.1 pounds.
Length:
17.25 inches.
Girth:
12 inches.
Angler:
Thomas Everett of Ard-
more.
Method of Catch:
Baitcast rod and reel.
Date Caught:
May 2, 2016.
Area Caught:
No information.



What's the biggest fish you've ever caught? A 7-pound largemouth, a 2-pound crappie or a 45-pound blue catfish? While your fish might not be a new state record, it possibly could be the biggest fish ever caught from your favorite lake. Thanks to a network of record-keepers at lakes across the state, your next trophy could qualify as a lake record.

The Lake Record Fish Program was established as a way to serve anglers and recognize big fish and the lakes they come from. To find out more, go online to wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/records.htm. **x



2015 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

YOUNG ESSAYISTS CELEBRATE ARCHERY, HUNTING

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each year, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International co-sponsor a creative writing competition for Oklahoma middle and high school students. A boy and a girl from two age divisions are selected winners. Students were required to write essays with the theme "Hunting: Sharing the Heritage" or "Archery: What I Like About Archery in the Schools and Bowhunting." Winners in the ages 15-17 Senior Apprentice Hunter category receive a guided antelope hunt in the Texas Panhandle, and winners in the ages 11-14 Junior Apprentice Hunter category receive a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, "Outdoor Oklahoma" honors Senior Division male winner Robert Ernsting, 17, an 11th-grader at Okarche High School.



HUNTING: SHARING THE HERITAGE

By Robert Ernsting

Sharing the heritage. What does that mean? To me it means sharing what you have learned over many years of experience to a wide-eyed, inquisitive youngster. I was most certainly one of those wide-eyed, inquisitive, ornery, 8-year-old boys! Around the age of 7, I begged and pleaded my parents to enroll me into a hunter's safety course. After passing, the next day my dad showed up with a single shot .223. Man, I was probably the happiest boy in Canadian County! The following week we headed to a local pit to shoot. I was focused on the bull's-eye, took a deep breath, exhaled half, and slowly squeezed the trigger. After a three-shot group, I sprinted to the target to take a look. On my way back, my dad said, "Son, just how close were you to the scope?" I replied, "Well, I could only see the bull's-eye." After a quick look in the mirror, I saw I had a huge goose egg right above my right eye! Through all the excitement and adrenaline, I had absolutely no idea I had been "scoped"!

After an uneventful first season, my dad ultimately realized he was far too busy to keep up with my weekly demands to go hunting. A family friend named Gerry told me that he had someone he wanted me to meet. The next weekend, we went out to a farm pond where I met Jack. He was a middle-aged man with a wife and two daughters, and he was looking for someone he could take under his wing. We became lasting friends! He loved to talk, and I was all ears. He told me about these draw hunts for kids under 16; we applied for a few, and one in particular was a hunt in Muskogee. One day, Jack called with the best news an 8-year-old boy could hear! We had drawn the hunt to Muskogee! We passed the weeks before the youth hunt pursuing waterfowl. He created a monster. I absolutely fell in love with hunting waterfowl! We took numerous of my first species of ducks and my first Canada goose, while the specklebelly, Ross', and snow still eluded me.

The week of the draw hunt arrived! No school for a week, baby! I was stoked! We arrived at the hotel, unloaded our luggage and then headed to the pre-hunt briefing. That night, visions of monster bucks kept me awake until well past midnight. I woke to the smell of coffee, and Jack's



smile. He asked, "Hey bud, you ready to go get 'em?" We made the trek far back and waited for day to break. After not seeing much, we decided to head back to the truck and grab a bite to eat. On the way back, Jack suddenly stopped and motioned me forward like one those military guys you see on TV. I crept up, and there the doe stood. My heart rate suddenly shot through the roof, and the hunt was on. We crawled to the closest tree; I took careful aim, seated my crosshairs behind the shoulder, and let the 64-grain bonded bullet do the rest.

I'll never forget that hunt as long as I live, nor will I forget all the knowledge Jack has poured into me over our nine years, 17 deer, three turkeys and countless waterfowl. In the past few years, Jack has had a major decline in health; he has lost over 50 pounds and almost all motivation to get out of the house. The doctors have no idea what is wrong. But with weekly shots and pills that would choke a horse, he has regained some much-needed energy. We still hunt together and love every moment we spend in God's wonderful creation.

Good ole Gerry had yet another friend who loved to take kids hunting. To my luck, Mike Cerny, aka Doc, loves to waterfowl hunt! A 6-foot-4-inch, long and lean 48-year-old, Doc lays wood floors to support his hunting addictions. We met in the summer of 2011. To pass the time on those long, hot summer days, we went bowfishing. Well, let's add another addiction to the list. I found myself smelling of carp and gar more than I smelled like flowers and other such things. As the days grew shorter and colder, our focus drifted from fish to fowl. With hunts for sandhill cranes, ducks and geese planned, we couldn't wait for the migration to start! I bagged my first crane, specklebelly, Ross' and snow geese that year.

As my relationship continues to grow with both men, they continue to guide me and mold me into a man; they have both certainly done their fair share of sharing the heritage, and I'm eternally grateful for both men. As friends hear of my adventures, they constantly beg for me to take them. As it turns out, I love introducing new people to the outdoors. I'm so grateful that Doc and Jack invested in me their time, money and love of the outdoors. I hope that one day I can pass the torch to another wide-eyed, 8-year-old youngster. **x

Outdoor Calendar

FOR NEW UPDATES TO THE OUTDOOR CALENDAR, PLEASE
VISIT THE DEPARTMENT'S
WEBSITE: WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM/CALENDAR.HTM

JULY 2016

- 2 Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day – city permit not required.
- 3 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Fishing With Ryan and Todd, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 4 Independence Day; state offices closed.
- 6 ODWC Controlled Hunts drawing results announced, 8 a.m., wildlifedepartment.com.
- 9 "Hooked on Fishing" free class, ages 5-15, 8-10 a.m., Edwards Park Lake, 1515 N Bryant (Oklahoma City), register at (405) 297-1426.
- 10 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Keystone Stripers, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 11 Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., 2145 NE 36, Oklahoma City.
- 14 Family Fishing Clinic, 6:30-8 p.m., Arcadia, preregister at <http://bit.ly/1nDcLaA>
- 16 Hooked on Fishing" free class, ages 5-15, Metro Tech Springlake, NE 36 and Springlake Drive, register at (405) 297-1426.
Fly Fishing Clinic, 9:30 a.m., Bass Pro Shop Oklahoma City, (405) 218-5200.
Oklahoma Boating Safety Course, 9:45 a.m., Bass Pro Shop Broken Arrow, register at (405) 306-5406.
NWTF Camo and Pearls Ladies Event, Reed Center, Oklahoma City, (405) 514-9913 or klorenz@eskridge.net.
- 17 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Management Update, 8 a.m., OETA.

- 23 "Hooked on Fishing" free class, ages 5-15, Crystal Lake, Oklahoma City, register at (405) 297-1426.
- 24 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Fishing With Dick Faurot, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 28 Family Fishing Clinic, 6:30-8 p.m., Arcadia, preregister at <http://bit.ly/1UIJ3wh>
- 31 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Drummond Teacher's Turkey Hunt, 8 a.m., OETA.

AUGUST 2016

- 1 Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., 2145 NE 36, Oklahoma City.
- 6 Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day – city permit not required.
- 7 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Antelope Hunt With Wade Free, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 12 Feathered Friends of NWTF Hunting Heritage Banquet, Sooner Legends Inn, Norman, (405) 410-4435.
- 13 Quail Forever Central Oklahoma 89er Chapter, 11th annual fundraising banquet, 6-10 p.m., Sooner Legends Inn, Norman.
"Wetland at Night," Hackberry Flat WMA, (405) 990-4977 or melynda.hickman@odwc.ok.gov.
- 14 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Law Enforcement Social Media, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 20 Fly Fishing Clinic, 9:30 a.m., Bass Pro Shop Oklahoma City, (405) 218-5200.
- 21 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, River Warriors, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 27 Oklahoma Boating Safety Course, 9:45 a.m., Bass Pro Shop Broken Arrow, register at (405) 522-1880.
DU Eastern OK County Sportmen's Night Out, 6-10 p.m., Midwest City Community Center, (405) 481-5939.
DU Camo Shoot, 6-10 p.m., Silverleaf Shotgun Sports, Guthrie, (405) 850-0275.

Game Bag

A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

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

Dear Col. Robert Fleenor, chief of Law Enforcement, Wildlife Department:

My name is Del Carson, and I am a 79-year-old retired Air Force sergeant.

On April 11, 2016, I was fishing on Lake Vanderwork. My motor kept cutting out and as I pulled into the loading ramp, the motor quit and I could not get it started. The wind was up, and there were big waves. One wave came and swamped the boat with water.

Before the boat went down, I got it over next to the dam. I was going to try and pull it out, but the gate to the dam was locked.

I carry a copy of the "Oklahoma Fishing" guide, so I looked up the local game warden's phone number. Game warden Lt. Jeff Headrick came out to the lake with a key and opened the gate. As it turned out, my straps and rope were too weak. He pulled a long rope out of

his truck and pulled the boat from the water.

After the boat was drained, we put it back in the water and pulled it over to my trailer. Lt. Headrick pulled his gun, phones and billfold off and got in the water with my son to load the boat. I tried to pay him, or take him and his wife out to dinner. He refused everything and said it was his job.

Without Lt. Headrick's help, we could not have gotten the boat out of the water. I cannot thank Lt. Headrick enough for his actions.

Del Carson

Dear Wildlife Department:

I like seeing all the hunting and fishing posts on your Facebook page. I get a real kick at seeing how excited the kids get when they catch fish or get their first deer. My granddaughter is learning all about hunting and safety through her Uncle John. I can't wait for her to get that first one. I love your website. It's awesome!

Vicky Ervin, Sapulpa

EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks, Vicky, for your compliment about our website (www.wildlifedepartment.com) and for following us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/wildlifedepartment). We are thrilled that we are nearing 100,000 "Likes" on our Facebook page as of presstime. I would also suggest our "Outdoor Oklahoma" channel on YouTube. Go to www.youtube.com/outdooroklahoma and check out the hundreds of videos available for viewing!



Game Warden's Journal

Accounts from the field by the public servants tasked with enforcing the fish and wildlife laws of Oklahoma.



Oklahoma game wardens John Grellner, based in Caddo County, and Michael Zimmerman, based in Grady County, recently participated in the third annual Dr. Seuss Read-A-Thon at Sunset Elementary School in Anadarko. Dr. Seuss books were read, and a fun time was had by all!

Grellner said, "We are proud to be members of communities across this great state! We love giving back and helping to make all communities better!" **X

(From the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation-Game Wardens Facebook page.)



Game warden John Grellner reads a book to youngsters at the Dr. Seuss Read-A-Thon in Anadarko.

Game Warden Capt. Tracy Daniel, 8th District supervisor, always enjoys checking successful spring turkey hunters who have done it the right way. These two brothers, Chase and Shane Wiles, both of Elloree, S.C., made a long trek to Kaw Wildlife Management Area and called in these two mature birds on April 18, 2016. The game warden was pleased to see that both birds were tagged, and both hunters had properly completed their record of game. Congratulations guys!

(From the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation-Game Wardens Facebook page.)



South Carolina brothers Chase and Shane Wiles.

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.

REGULATIONS ARE NOW ALL-IN-ONE

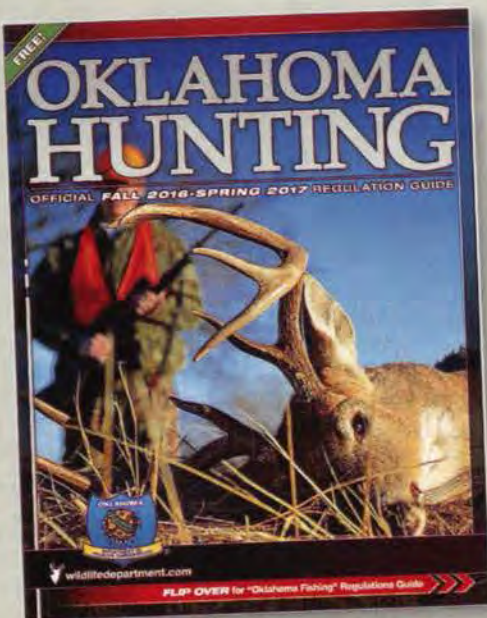
The 2016-17 "Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Regulations Guide" printed version should be available now at license vendors across the state. There are two notable changes to be aware of.

- For the first time, all regulations for fishing and hunting — including waterfowl — are summarized in this one printed guide. A separate waterfowl guide will no longer be printed.

- The center section of Special Area Regulations now lists only deviations from statewide rules for public areas. If no special regulations appear for a particular area, the statewide general regulations apply.

Sportsmen who prefer a printed version need only grab one copy of the free guide, for all the hunting and fishing rules. The 2016-17 guide continues the two-cover format: On one side is the hunting guide cover, and on the other side is the fishing guide cover.

A mobile-friendly version appears in the "The Official Fish and Wildlife Guide." This is a free mobile app available for download from the from iTunes or Google Play stores. **X



2016-2017 *Oklahoma* Hunting Seasons

DEER

Deer Archery	Oct. 1-Jan. 15
Youth Deer Gun	Oct. 14-16
Deer Primitive Arms (Muzzleloading)	Oct. 22-30
Deer Gun	Nov. 19-Dec. 4
Holiday Antlerless Deer	Dec. 16-25

ELK

Elk Archery	Oct. 1-Jan. 15
Youth Elk Gun	Oct. 14-16
Elk Primitive Arms (Muzzleloader)	Oct. 22-30
Elk Gun	Nov. 19-Dec. 4

Special Southwest Zone Elk Seasons

Archery	Oct. 1-5
Muzzleloader	Closed
Gun	Oct. 6-9
Antlerless	Nov. 19-Dec. 4 and Jan. 1-31

ANTELOPE

Antelope Archery	Oct. 1-14
Antelope Gun Seasons	
Either Sex Hunt	Sept. 8-11
State-Drawn Doe	Sept. 12-21
Landowner-Drawn Doe	Dec. 3-Jan. 15

BEAR

Bear Archery	Oct. 1-16
Bear Muzzleloader	Oct. 22-30

TURKEY

Turkey Fall Archery	Oct. 1-Jan. 15
Turkey Fall Gun	Oct. 29-Nov. 18
Youth Spring Turkey	April 1-2
Youth Spring Turkey (SE)	April 15-16
Spring Turkey	April 6-May 6
Spring Turkey (SE)	April 17-May 6

QUAIL	Nov. 12-Feb. 15
PHEASANT	Dec. 1-Jan. 31
CROW	Oct. 10-Nov. 16 and Dec. 9,-March 4
SQUIRREL	May 15-Jan. 31
RABBIT	Oct. 1-March 15
FURBEARERS (raccoon, bobcat, badger, gray fox, red fox, mink, muskrat, opossum, river otter and weasel)	Dec. 1-Feb. 28

MIGRATORY BIRD SEASONS


Dove	Sept. 1-Oct. 31 and Dec. 17-25
Rail	Sept. 1-Nov. 9
Gallinule	Sept. 1-Nov. 9
September Teal	Sept. 10-25
Early Canada Geese	Sept. 10-19
Snipe	Oct. 1-Jan. 15
Sandhill Crane	Oct. 22-Jan. 22
Canada Geese	Oct. 29-Nov. 27 and Dec. 10-Feb. 12
White-fronted Geese	Oct. 29-Nov. 27 and Dec. 10-Feb. 5
Light Geese	Oct. 29-Nov. 27 and Dec. 10-Feb. 12
Woodcock	Nov. 1-Dec. 15
COLGS	Feb. 13-March 30

Waterfowl (Ducks, Coots, Mergansers)

Panhandle	Oct. 15-Jan. 11
Zone 1	Oct. 29-Nov. 27 and Dec. 10-Jan. 22
Zone 2	Nov. 5-27 and Dec. 10-Jan. 29

Youth Waterfowl

Panhandle	Oct. 8-9
Zone 1	Oct. 22-23
Zone 2	Oct. 29-30

 **Hunters in the Know...**
Let Young Bucks Grow!

I Want to Hunt, So What's Next?

By Micah Holmes,
Information Supervisor

You've decided you want to learn how to hunt. Dove season will be coming up Sept. 1, and then teal, fall turkey, deer, rabbit, quail and pheasant seasons will soon follow. Becoming a hunter is not always easy or straightforward, but you won't regret making the effort.

This is actually a great time of year to learn about the sport and decide if it is something you're really going to enjoy. Here are a few pointers that I hope you will find helpful in your journey to becoming a hunter.



Spend time in your chosen hunting area to get the lay of the land before trying to hunt.

- Find someone in your extended family, your circle of friends or among your co-workers who is already a hunter. In most cases, we have found that it takes a hunter to make a hunter. If you can find a mentor who will take you under his or her wing and show you the ropes, it will be more beneficial than any book you could read or any website you could visit. There's a good chance you already know someone who would be eager to introduce you to the sport of hunting, and all you need to do is ask. Tell everyone around you that you're thinking about learning how to hunt, and you'll be surprised how much the hunting community will be happy to help you out.
- Go through the online Hunter Education course. It is free and provides a solid introduction to important items such as firearms handling, game identification and safety in the field, among other things. Find the course at www.wildlifedepartment.com/education/huntered.htm.
- Buy a license. To hunt small game, you will need a \$25 license if you are a resident 16 or older. There might be other licenses required for various seasons. You can call the Wildlife Department, and we'll walk you through it to make sure you get all the proper licenses. Licenses are sold by vendors statewide or at www.wildlifedepartment.com/forget1/OnlineSales.aspx.
- Buy or borrow a firearm and become familiar with it. You probably know someone who will loan you a .22 rifle or a 20-gauge shotgun, or you can find one for less than \$200 (maybe gently used). Go to a shooting range and try some target shooting. You can find a nearby range at http://wheretoshoot.org/Find_Range/index.asp. Many of these ranges will have someone who can help you through the basics, maybe for a small fee.
- Find a place to go hunting. Again, it is likely you that you already know somebody that will let you hunt on family land, especially for small game. If not, no problem.

The Wildlife Department manages more than a million acres of public hunting lands in every part of the state. Find a public hunting area near you at www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wheretoh.htm. Plan to spend a day or two at the area before even trying to hunt. You can learn the lay of the land, figure out where to park, and determine some likely hunting spots. You can also call up the area biologist, and he or she will be happy to help out a new hunter.

- Learn the regulations. A great new way to get the hunting rules in your hands is to download the Wildlife Department's mobile app; just search "Oklahoma Fish Wildlife Guide" on iTunes or Google Play. You can get a printed version at hundreds of license vendors statewide, or you can find them at www.wildlifedepartment.com/laws_regs/huntingguide.htm. If something doesn't make sense, give us a call or, better yet, call the game warden in your county. A list of game wardens is at www.wildlifedepartment.com/laws_regs/lawstatemap.htm.
- Read, watch and follow as much hunting-related information as you can. You can find a bunch of good videos at www.youtube.com/outdooroklahoma. Many of the videos contain tips and tricks that new hunters will find useful. We also have an active Facebook community where you can get questions answered: www.facebook.com/wildlifedepartment.



Ask others about good places to go hunting. The Wildlife Department manages more than a million acres where public hunting is permitted.

- Apply for a Controlled Hunt in the spring. These are limited-draw hunts operated by the Wildlife Department, and many of them offer a good chance at success. It only costs \$5 to put your name in the hat.
- Consider hiring a guide. This isn't cheap, but there are guides out there who really enjoy sharing their knowledge with others. It usually pays to interview each guide to make sure his or her expectations and perspectives match up with yours.

Hopefully these tips will help you embrace America's hunting tradition and you'll join the ranks of the sportsmen and conservationists who have long cherished their experiences in nature. 🦋



One good way to learn about hunting is to ask someone to show you how.

READERS' PH 20 SHOW

On these pages are captured moments, glimpses of the beauty and intrigue found in Outdoor Oklahoma. Each year, our Readers' Photography Showcase is among the most popular features in the magazine. For 2016, more than 250 of you answered the call to submit your best images for consideration. We studied each of the 734 photos received and fancied these 72 images that now grace these pages. Congratulations to those whose photos and comments appear here, and we extend our gratitude to all who submitted entries.



RICHARD SMITH OF BROKEN ARROW
American kestrel, Heyburn Lake, February 2016



MICHAEL BRYAN OF BARTLESVILLE

PHOTOGRAPHY

16

THE CASE



Taken at sunrise at the Tallgrass Prairie. This large bull bison did not pay much attention to me as he feasted on fresh spring grass.



DAVID STROZDAZ OF EDMOND

I spent the early morning hours photographing lesser prairie-chickens as they were actively flying in to the lek north of Woodward.



TRISH LUCKIE OF ROSSTON
Taken in Harper County



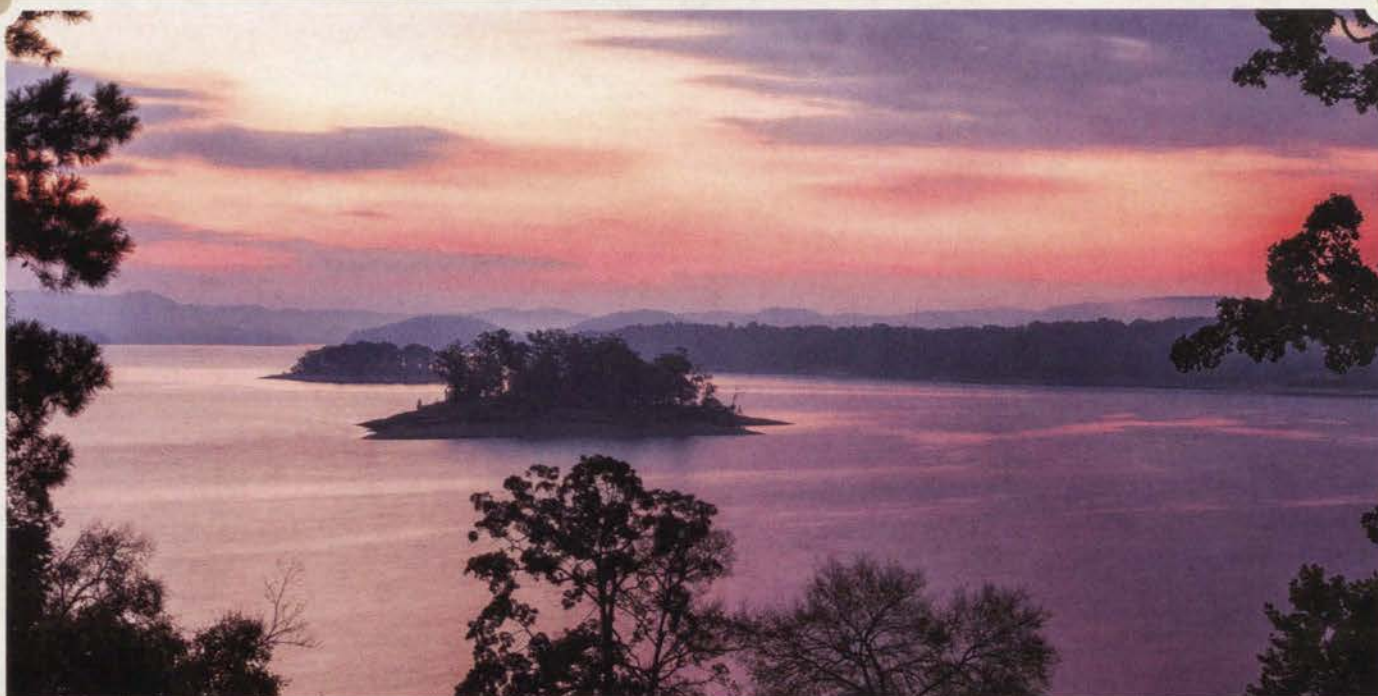
LARRY E. SMITH OF LAWTON

Taken in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Bull elk grazing a recent prescribed burn area on a cool, overcast morning.



MARK GUNTER OF YUKON

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Jan. 15, 2016. Thanks to my wife's good eyesight and a 400 mm reach on the lens, I was able to watch a brief scuffle between several wild turkeys.



ANGIE PRECURE OF MERIDIAN

I took this photo of sunrise at Broken Bow Lake in the spring. The colors of the sky with the haze in the air made for some beautiful colors that morning.



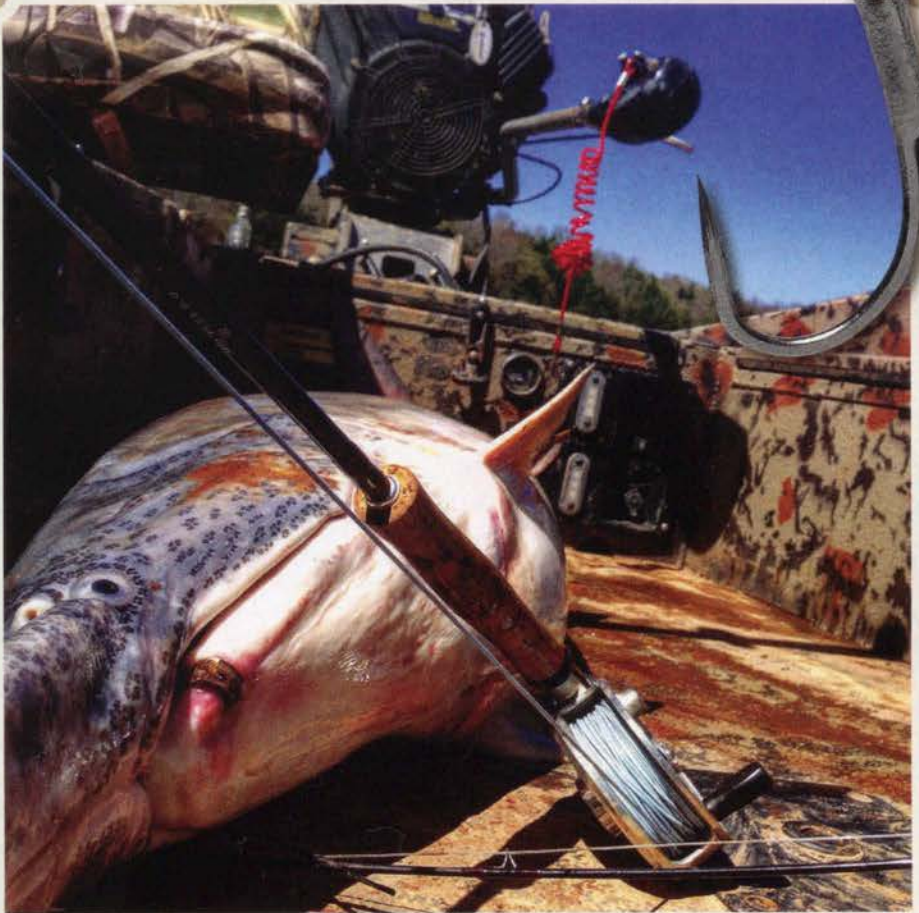
BRANDON BOWMAN OF MOORE

A peaceful morning on the shoreline of Cedar Lake in the Ouachita Mountains, eastern Oklahoma.



CYNTHIA REESE OF SHAWNEE

Bald eagle captured flying over an Osage County pasture.



MICHAEL SANDERS OF STILLWATER

This is the spoonbill that finally cracked the rod's back. After hooking and landing several, I finally found one that was strong enough to snap the rod in two. After a serious battle, I managed to get the fish to the boat and found that it was a tagged fish!



GLEN GEBHART OF STILLWATER

This is one of a series of pictures I took of a great blue heron catching and eating a redear sunfish in my pond south of Stillwater.



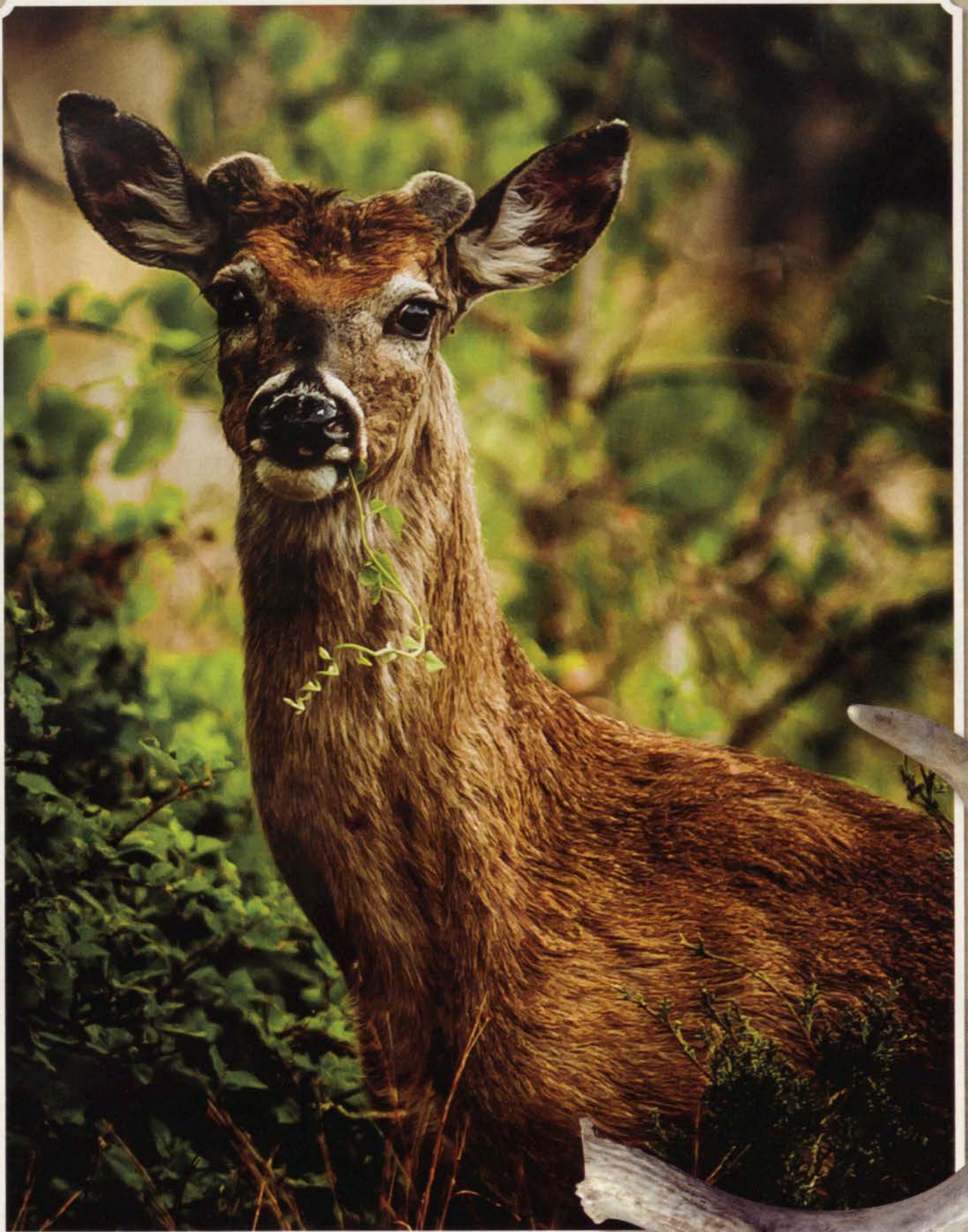
CARMON BRIGGS OF PAWHUSKA

Taken at sundown in November at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northern Osage County.



LARRY KRUSE OF TULSA

A few miles north of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. Taken at dusk with a range of about 150 yards.



DON RISI OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Alongside a road in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



DAVID R. MORRIS OF MEAD

I found this frog sitting on a polk salad stalk in my Bryan County backyard. I would try getting close, and the frog would move to the other side of the stalk. The frog finally cooperated, and I was able to get several shots before it got too dark.



NANCY GASSAWAY OF MUSKOGEE

Monarch butterfly on bloom at the Papilion Gardens in Muskogee.



KAY WILLIAMS OF YUKON

I photographed this butterfly in the Shawnee area.



EDDIE MCGEE OF CHOCTAW

Taken near Choctaw. I grow mammoth sunflowers every year just for the photo opportunities presented by various bees and butterflies as they land on them. This bumblebee was having a grand old time gathering loads of nectar.



CURT GRUEL OF EDMOND

Leaving the Wichita Mountains on a foggy day in May, 2013, we came upon a field of wild poppies near a convenience store. I waded into the field and shot this from a squat.



HEATHER BOLIN OF CACHE

Oklahoma wildflower with spider taken at the Holy City in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



LINDELL DILLON OF NORMAN

A male red-bellied woodpecker taken in Lake Thunderbird State Park.
The Cross Timber oaks are full of birds in winter.



HEATHER BOLIN OF CACHE

This picture was taken at Beaver's Bend State Park.



CHELSEA HEAVIN OF INDIAHOMA

My 6-year-old son, Riley, and I were just finishing up a long day of exploring. He excitedly shouted, "Momma! Momma! Look what I found!" As he was holding out the cardinal feather to proudly show me, I snapped this photo.



JON BUDER OF MIDWEST CITY



KITTY CROMWELL OF PERKINS

I love hearing and seeing meadowlarks. Even though this Eastern meadowlark is holding on to an icy branch, it seems to know spring is coming soon.



MICHAEL BRYAN OF BARTLESVILLE

Taken out the back door on a frosty morning in Osage County, just west of Bartlesville with a 600 mm lens.



MARY STEPHENS OF W

Sunset at Johnson Creek on Lake Texoma. I took sev



WASHINGTON, OKLA.

Several shots before the perfect one presented itself.



JUSTIN WALLIS OF EDMOND



FELICIA SAWYERS OF PONCA CITY

Carolina chickadees can be spotted almost anywhere in Oklahoma.



SHERMAN L. BARR OF EDMOND

This is a golden-crowned kinglet. Got this photo while walking the trails in Martin Park this winter.



Taken during sunset over the Talimena Drive in southeastern Oklahoma. This is a panorama created with four photos together, high and low. Careful attention was made to attain a solar flare through the trees.



EDDIE MCGEE OF CHOCTAW

A casual walk through my garden and I found this little guy just begging to have his picture taken.



STEPHEN KIRKLAND OF EDMOND

Taken at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



GEORGE WILLIAMS OF YUKON

A grasshopper landed on the rock within a foot of this Eastern collared lizard. I had to wait for five minutes with my finger on the shutter button for the action that was to take place. I got the whole sequence from beginning to the end.



AMY DRABEK OF MOORE

I love the diversity of the landscape in Oklahoma. I snapped this photo of my daughter taking in the view from the top of Mount Scott.



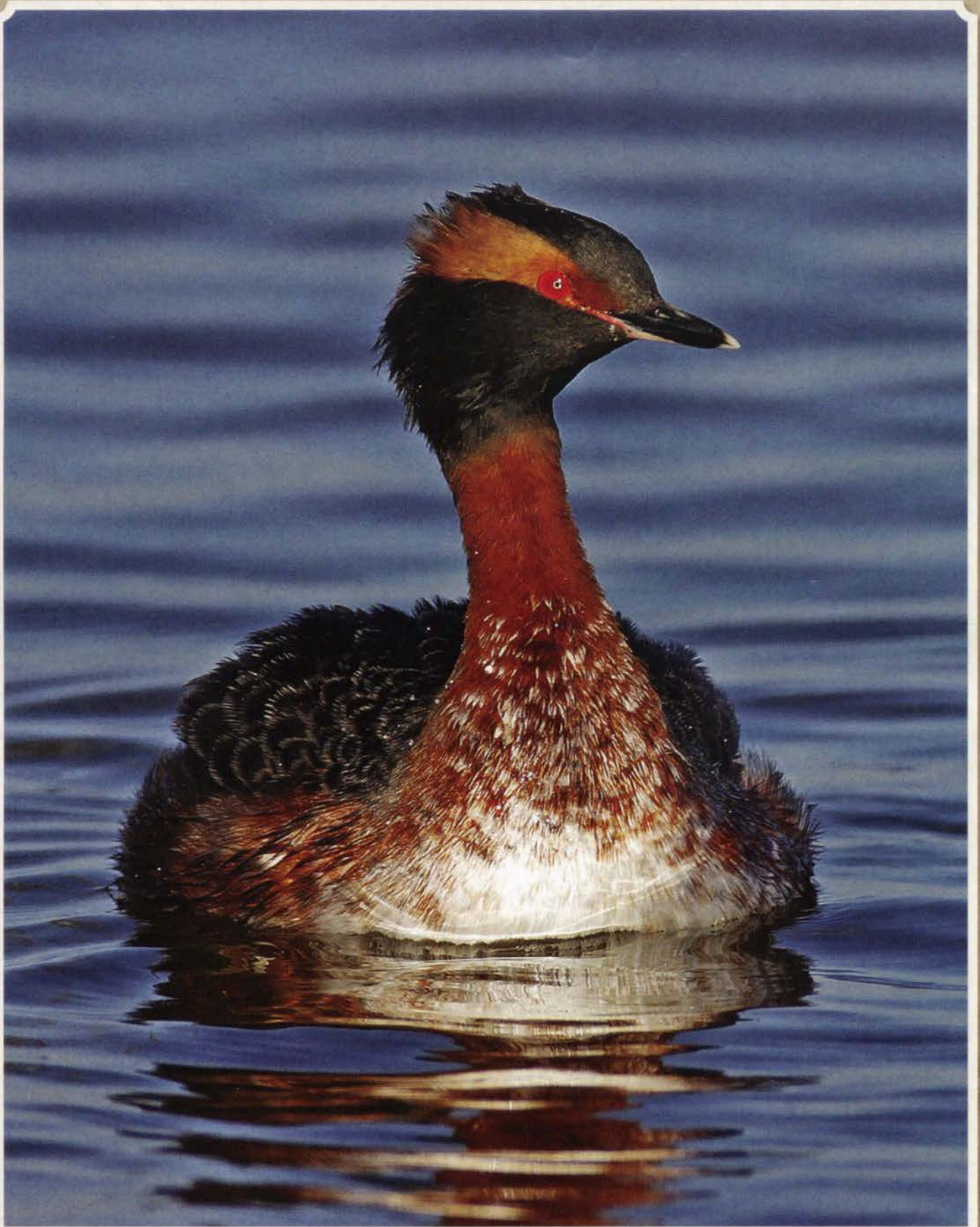
HOLLIS ANNE PRICE OF JONES

This was taken at the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge. I liked the fact that it looks like a face. I called the image "Here's Looking At You."



STEPHEN KIRKLAND OF EDMOND

Taken at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



DAVID STROZDAZ OF EDMOND

There were multiple species of grebes staging on Lake Hefner during spring migration, allowing me to photograph this horned grebe as it was transitioning in to breeding plumage.



FELICIA SAWYERS OF PONCA CITY

American coots in sync with one another on Ponca Lake East.



MATT PERE OF DENNISON, TEXAS

Foggy Lake Texoma morning. The birds weren't flying, but the fog rolled in as a man and his best friend looked into the mist, thinking there is no place they'd rather be on an early December morning. This photo only took a little touch of God's beauty to make it a favorite.



CYNTHIA REESE OF SHAWNEE

A juvenile eagle flew directly over me for this shot.



JEFF FLINN OF JENKS

This was taken near Jenks.



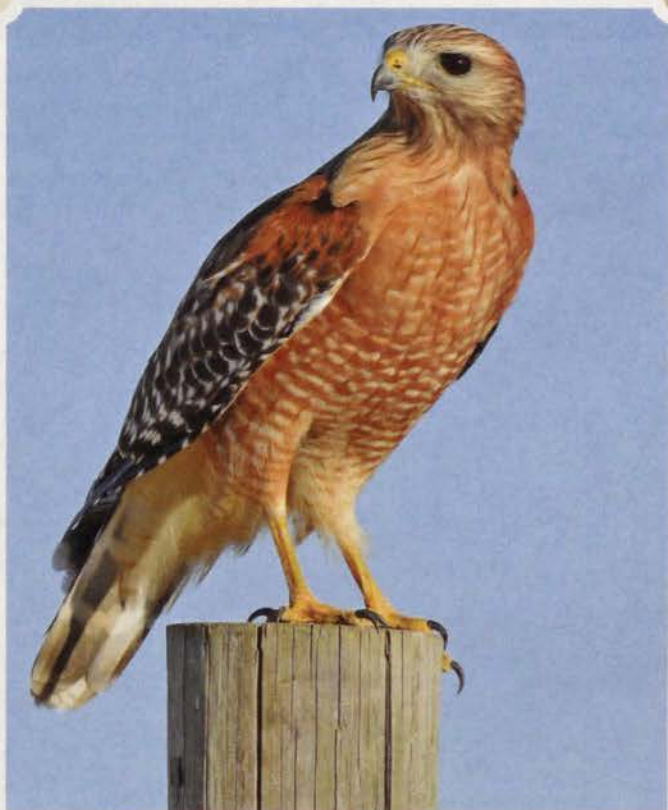
EDDIE JONES OF RINGWOOD

It took patience and a lot of shots to get this clear detailed picture at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge.



DAVID MCGOWEN OF LAWTON

A northern harrier hunting at Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area.



SHERMAN L. BARR OF EDMOND

(Left:) This red-tailed hawk was sitting by an open field west of Edmond. I pulled to the side of the road to get the shot.

(Right:) I was able to get this shot from my truck of a red-shouldered hawk on a post near Edmond.



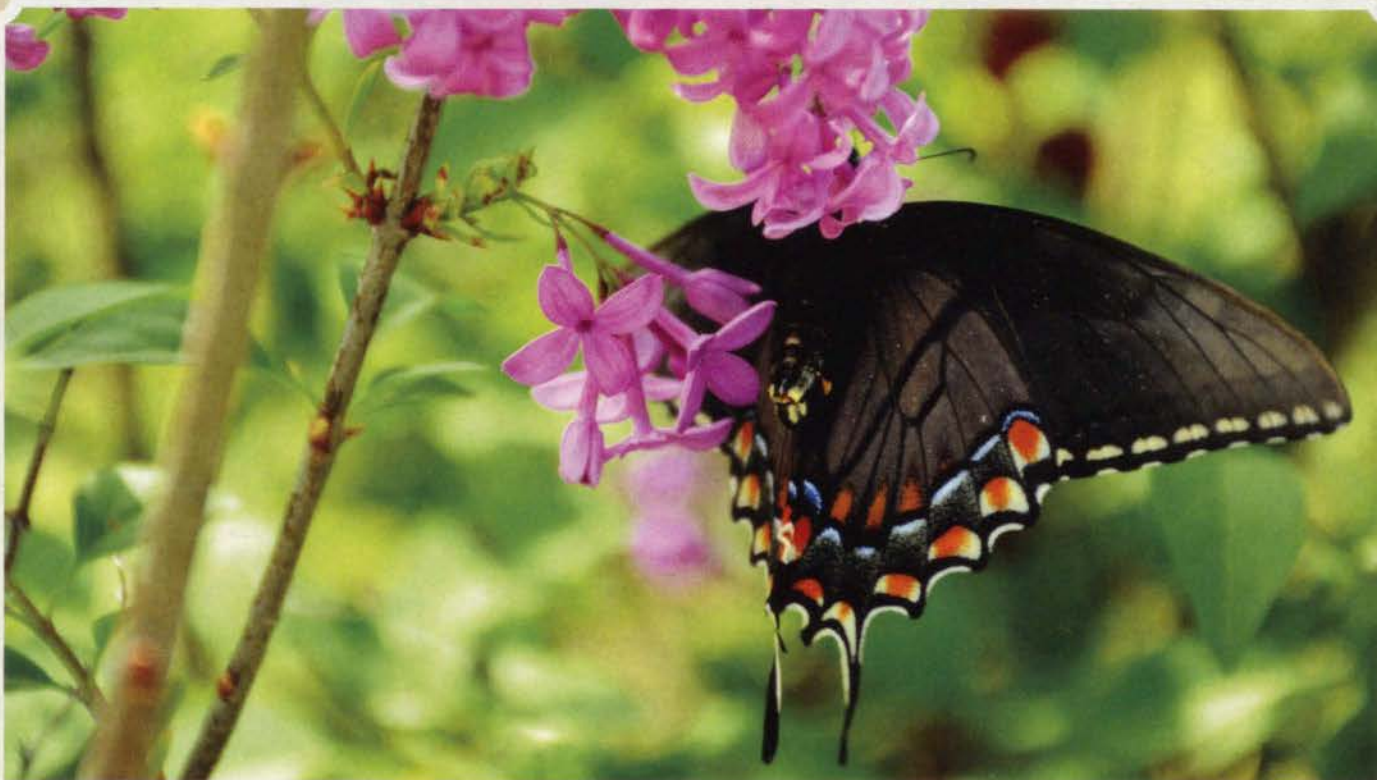
ASHLEY WAGNON OF TAHLEQUAH
 Passion flower in a Cherokee County pasture.



ANGIE OXLEY OF OKLAHOMA CITY
 Black-tailed prairie dog in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



TOMMY EVANS OF MIDWEST CITY
Wildflowers at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



STEPHANIE BISHOP OF TALALA
Butterfly on lilac near Talala in Rogers County. My neighbors have a beautiful lilac bush. As I was photographing it one day, this gorgeous butterfly landed on one of the flowers. It stayed there long enough for me to get this image.



GEORGE WILLIAMS OF YUKON

Visiting Pawhuska for photo opportunities in July 2015, I learned that after a heavy rain there often is an excellent waterfall at Bluestem Lake. I had to get there around sunrise to shoot the falls without the swimmers in the scene.



TODD BENTON OF GLENPOOL

Great blue heron fishing on Cedar Lake.



DON RISI OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Taken at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City.



TRACY FARRAR OF ROLAND

I had great pleasure photographing more than 100 snow geese this winter at Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuge near Vian. A big thrill was when these three flew by right over my head!



CYNTHIA REESE OF SHAWNEE

Taken while walking along a county road near a local town lake in Fairfax.



DARIN SWINNEY OF BROKEN ARROW

An adult great blue heron provides a nice backdrop on a cold winter stroll through the trails of Oxley Nature Center in Tulsa.



DAVID STROZDAS OF EDMOND

I came across this hawk perching in a campground area at Lake Arcadia.



LINDELL DILLON OF NORMAN

A white-tailed buck taken in Lake Thunderbird State Park, one of my favorite haunts with a camera. I've photographed this buck several times during the rut. I nicknamed him Lefty.



TOM WHIPPLE OF WYANDOTTE

This ice flower photo was taken near my residence. (Also called frost flowers, these rare structures can appear in fall or early winter when long-stemmed plants extrude thin layers of ice -- Ed.)



DAVE MCGOWAN OF LAWTON

A red-headed woodpecker prepares to deliver a grasshopper to the nest in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



DAVE MCGOWEN OF LAWTON

A burrowing owl keeping its eyes on me
at Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area.



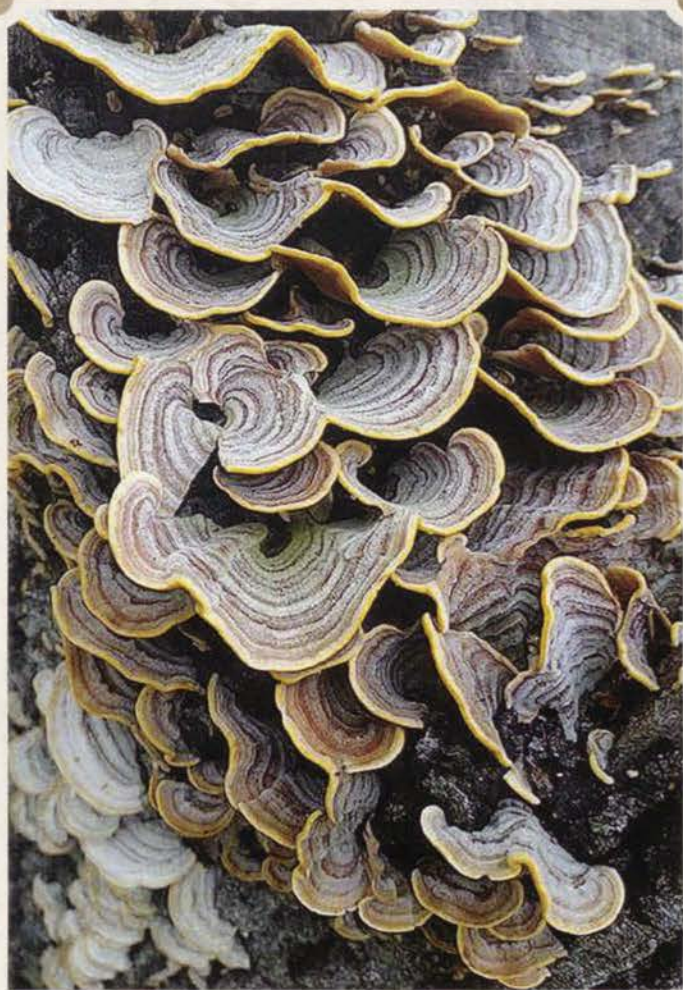
DON RISI OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Taken at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City.



SUE SELMAN OF SELMAN

This was taken at the Sue Selman Ranch in Harper County. These birds are hard to photograph because they are not still very long.



HOLLY LACKEY OF CHECOTAH

Taken at Lake Eufaula State Park. I like finding little gems in nature like this to photograph.



MICHAEL BRYAN OF BARTLESVILLE

After multiple attempts and a few hours chasing fast-flying aerobic purple martins with a hand-held 600 mm lens, I finally caught one with dinner for the chicks. Shot west of Bartlesville in Osage County.



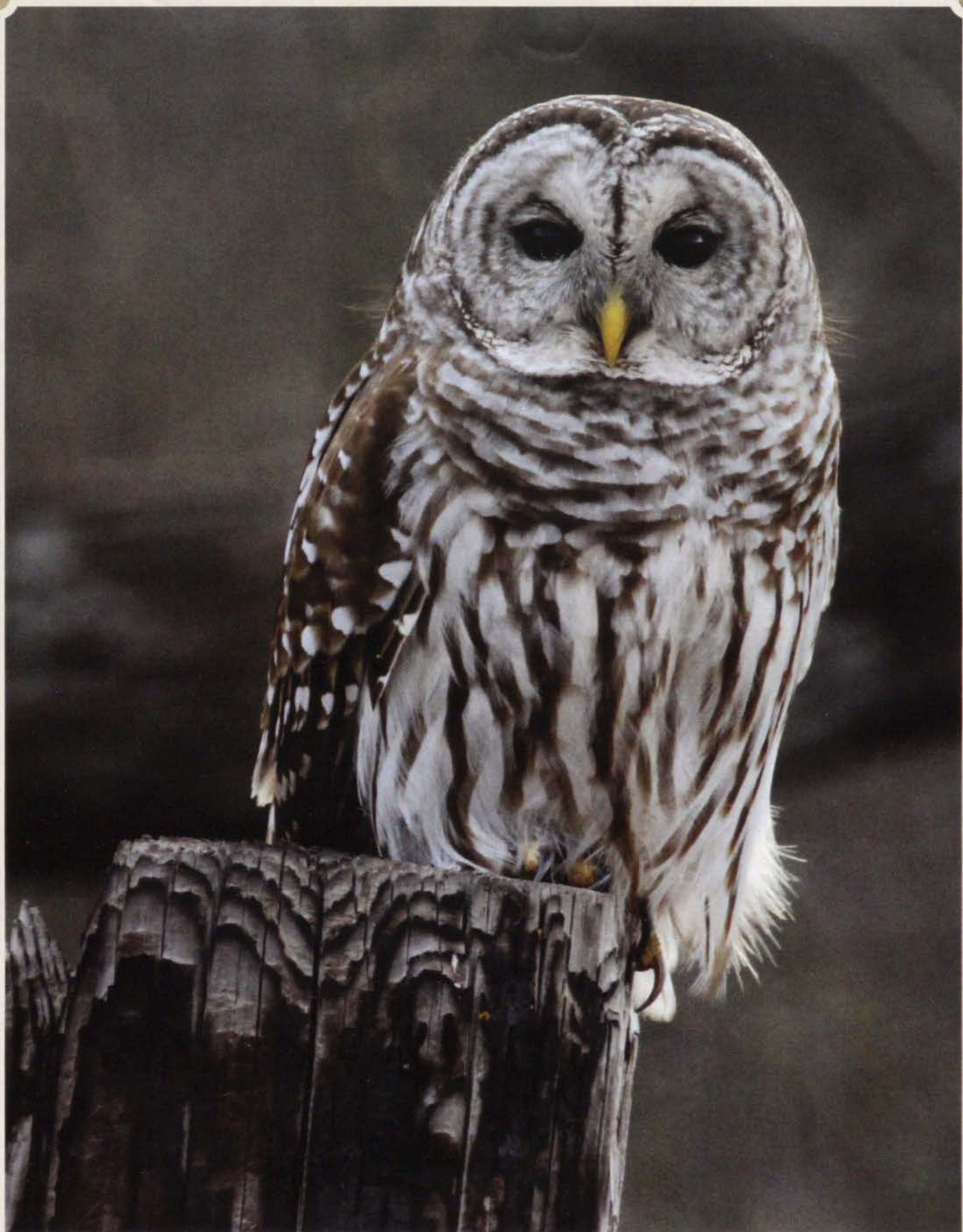
JOHN WILSON OF TULSA

I spotted this Viceroy butterfly larva at Bixhoma Lake. It is interesting that it is on a leaf which has a picturesque pattern made by a leaf miner.



MELISSA SCOTT OF COLLINSVILLE

Taken in my backyard in Collinsville. It was really difficult to get this up-close photo because the frog kept moving around every time i got the camera lens within a foot of it. This little guy is the first tree frog I've seen this spring and was sitting in a warm sunny area on the side of an oak.



CAMMIE C. MYERS OF AMBER

I often see this barred owl at night, but I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to see it during the daylight!



RANDY WATKINS OF CUSHING
Taken at Turner Falls near Davis.



DON RISI OF OKLAHOMA CITY
Taken at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City.



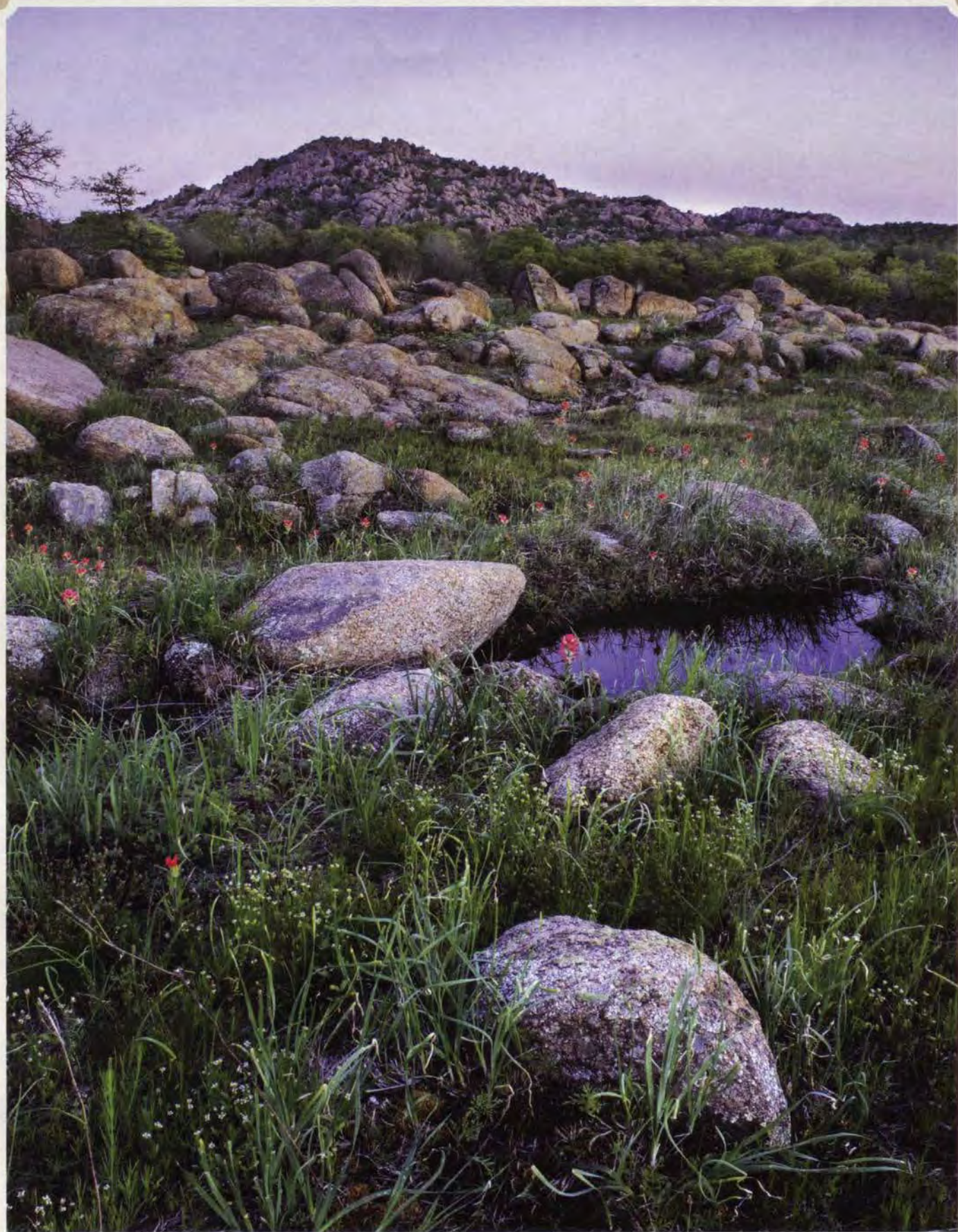
NATHAN HOLDEN OF NORMAN

Taken at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



DWAYNE KEAR OF NORMAN

Taken east of Norman on my property. I was able to capture this young buck as the sun began piercing through the ground fog.



BRAD DELASHAW OF OKLAHOMA CITY
Taken at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

O K L A H O M A ' S

Watchable Wildlife

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

BY BROOKE POWELL

In far southeastern Oklahoma, "living dinosaurs" still exist. A survivor from the Triassic Period, the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) has remained unchanged for 65 million years. In fact, alligators are less closely related to reptiles such as lizards and more closely related to birds, which some scientists theorize are direct descendants of dinosaurs.

Adult male alligators can grow up to 15 feet long, and females typically reach nearly 10 feet. They are grayish-black above with a light-colored belly. Young alligators tend to be more colorful with highlights of yellow and white. Their bodies are armored with large, bony plates. The ears, eyes and nostrils are situated near the top of the head. Valve-like structures on the ears and nostrils close when the alligator is underwater. Alligators can see while underwater because they have transparent eyelids. While they are graceful in the water, they tend to move clumsily on land.

American alligators have very strong jaws lined with about of 80 teeth. They use their teeth to capture their prey. Alligators swallow their food whole because they cannot chew. Losing teeth while capturing prey is not uncommon. Fortunately, each tooth has an underlying tooth precursor, so any lost teeth are quickly regrown.

American alligators usually mate around June, and mating season lasts about six to eight weeks. They typically mate underwater during the end of their courtship period. In June and July, females form their nests on high banks. There she lays 20 to 30 eggs, which are covered with nesting material. The covering creates a constant temperature in the nest so the female does not have to keep it warm.

The temperature of the eggs during incubation determines whether the hatchlings are male or female. Tempera-

tures less than 85 degrees produce females, temperatures greater than 91 degrees produces males, temperatures in between produce both females and males. As soon as the offspring break their shells, they make a distinctive call. The mother, very protective of the nest, then comes to dig out the eggs. At this point, the hatchlings are vulnerable to predators such as raccoons, otters, snakes, fish, frogs, herons and larger alligators.

Adolescent alligators eat a selection of small animals, mostly insects, small fish and frogs. As they grow, so does their appetite. They will start eating larger prey. Large alligators can eat any prospective meal that comes within range. They mostly feed on fish, turtles, birds and small mammals.

Alligators are often basking with their eyes and nostrils just above the water. They are mostly found in swamps and marshes, but sometimes they are found in rivers, lakes and other bodies of water. In Oklahoma, alligators can be found in Red Slough Wildlife Management Area and the Little River National Wildlife Refuge. Choctaw County and McCurtain County have the highest number of these long-lived reptiles, but they can also be found in other southern counties.

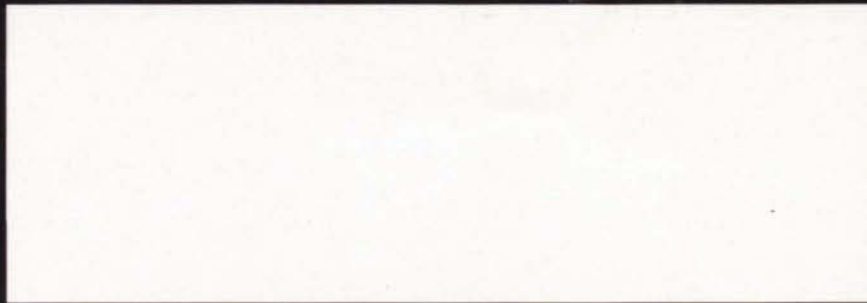
When the temperature is lower than 75 degrees, alligators hibernate in burrows known as "alligator holes." Even when they are outside of the holes, they can still endure long periods in the cold. When the water is beginning to freeze, they submerge their bodies and keep their nostrils above the surface so they can still breath. This behavior sometimes causes them to be trapped in the ice until a thaw allows them to move again.

American alligators are difficult to find in Oklahoma. But they can be found in remote and marshy areas in the southeastern corner of the state. 🌿



Alligator's Range
in Oklahoma





GARRETT HAMILTON OF LAWTON

Sunset's fading rays blanket the Wichita Mountains in this view captured by Garrett Hamilton of Lawton. More spectacular images of the natural world around us are featured in the "2016 Readers' Photography Showcase" in this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

Outdoor Oklahoma

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

