



The Wild Side!

February 2015

Cover Photo

Western Oklahoma's cave myotis (*Myotis velifer*) hibernate in large clusters. Learn more about hibernating bat counts in this Wild Side issue! Photo by Jena Donnell.

Upcoming Events

Eagle Watches Statewide

Jan. 2014 - Feb. 2015

This is your opportunity to see our nation's symbol soar over Oklahoma and learn more about Bald Eagle ecology and their recovery story! Check out our [flier](#) for specific locations, dates and contact information!

Red Slough Birding Convention

Idabel
May 9-12, 2015

Register now for the 7th Annual Red Slough Birding Convention! With morning and afternoon tours of three conservation areas, you'll get a firsthand look at southeastern Oklahoma's diverse wildlife!

Greetings Citizen Scientists!

Thanks for participating in the 2015 Winter Bird Feeder Survey! With your help, we broke a 7-year participation record! Last month, 348 people from 52 counties reported more than 31,138 individual birds visiting backyard feeders!

The most numerous birds using feeders were the American Goldfinch (4,498), House Sparrow (3,392), Northern Cardinal (3,375), Red-winged Blackbird (2,475), and Dark-eyed Junco (2,462).

This year, we noticed that when some birds visit feeders, they come in flocks! Here's a look at the top five "flocking" species reported this year.

1. **Red-winged Blackbird**
Percentage of participants: 27.6%
Average flock size: 25 birds
Largest one time count: 300, Cleveland County
2. **Brewer's Blackbird**
Percentage of participants: 2.6%
Average flock size: 20 birds
Largest one time count: 100, Cleveland County
3. **American Goldfinch**
Percentage of participants: 71.6%
Average flock size: 18 birds
Largest one time count: 180, Creek County
4. **House Sparrow**
Percentage of participants: 65.5%
Average flock size: 14 birds
Largest one time count: 103, Comanche County
5. **Rusty Blackbird**
Percentage of participants: 1.7%
Average flock size: 11 birds
Largest one time count: 35, Seminole County



Ken Granstrom of Oklahoma County photographed this Downy Woodpecker a few days after participating in the Winter Bird Feeder Survey.

Looking for more ways to get involved with the Wildlife Diversity Program? Check out our other citizen science projects at wildlifedepartment.com. Our next opportunity will be the [Oklahoma Nestbox Trails](#) project. To participate, install one or more nestboxes by mid-February, monitor their use through the end of summer, and report the number of cavity-nesting chicks that fledge! Over the course of the 29-year project, citizen scientists have recorded over 68,000 fledglings!

Jena Donnell
Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Species Profile: Eastern Bluebird

The cobalt blue and rust colored feathers of eastern bluebirds have long captured our attention. One of the earliest known references to this colorful songbird was as a "blew bird" by early 1700s explorer Mark Catesby. Later, colonists called this bird the "blue robin" because of similarities to the European robin. Today, the charming eastern bluebird is a welcome visitor to many rural backyards.

As with many songbirds, male eastern bluebirds are more brilliantly colored than females. In addition to uniformly deep blue feathers on the head, back, wings and tail, males have chestnut throats, breasts and flanks. The belly is white. Because the blue coloration is simply a result of light interacting with the structure of individual feathers, the intensity of a bluebird's color changes with the brightness and angle of light illuminating it. Females have muted coloration when compared to males; the head and back is blue-gray and the throat and breast is dull orange.



Participate in the Oklahoma Nestbox Project by reporting the nest success of eastern bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds! Photo by Bill Thompson - USFWS

Eastern bluebirds are largely insect eaters, feasting on spiders, caterpillars, beetles and grasshoppers. In spring and summer, this bird can often be seen perched on trees and fence posts overlooking open fields. When an insect is spotted, the bird flies to the ground to catch its prey. Occasionally, bluebirds capture insects in mid-air. When insects are less prevalent, the diet switches to fruits from sumac, dogwood, hackberry, pokeweed and other fruit producing plants.



Eastern bluebird females weave grass for their nest. Photo provided by USFWS.

In Oklahoma, the breeding season may begin as early as mid-February. Males first choose a territory in suitable habitat and then display their bright blue feathers and sing to attract females. When a pair has formed, the female begins weaving grasses or pine needles into a well-ordered nest. Females lay 2-7 eggs, averaging 4 per brood, and incubate the clutch for 11-19 days. Chicks fledge 17-21 days after hatching. Males are notoriously territorial during the mating season, defending the nest and paired female from any intruding males.

A cavity nester, eastern bluebirds traditionally use abandoned woodpecker nests in standing snags or dead or dying trees. When those trees are harvested for timber or cut down because of safety concerns, bluebirds must seek other cavities. While natural cavities are still available and birds will use wooden fence posts when available, they also regularly utilize man-made nest boxes.

One easy way to get involved in eastern bluebird conservation efforts is to install nest boxes on your property. Boxes should be available in mid-February and spaced at least 100 yards apart. Pre-made boxes are available at several retail stores, or construction plans can be found at noble.org. After installing one or more nest boxes, be sure to monitor the nest success and take part in the ODWC Nest Box Survey!

State Wildlife Grant Action Report: The Impacts of Flow Alterations to Crayfishes in Southeastern Oklahoma

The State Wildlife Grants Program provides proactive conservation for our nation's rare and declining species to preclude the need to list these as threatened or endangered.

Crayfish are often considered ecosystem engineers. They create forage and habitat for other invertebrates; consume large amounts of algae and detritus; and are a source of food for over 200 North American species of wildlife.

Four of these “engineers,” the Little River Creek crayfish, Mena crayfish, Kiamichi crayfish and Ouachita Mountain crayfish have only been found in the Ouachita Mountains of Oklahoma and Arkansas. To help guide future monitoring efforts for these crayfish, researchers with the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit created potential range maps using predictive modeling software. The resulting maps will help biologists and researchers identify possible populations beyond sampled locations.



Researchers with the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit mapped potential ranges for four endemic crayfish.

To create the models, researchers factored in known locations of these crayfish species from over 20 years of surveys. After known locations were entered, they focused on the environmental requirements of each species, particularly on soil types, winter temperature and rainfall, and elevation. The computer program then looked for these requirements across the surrounding landscape.

Based on the models, three of four species were predicted to occur in streams that have never been sampled for crayfish. Furthermore, two species were predicted to occur in separate watersheds that have not yet been sampled.

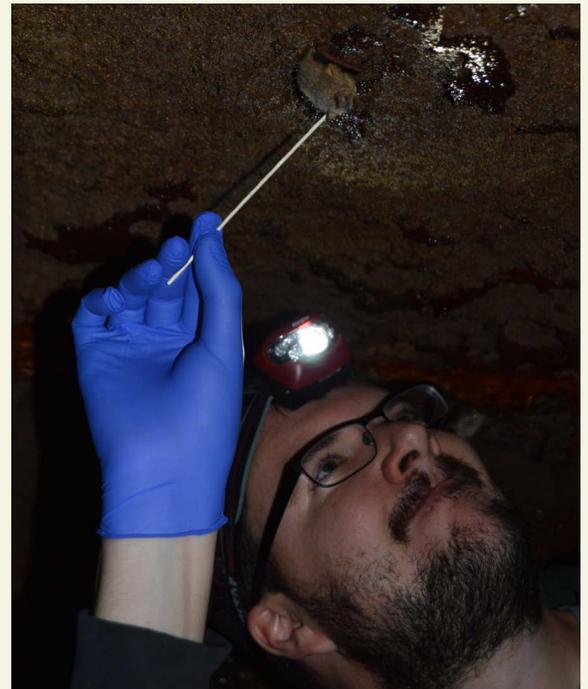
Find more detailed results of this study at wildlifedepartment.com.

Oklahoma Winter Bat Count: Something Batty is Afoot!

This winter, biologists, cavers, and volunteers are descending into the depths of Oklahoma's earth to conduct annual winter bat counts. In January and February, the bats hibernating in our caves are at their deepest sleep. This timing allows our quiet counters an opportunity to quite literally “count noses.” Counts are going on across the state where known bat colonies hibernate. These population counts are sent to bat specialists who maintain the data to see bat population trends.

For the last few years, the surveyors have also been collecting biological samples. In select caves across the state, counters “swab” a few of the bats faces and forelimbs. These swabs are similar to Q-Tips and are kept in sterile containers that are only opened at the time of application. The swab is run across the sleeping face and down both forearms to collect micro bacteria and other organisms that are on the body while the bat hibernates. The swab is returned to the original container, sealed and sent to a laboratory to see if any signs of white-nose syndrome or other bat contagions are present. Reports are returned in a few months and shared with others in the bat community.

Ready to learn more? Check out the May/June issue of “[Outdoor Oklahoma](#)” to learn how to attract bats to your property and find out about other monitoring techniques and how to register for the Selman Bat Watch!



Wildlife diversity biologist Matt Fullerton swabs a tri-colored bat during the 2015 annual surveillance. Photo by Jena Donnell.

Article by Duane Del Vecchio, member of the [Central Oklahoma Grotto & Oklahoma Bat Coordinating Team](#)

Nest Box News

Last month, the Wildlife Diversity Team installed a camera in an artificial owl nesting structure at Hackberry Flat WMA. Within the first 24 hours we had both a great horned owl and a barn owl visit the house. Since then, the great horned owls have visited several times and the first egg was laid Feb. 10. Four days later, a second egg was laid and a third egg was laid Feb. 17.

Great horned owls typically adopt an abandoned hawk nest and often lay one to four eggs in late winter. Incubation lasts 30 to 37 days.

Keep track of the great horned owl nest by "liking" [Jena Donnell, Wildlife Diversity Specialist on Facebook!](#)



Great horned owls are one of Oklahoma's earliest nesters. This egg was laid Feb. 10.



The second egg was laid between noon and 6 p.m. Feb. 14. Nearly spherical, great horned owl eggs measure 2.1 inches in length and 1.8 inches in width.



The third egg was laid Feb. 17. We're curious if the clutch is complete!



The Wild Side e-newsletter is a project of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Wildlife Diversity Program. The Wildlife Diversity Program monitors, manages and promotes rare, declining and endangered wildlife as well as common wildlife not fished or hunted. It is primarily funded by the sales of Department of Wildlife license plates, publication sales and private donors.

Visit wildlifedepartment.com for more wildlife diversity information and events.

For questions or comments, please email jena.donnell@odwc.ok.gov

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