



The Wild Side!

March 2015

Cover Photo

Sue Hokanson, park naturalist with Quartz Mountain Nature Park, points out a clue during a Hackberry Flat Day activity. Hackberry Flat Day will be held April 18, 2015 from 8-3 p.m. Photo by Jena Donnell.

Upcoming Events

Bat Wing Ding
Alabaster Caverns State Park
April 10-11, 2015

Play batty games, watch as biologists mist-net for bats, and learn all about Oklahoma's flying mammals at this bat festival! This event is free!

Creating a Butterfly Garden
Martin Park Nature Center
Oklahoma City
April 11, 2015

Want to attract more colorful butterflies to your backyard? It's not complicated but does take a bit of gardening know-how. Learn the secrets of creating a space perfect for welcoming winged-wonders to your garden. After the [free class](#), stay for the "Seed Starters" workshop (\$10) and make your own seed container ready to welcome butterflies to your home.

Hackberry Flat Day
Hackberry Flat Center
Frederick
April 18, 2015
8-3 p.m.

Join us for tours of [Hackberry Flat WMA](#), learn about southwestern Oklahoma's wildlife, and try your hand at a number of activities! This event is free!

Greetings Wildlife Enthusiasts!

Are you ready to start planning your 2015 bird-watching excursions? Then add the [7th annual Red Slough Birding Convention](#), held May 9-12 in Idabel, Okla., to your list! This convention is perfectly timed to showcase neotropical migrants and will feature three of southeastern Oklahoma's conservation areas. Join experienced tour guides as you explore Red Slough Wildlife Management Area, Little River National Wildlife Refuge and the McCurtain County Wilderness Area during the conventions' morning sessions. Trips to the wetlands provide opportunities to see species like the purple gallinule, anhinga and least bittern, while tours of the forested areas can produce Swainson's warblers, brown-headed nuthatches and even the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker!

The convention's afternoon tours will include a highlight of McCurtain County's state champion trees, and diverse wildflower and dragonfly communities. As you travel around the county, guides will be on-hand to identify eight of the towering giants at Little River NWR, the unique prairie plants just outside of Idabel, and 50 potential dragonflies and damselflies found at Red Slough WMA!

In addition to these tours, the convention also offers three evening presentations. Keynote speaker Dr. Jay Huner will discuss his past research in Louisiana on the convention's opening night, May 9. The next evening, University of Oklahoma's Dr. Jeff Kelly will discuss his research on bird migration. Presentations will wrap-up during the May 11 banquet with Dr. Huner's tale of "A Bumbling Birder's Big Year" when he counted 346 species in his home state of Louisiana in 2012.

[Registration](#) for the birding convention is \$125 and includes six tour options, three presentations, a banquet and the 2015 birding convention T-shirt. Registration details can be found at redsloughconvention.com. Want to see more photographs from previous conventions? Check out [Red Slough Birding Convention on Facebook!](#)

Attending the Red Slough Birding Convention is a great opportunity to tour the areas' birding hotspots and potentially increase the number of birds you see on your outing. If you can't make the convention, we encourage you to explore these and other Oklahoma conservation areas on your own. As always, share your adventures with [Jena Donnell, Wildlife Diversity Specialist on Facebook!](#)



Convention participants will tour a number of different habitats, each teeming with their own unique birds! Photo courtesy of USDA Forest Service.

Species Profile: Spring Peeper

As we begin to thaw from the late winter freezes, keep an ear tuned for calling amphibians. One call you'll likely hear in eastern Oklahoma comes from a small, light brown frog, the spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*). Averaging an inch in size, the spring peeper's dark cross or "x" on the back easily distinguishes this from other members of the chorus frog genus.

The spring peeper is a frog of our state's eastern woodlands. Though rarely seen outside of the breeding season, keen observers may be able to spot - or at least hear - this cryptic frog near small, temporary ponds or swamps surrounded by trees or shrubs. A signal that spring is just around the corner, the loud, clear call of spring peepers is somewhat deceiving. After hearing the call, most listeners are convinced the sound is coming from a large frog instead of one only slightly larger than a paperclip.

This frog, like Oklahoma's four other species of chorus frogs, begins calling in late winter and early spring, responding to the first warm rains. Male spring peepers often gather in large singing groups to attract females. The frogs give a single "peep" that is repeated in one-second intervals. After mating, females can lay over 700 eggs in small clusters or rows attached to vegetation growing under water. Tadpoles hatch in one to two weeks and metamorphose into adult frogs within three months.

Spring peepers, like other frogs, are active at night and eat a variety of small insects like ants, flies, caterpillars and spiders. In turn, they are eaten by large aquatic insects, snakes, fish and birds. To avoid predation, spring peepers rely on their camouflaged coloration and hide in thick vegetation. They also take advantage of early spring's cool temperatures and are most active when many of their predators are still waiting for warmer weather.

Learn more about the spring peeper and other frogs in "[A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles.](#)"

Tools of the Trade: Wildlife Identification Bands

To learn about the migration patterns and lifespans of birds, biologists often take part in nationwide bird banding programs. After fitting birds with small metal bands in the field, biologists then rely on citizen scientists to report the sighting or harvest of banded birds.

In Oklahoma, these banding programs have revealed some birds can be rather long-lived. A ruby-throated hummingbird banded in Oklahoma in 1978 and later recaptured in our state in 1986 has tied as the oldest banded ruby-throated hummingbird on record with an age of at least nine years. A green-winged teal banded in Oklahoma in 1941 was later harvested in Missouri in 1960; this 20 year old duck is the oldest banded bird on record for its species!

Bands and banding pliers come in a variety of sizes and styles. The 25 standard bands and five specialty bands fit everything from hummingbirds to swans. Different styles of bands are used for different groups of birds. The most common type, the standard butt-end band, is attached to the bird by simply crimping the band around the leg with a pair of pliers. Raptors and other birds with strong bills are able to remove this type of band. Instead, biologists use a type of band that locks on the leg or is riveted together, making the band more secure.

If you see a banded bird, you can report the band number and sighting information to www.reportband.gov. A certificate of appreciation listing specific information about the bird in addition to the banding date and location will be e-mailed to the reporting party.

While popular with bird research, banding programs have also provided insights into other species movements, including many species of fish and bats!

Article by Jeff Tibbits, wildlife diversity intern



Spring peepers are one of the earliest amphibian species to call. Photo by Zach Welty via Flickr ([license](#)).



Biologists use unique band numbers to track movements and longevity of birds and other species. Photo by USFWS.

State Wildlife Grant Action Report: Distribution and Diversity of Salamanders in the Oklahoma Ozarks

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.

Two uncommon salamanders, the grotto and Oklahoma salamander, live in and around the clear Ozark streams of Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas. Because of their restricted range and unknown population status, both species have been designated Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Though closely related, these species have distinctive adult life histories. The larval form of both species has gills and lives in springs and streams. Grotto salamander larvae may live in these streams for two to three years before metamorphosing into blind and colorless adults. These adults live in caves where they feed on invertebrates that are attracted to bat guano piles. Conversely, adult Oklahoma salamanders can be either fully aquatic, or can live on land. The adult life of this salamander depends primarily on habitat and stream temperatures. Streams with small gravel bottoms are more susceptible to drying out in the summer. The salamanders adjust to low stream flow by living on land, but streams with larger cobbles are more likely to support the aquatic form throughout the summer. Prior to 2004, the terrestrial life form of the Oklahoma salamander was thought to be a variation of another species, the many-ribbed salamander. Because of this misidentification, historic records for the Oklahoma salamander only include the aquatic life form.



Researchers with the University of Tulsa are studying the grotto and Oklahoma salamanders in northeastern Oklahoma. The Oklahoma salamander has two adult life forms. The left photograph shows the land-dwelling form. The right photo shows the fully aquatic adult life form. Top photo by Ron Bonett. Bottom photo by Wayne Van Devender.

To better understand the range of these largely unknown amphibians, a State Wildlife Grant was awarded to Dr. Bonett with the University of Tulsa and Dr. Fenolio with the San Antonio Zoo. As part of this study, researchers surveyed over 125 locations in seven northeast Oklahoma counties. They were able to find grotto salamanders at eight new locations, but efforts were hampered by heavy rains during the two-year survey period. Researchers had more success in finding Oklahoma salamanders, adding 38 new location records for this species and more than doubling the number of known land-dwelling populations of this salamander in Oklahoma.

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Report Hummingbird Arrival and Departure Dates

We want to know when you see your first hummingbird!

Please participate in our citizen science hummingbird survey! Simply record the date, species and sex of the first and last hummingbird you see at your feeder. Be sure to let us know the date you install your feeder!

Don't forget to clean your feeders frequently during the hot summer months.

[Data sheets](#) and an [online survey](#) are available at wildlifedepartment.com. Keep track of your observations through the fall and let us know about your 2015 hummingbird season in November!



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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