



## The Wild Side!

April 2015

### Cover Photo

American Toads were **calling** during the recent Cookson Wildlife Management Area inventory! More than 75 species were documented during the inventory, including 19 species of amphibians! Photo by Jena Donnell.

### Upcoming Events

**Earth Day**  
April 22, 2015

**Saturday Morning Hike**  
**Wichita Mountains Wildlife**  
**Refuge**  
April 25, 2015

Meet at the Refuge Visitor Center for a **guided hike** for the whole family at 9:00 a.m. These hikes are offered every Saturday!

**Red Slough Birding Convention**  
**Idabel**  
May 9-12, 2015

Watch for bitterns, rails, woodpeckers and warblers at the 7th annual **Red Slough Birding Convention!** Morning tours will feature the bird-watching opportunities of three conservation areas. Afternoon tours will allow you to explore the wildflower, dragonfly and champion tree diversity in McCurtain County.

### **Greetings Wildlife Enthusiasts!**

Binoculars. Stopwatch. Data Sheet. Field Guide. After a final scan of the “required gear checklist,” we got out of the truck and began watching and listening for birds. Red-bellied woodpeckers were drumming on a nearby tree, Harris’s sparrows were perched on a branch, and a red-tailed hawk was flying overhead. The Drummond Flats WMA Bird Survey was off to a great start! Five minutes and 12 species of birds later, the stopwatch sounded and we loaded back into the truck and headed to the next survey location. Wildlife diversity biologist Melynda Hickman had just a few short hours to visit the remaining 16 listening points.

Hickman has been visiting these same survey locations five times a year for the last six years. These surveys not only give biologists a snap shot of the current bird populations, but will also allow area managers to measure the success of future habitat management work. By categorizing the observed birds by the habitats they require, biologists can use these surveys to compare bird populations “before and after” restoration. As the restoration project transitions from planning to on-the-ground work, we hope to see a continued increase in wetland-related species.

Biologists are planning a “natural wetland restoration” at Drummond Flats WMA; instead of using a complex system of dikes to artificially flood areas, individual units will be dependent on rainfall.

Last year, Hickman reported 83 species of birds; a majority of which were wetland-related species like ducks, sandpipers and egrets. She also reported an uptick in riparian area birds like woodpeckers, orioles and flycatchers.

Surveys will continue as ODWC and partnering agencies like the USDA and Department of Defense develop restoration plans. The next bird survey at Drummond Flats WMA is scheduled in May.

We hope you get into the surveying spirit and participate in one of our citizen science opportunities! Find more details at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com)!



Melynda Hickman and Keith Waag search for birds at Drummond Flats Wildlife Management Area in northwestern Oklahoma. These surveys have been conducted since 2009. Photo by Jena Donnell.

## Species Profile: Chuck-will's-widow

For many wildlife enthusiasts, spring evenings aren't complete without noise. At dusk, the show starts as frogs begin their evening chorus. By nightfall, one more voice is added to the melody; a rolling "[chuck-will's-widow](#)" is slowly repeated into the night. Rarely seen, but often heard, the chuck-will's-widow is considered one of spring's many messengers.

Chuck-will's-widows are a member of the nightjar family, a group of birds that nest on the ground and hunt insects while in flight. (This family is often referred to as "goatsuckers" because of a myth that these birds feed on goat milk.) Other members of the nightjar family include the whip-poor-will, common nighthawk and common poorwill. Of the four species found in Oklahoma, chuck-will's-widows are the largest.

Like other nightjars, chuck-will's-widows are well camouflaged, with brown, black and buff patterned feathers. They have a large, flat head and long tail and wings. Seldom seen, these birds can be identified by their namesake call alone. Though similar to the call of the [whip-poor-will](#), you can distinguish the chuck-will's-widow by the slower, lower pitched song.

To guide flying insects into their large, open mouths when foraging, these birds have modified feathers, or bristles, that resemble whiskers around their beak. But chuck-will's-widows have a very diverse diet. In addition to eating moths and beetles, this bird will occasionally eat small birds - primarily migrating warblers - and even bats! When molting tail feathers in late summer, chuck-will's widows have even been seen hunting frogs on the ground!

After wintering in South America, chuck-will's-widows make the long journey to the southeastern United States to take advantage of our abundant summer insect populations. Oklahoma records show this bird is a dependable migrant; over 25 years of data from Washington County report the first chuck-will's-widow song between April 20 and April 24 and the last song of the season between July 16 and July 20.

While in the United States, this bird can be found in dense woodlands along creeks and streams. Two to four eggs are laid on the ground in a shallow depression in leaf litter or pine needles. Nests are in plain sight but are protected by the cryptic coloration of the incubating adult. Incubation lasts 20 days and chicks fledge 17 days later. Adults continue to feed the fledglings for two weeks.

## Northern Long-eared Bat Listed as "Threatened"

On April 1, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the northern long-eared bat as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This bat occurs in primarily forested landscapes in eastern Oklahoma.

Like our other bat species, northern long-eared bats feed on flying insects (moths, flies, beetles, etc.) at night. What makes this bat unique is its ability to pick insects off vegetation as it flies by, a behavior known as "gleaning." Many of Oklahoma's other bat species catch insects in the air instead. During the day, northern long-eared bats roost underneath tree bark, in cavities, or in crevices of both live and dead trees. Unlike other closely related bats such as the cave myotis and gray bat, this species often roosts individually or in small groups.

This species was petitioned under the Endangered Species Act due to large population declines in the eastern United States. These declines in the eastern United States. These declines have been attributed to white-nose syndrome, a disease that affects hibernating bats. Oklahoma is currently white-nose syndrome free.

Learn more about this threatened bat at [fws.gov](http://fws.gov).

This listing will become effective May 4, 2015.



Chuck-wills-widows are our largest nightjar. Photo by GTM Research Reserve via Flickr ([license](#)).



The northern long-eared bat was recently ruled as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Photo by Al Hicks/NYDEC.

## State Wildlife Grant Action Report: Habitat Restoration and Population Assessment of Chicken Turtles and Crawfish Frogs

*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.*

With unique plant communities more often associated with the Gulf Coastal states than the Southern Great Plains, The Nature Conservancy's [Boehler Seeps and Sandhills Preserve](#) protects a myriad of wildlife and their habitat. In addition to managing two unique plant communities, this 480 acre Preserve also includes two beaver-formed lakes that are home to several species of turtles, snakes, frogs, and even a few salamanders! Unfortunately, one of the beaver dams was vandalized, allowing much of the water to be drained.

To determine what effect this loss of habitat had on the reptile and amphibian communities living in and around these natural lakes, a State Wildlife Grant was awarded to Dr. Day Ligon with [Missouri State University](#). Dr. Ligon's research team also used this opportunity to learn more about two of the Preserve's unique species.

Researchers kicked off their intensive survey efforts in May 2012 and 2013. Using seven different survey methods, the team trapped turtles, captured snakes, and listened for frogs through July. After two years of surveys and several attempts by the beavers to repair the dam, the team documented 53 species of reptiles and amphibians using the area! Twelve species had not been documented in an earlier survey and five species are considered species of greatest conservation need. When compared to previous surveys, researchers found that the reptile and amphibian communities at these two lakes have endured the changing water depths. Even so, these small populations are in need of careful management to ensure they persist in future years.

Two of the species documented, the western chicken turtle and southern crawfish frog are as unique as the Preserve! Unlike many turtles, chicken turtles can have two nesting seasons; one in early spring and one in fall. When the small pools they live in begin to dry, they move to land and burrow in the sand for a summer dormant season. During the study, researchers captured more than 50 turtles and tracked their movements with radio telemetry equipment. They were also able to track egg development with sonogram equipment!

Similar to chicken turtles, southern crawfish frogs have an early breeding season. From February to April, these frogs gather at fishless pools and ponds to breed; some traveling nearly a mile. After breeding, the frogs return to the mouths of crawfish burrows to feed on crickets, beetles, spiders and the occasional crawfish. Using automated recording systems, researchers determined these frogs called most frequently in early evening (8 p.m. and 9 p.m.) and at lower temperatures than previously reported (average temperature ranged between 53 and 62 degrees Fahrenheit between the two lakes)! The researchers also discovered crawfish frogs are breeding in bodies of water with several other species of frogs (14 species were recorded). This diversity hasn't been reported in other research studies!

More details about this study can be found in the [final report](#).

Want to learn more about The Nature Conservancy's work in protecting and restoring nature? Check out their [2014 Annual Report](#) to see their Year in Conservation and to learn more about this State Wildlife Grant research project!



The western chicken turtle has an unusual reproductive cycle. Unlike many other species, this turtle has two nesting seasons; one in the spring and one in the fall.



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](http://wildlifedepartment.com) for more wildlife diversity information and events.

For questions or comments, please email [jena.donnell@odwc.ok.gov](mailto:jena.donnell@odwc.ok.gov)

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