G.M. Sutton Avian Research Center P.O. Box 2007 Bartlesville, OK 74005 918.336.7778 918.336.BIRD info@suttoncenter.org www.suttoncenter.org

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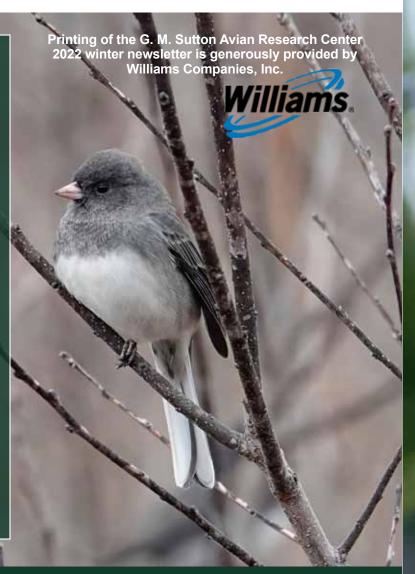


Photo by Dan Reinking



Your generous donation helps us with our mission of "finding cooperative conservation solutions for birds and the natural world through science and education."

Join us in protecting our natural heritage for the next generation!



"finding cooperative conservation solutions for birds and the natural world through science and education"



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ON THE COVER:

The article on page 2 highlights some unusual birds in Oklahoma, but a major objective of the breeding bird atlas project is to provide long-term monitoring of most species that nest in Oklahoma, including warblers such as this northern parula that can be found throughout eastern Oklahoma

Photo by Dan Reinking

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Sutton Center friends.

We were so happy that we could flock together for a fantastic Wild Brew at the Cox Convention Center in Tulsa 27 August. Thank you so much to all volunteers, the committee, breweries, restaurants, entertainers, sponsors, and attendees for making it such a fun event. It didn't seem overly crowded, but we were approximately 2400 people and some special birds having a good time. Truly the best party ever hatched! You can also be proud to know that the income from Wild Brew helps keep our very important conservation, research, and education programs going.

As you can see in our newsletters, there is a lot that we do. Not all of it fits on these pages, but I want to mention a collaborative Ladies Shotgun Skills Clinic together with Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation game wardens and Quail Forever. There is no arguing that practicing your aim provides an adrenaline kick, and we were using steel shot of course. Spreading the word to hunters and outdoor enthusiasts that there are excellent ammunition alternatives to lead, is important to our mission – please help keep wildlife healthy and avoid killing eagles and other birds of prey inadvertently through lead poisoning.

It has been three years since we hosted the Prairie Grouse Technical Council in Bartlesville. It was a treat to meet with fellow prairie grousers again in Montana, and a great experience to be shown the beautiful sagebrush country in Wyoming and southwestern Montana where Aaron Pratt did part of his dissertation research on greater sage-grouse. We also went to a wind farm where a current study is comparing greater sage-grouse use before and after construction.

By the time you read this, the annual workshop for the Bald Eagle Survey Team may already have taken place. But we welcome more volunteers who can commit to monitor eagle nests, since as you can see on page 8, there are a lot of nests to keep track of! Volunteers make a huge difference for us as a nonprofit. For example, I know Daniel will be thrilled if you contact him (dharris@suttoncenter.org) and want to help with husbandry of the animal ambassadors on a regular basis.

As the year draws to a close, we hope that you remember us when considering charitable deeds. Thank you so much for supporting the Sutton Center through donations, volunteering, and spreading the word about conservation needs.

Lena Larsson, Ph.D. Executive Director

Sendamon



Ladies shotgun skills clinic participants hosted by the Sutton Center.

Birds of the "Southwestern Deserts" and "Gulf Coast" of Oklahoma?

by Dan Reinking

Three years of summer surveys of Oklahoma's nesting birds are now complete, and although we are still trying to make up for a large deficit caused by the onset of the pandemic in 2020, volunteers and staff continue to make progress in visiting 583 survey areas across the state. Our first breeding bird atlas for Oklahoma was completed from 1997 to 2001, and we hope to finish the second atlas in five years as well. Once the surveys have been completed, and the results evaluated, comparisons between the two projects should yield some interesting and useful information about how nesting bird populations in Oklahoma have changed over the intervening 23 years. Long-term, repeatable projects such as this one provide insights that are difficult to obtain in other ways, particularly when trying to monitor the status of more than two hundred breeding bird species over the nearly 70,000 square miles of Oklahoma.

Some bird observations jump out for 2022 that continue to reinforce patterns that have emerged during previous survey seasons. Northward expansions of birds from the Gulf Coastal Plain and



Limpkins are normally found in Florida, but are increasingly being seen in Oklahoma. Photo courtesy of Red Slough

Birds of the "Southwestern Deserts" and "Gulf Coast" of Oklahoma? (Continued)

by Dan Reinking

from across Texas bring new nesting species to the state. In southwestern Oklahoma, a bird of the desert southwestern U.S., the zone-tailed hawk, has been nesting in the Wichita Mountains for several years. Sightings of cave swallows are now regular occurrences across several of the counties in southern Oklahoma, an area where crested caracara sightings are also becoming more common. In southeastern Oklahoma, especially at the bird wonderland that is the Red Slough Wildlife Management Area, many species of birds associated with the Gulf Coastal Plain, including white ibis, common and purple gallinules, anhingas, and Neotropic cormorants have become regular summer residents in numbers ranging from dozens to low thousands. After two years of brief sightings of a limpkin (a non-migratory species normally found in Florida) at Red Slough, this year saw reports from multiple counties (from as far north as Tulsa) of at least seven birds throughout the summer season. While there is no evidence of nesting activity, such exploration into new areas by multiple individuals at least hints at that possibility in future years.



Neotropic cormorants have nested in several Oklahoma counties, including this juvenile bird photographed in Wagoner County by Jim Arterburn.

Crested caracaras are being seen in Oklahoma more frequently in recent years, especially in southern counties.

Photo by Manjith Kainickara



This zone-tailed hawk on a nest was photographed in the Wichita Mountains last May by Grace Huffman.



Terry Mitchell photographed this zone-tailed hawk in the Wichita Mountains earlier this year. Southwest Texas has previously been the closest this species is found to Oklahoma.

Talented Young Artists Tell Powerful Stories

by Audra Fogle

In early January, students from across the state will compete to communicate the most compelling stories through visual and literary art in the 18th annual Sutton Award. Each year, this scholarship competition gains more prestige and aids in our mission to educate students about the importance of wildlife conservation. We are proud to partner with NatureWorks to make this award possible and showcase our 20 winning students at the NatureWorks Art Show and Sale on March 4th and 5th in Tulsa. All Oklahoma students in grades 9-12 are eligible to enter. To make it accessible for all students, there is no entry fee. To view the gallery of students' artwork, learn about the history of the award or how to enter, visit Sutton Center's website. The submission portal opens January 1, 2023.

"Using the arts for conservation can help attract new audiences, increase understanding, introduce new perspectives, and create a dialogue among diverse people. The arts—painting, photography, literature, theater, and music—offer an emotional connection to nature. ... Conservation problems require creative solutions; it makes sense to access more ways of knowing the world in order to take care of it."

Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques, 2nd edition, 2015







THANK YOU to Day of Caring Volunteers!

by Christina King

This fall, over 40 volunteers from ConocoPhillips and Phillips 66 of Bartlesville donated their time and skills to the Sutton Center for Bartlesville Regional United Way's Day of Caring. A number of projects were completed including organizing cabinets, shops and closets, cleaning windows, sealing signs and picnic tables, concrete work, gardening, as well as bird enclosure and building upkeep, just to name a few! Their efforts were instrumental for the maintenance of our buildings and property and we are still admiring the progress. We could not have accomplished these projects without these groups of volunteers and we are truly grateful.



Good Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Mothers!

by John Hoolihan

Sutton Center's Attwater's prairie-chicken breeding facility is building on its successes after a fruitful 2022 breeding season. We had a total of 158 chicks that hatched and lived to reach the benchmark age of 8 weeks — a 66% increase over 2021. Most of the chicks and 10 adults were transferred to Texas for release, while some of the poults remained at the facility. They will help produce more Attwater's prairie-chickens next year. Our appreciation is extended to our dedicated staff and four seasonal interns who made all this possible.

This year we experimented with prairie-chicken hens raising chicks. Trials in the past had limited success due to inclement weather as the birds were in outside enclosures, so we wanted to try this method inside our breeder barn. Hens that had been incubating dummy eggs for at least 10 days were selected. Day 23 is the time when pipping begins (when the chick starts to break out of the egg) and eggs are routinely moved to an artificial hatcher. At this time, we replaced the dummies under a hen with machine-incubated eggs. Eggs placed under foster hens hatched normally and these chicks thrived. We also took newly hatched chicks straight from the artificial hatcher and placed them under hens that were already fostering chicks. The hens were very receptive to take care of more young, and some mothers were taking care of up to 25 chicks at one time!

Overall, the fostering program saved us a lot of labor, and it provided health benefits for the prairie-chicken chicks. The protocol used to raise Attwater's prairie-chickens by hand has a certain percentage of unexplained mortalities in chicks that exhibit sudden loss of vigor, something that we term as "inanition." There were no such cases observed with the fostered



Photo by Hayden Ring



Photo by Dan Reinking



Photo by John Hoolihan

chicks, and that contributed substantially to increased chick survival. We retained our best foster hens for the 2023 breeding season and hope to expand the fostering program even further.

Inanition in young Attwater's prairie-chicken chicks (mainly when 4–7 days old) was further addressed through diet supplements that included more insects and vegetation. We dramatically increased our insect production capacity to have ample mealworms and crickets to offer the chicks. The crickets were particularly helpful, as their movements triggered natural foraging behaviors, encouraging the chicks to eat. Additionally, we increased our on-site vegetation propagation of mixed greens and clover. Chicks also love dandelions, but dandelions are only easy to grow when you don't want them...

Increased production and survival of Attwater's prairie-chickens require additional space as young grow to maturity. We changed one of the outside flight pens to accommodate poults in a large section, but we need to keep track of them, so the enclosure cannot



Photo by Dan Reinking

be too large. The prairie-chickens need to weigh approximately 450 grams to wear radio transmitters, and most reach this weight at around 8 weeks of age. By then, they are also old enough to be transferred to Texas and released. We are now modifying a second prairie field so it will be ready for even more chicks in 2023!



Photo by Dan Reinking

Photo by Dan Reinking Photo by Dan Reinking Photo by Dan Reinking

The Recent Summer with Masked Bobwhites

by Morgan Anderson, Lily Grant, and Don Wolfe

Another busy breeding season came and went for the masked bobwhite breeding program. We transferred a total of 686 quail (646 chicks and 40 adult males) to the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge this past summer, in addition to 106 adults transported to the refuge in February. Through our continued partnership with LightHawk, these birds were flown to Arizona on four separate occasions from July to September. Over 200 of the chicks that hatched this year are staying with us to become future breeders, foster parents, and covey augmentation members (Fig. 1). Watching them grow up is very heartwarming to witness!



Figure 1. One of our holdback chicks at three weeks old.

Photo by Lily Grant



Figure 2. Chicks snuggle up to the imprint dad in the brooder.

Photo by Lily Grant

We tested some new methods for the chick hatching and raising process this past season. While the eggs were in the hatcher, we played recordings of a quail hen calling on the nest. The goal was to encourage the chicks to hatch. Additionally, we placed an "imprint dad" in the brooders with the chicks immediately after they had been removed from the hatcher (Fig. 2). Typically the quail chicks have been placed in brooders with only their cohort after hatching, so they build up strength before being placed with their foster dad. This year, a foster dad was already in the brooder to expose the chicks to an adult. The males welcomed the fatherhood role very quickly for the most part. An interesting finding was that most of these imprint dads seemed to immediately brood the chicks when they were moved to a foster box, which was very encouraging to see.

A big challenge this breeding season was that egg production began later than last year. In addition to the late start in laying, overall egg production was also slightly lower. Because of the lower numbers, we had to adjust the incubation schedule to include more eggs. Overall production and fertility were lower than in 2021. We suspect several possible reasons for this, including the odd weather patterns this past spring, the intensely hot summer, and the advancing age of some of our breeders.



A technique called candling uses bright light to determine whether an egg is fertile and developing normally.

Photo by Morgan Anderson

As our busiest time of year draws to a close, we are preparing for upcoming improvements to our buildings to enhance the operation. Additionally, we hosted the Masked Bobwhite Recovery Team meeting in October, and it was exciting to show the team our dedicated efforts here at the Sutton Center. Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to thank our interns. Their help was significant this summer, especially on our busiest days, and we appreciate all of their hard work.



A male masked bobwhite looking less than pleased while being held by Morgan Anderson. Photo by Lily Grant

Go Paperless

We are excited to announce that we now offer a paperless version of The Sutton Newsletter! The e-newsletter includes all of the same great articles and photos in a convenient and easy to read online format. Making the switch is easy! Email "PAPERLESS" to cking@suttoncenter.org and you will receive future newsletters directly to your email. Save our birds, save the environment, go paperless today!

2022 Bald Eagle Nest Monitoring Data

274 CONFIRMED ACTIVE

289 OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

327 NESTS CHECKED

319-400 FLEDGLINGS



The Odes of Oklahoma

by RJ Baltierra



Ebony jewelwing perched along the shady shoreline of a creek.

Fairly large for a damselfly and can be a bit easier to spot
despite hanging out in the darker areas of a creek.

Photo by RJ Baltierra

If you aren't familiar with the word 'odes,' I am sure you aren't alone! Odes is the shorthand term that us naturalist nerds use to refer to the order or group of insects, Odonata, or what is more commonly known as dragonflies and damselflies. Many of you have probably noted these often-conspicuous insects patrolling various bodies of water, from lakes to rivers to small park ponds. Some of you may have even noticed the small and inconspicuous damselflies that work the reeds at the water's edge. They differ from dragonflies by holding their wings together above their body rather than out to side, and most have tiny bodies compared to the generally bulkier dragonflies. Of the 488 species of dragonflies and damselflies recorded in the United States, 176 have been recorded within Oklahoma's borders. This places the state solidly in the top 10 for ode diversity in the country. In fact, McCurtain County alone has recorded more species than 15 other states! The diversity here is thanks to the dozen ecoregions or biomes that make it into the state, providing a wide array of habitats and unique niches for dozens of different odes. From the springs and seeps of the Ozarks, to the sloughs and swamps of the southeast, out to the wide, sandy-bottomed rivers of the Plains, and even all the way out to the high elevation mesas of the far panhandle, every area has its own assemblages of odes!



Widow skimmer in a typical perched position. Large and showy, they are hard to miss during the summer. Photo by RJ Baltierra

As it turns out, being the field technician for Oklahoma's second Breeding Bird Atlas was the perfect job to experience the state's incredible diversity of odes as well as a ton of other cool flora and fauna. The main priority was of course to document species of breeding birds through surveying blocks of land that are randomly strewn across the state. This is a massive undertaking that requires a lot of effort, and volunteers are very much needed, so if you want an excuse to go birdwatch in a new area of the state, go online at suttoncenter.org and sign up for some blocks! Through this job I was very fortunate to explore nearly all corners of the state and visit the many different habitats that make Oklahoma so ripe with odes. Timing was also optimum for ode observations, as the protocol required at least two visits to each atlas block to find both early season nesters and later season nesters. This allowed me to find even more species of odes as well, as different species are out flying at different times of the year, including some that have very brief flight seasons in the spring. Flight season refers to the time when odes are in their familiar adult forms when they breed, although all of them start out as aquatic, predatory larvae called nymphs. All told, from April until mid-July while surveying for breeding birds, I also photographed about 110 species of dragonflies and damselflies, or about 62% of all of Oklahoma's odes!



Flag-tailed spinlegs are a tad bigger than skimmers, and can often be found snacking on them, too!

Photo by RJ Baltierra

As you could probably guess from all the effort it took to photograph that many species, the odes of Oklahoma have really impressed me, and it is very hard for me to pick favorites. From the giant (3 inches long!), black-and-yellow, green-eyed, dragonhunter, which is named for its desire to eat other dragonflies (a not uncommon occurrence in the ode world); and all the way down to the tiny but colorful forktail damselflies barely an inch long and the width of a sewing needle, the variation in odes is astounding! While some species required a lot of hiking and traveling to specific habitats to see, some of my favorites can be found in your local reservoir, your neighborhood park and even your yard. Damselflies as a group, while widespread and diverse are difficult to see but should not be ignored, especially one favorite of mine, the ebony jewelwing. They are found throughout most of the state, and are quite gaudy, with a vibrant metallic green body, and jet-black wings. They inhabit the edges of shaded narrow to mid-sized flowing streams, usually clear but I have seen them in muddy creeks also. They are typically spotted as they flutter across a creek like a small jet-black butterfly. They don't always pose in the sunlight, but when they do, it is quite striking!

The most diverse and widespread family of dragonflies in Oklahoma is Libellulidae, more commonly known as the skimmers. Unsurprisingly, it contains some of the most conspicuous and numerous odes of the summer, like the eastern pondhawk, common whitetail, and the tiny but beautiful eastern amberwing. I am personally fond of the widow skimmer, a flashy dragonfly with a blue body, big black patches on the inner half of the wings, and white on the outer half. Like many in the skimmer family, they can be incredibly numerous, even well away from water, typically sallying from an obvious perch to catch small insect prey. My favorite group of dragonflies is Gomphidae, appropriately known as clubtails, with most males of these odes having a noticeably bulbous tip to their tail. Besides

how beautiful members of this group can be, quite a few are rare and local with brief flight seasons adding to their allure. Flag-tailed spinyleg, is a clubtail whose name tells it all. They have light blue eyes, a green body, with black and white stripes leading down the abdomen to an orange, flag-like tip. They can be quite common near ponds, lakes with rocky shorelines, and even around reservoirs. They are quite large, and as I have experienced with other clubtails, they are often found when flushed from their perch and land again a short distance away.

Like birdwatching, looking for odes is a lot fun, and if you're looking for another rabbit hole to dive into, I highly recommend it! Also, like birding, binoculars are just about a must, though you won't necessarily need anything too high powered, as most dragonflies and damselflies are easily approached with patience. I will also add that identification can be quite a bit more challenging than birds; short of actually collecting them with a net, some will probably go unidentified to species. Of course, identification isn't required, and odes are a lot of fun to watch just for their interesting behaviors. If you would like to get better at ode ID, I recommend Dragonflies and Damselflies of the West by Dennis Paulson. And for those who may want to take deeper dive into the state's odes, Dragonflies at a Biogeographical Crossroads by Brenda Smith and Michael Patten, is a fantastic book. That book was my go-to for finding certain dragonflies and damselflies, and it is also the source for many of the facts presented in this article. Lastly, if you have a knack for photography, please upload your sightings to iNaturalist or Odonata Central online. Get out and start looking for some odes - you won't be disappointed!



Stillwater clubtail, another favorite of mine for obvious reasons.

Generally restricted to the eastern half of the state, they are local and uncommon, restricted to their preferred habitats.

Photo by RJ Baltierra

The 34th Meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Fence Marking for Grouse, and Sage-Grouse Habitat Selection – Part 3

by Aaron Pratt



Ashley Messier from Kansas State received the John Toepfer Prairie Grouse Research Scholarship presented by Aaron Pratt.



Conference attendees who have received the Hamerstrom Award included (year received award, home state):
Mike Morrow (2011, Texas), Rick Baydack (2007, Manitoba),
Bill Vodehnal (2009, Nebraska), Jim Pittman (2022, Kansas),
Christian Hagen (2019, Oregon), our very own Don Wolfe (2017,
Oklahoma), Mike Schroeder (2013, Washington), KC Jensen (2017, South Dakota), Dan Svedarsky (1995, Minnesota), Jodie Provost (2022, Minnesota), Randy Rodgers (2009, Kansas).
Sutton Avian Research Center was awarded the organization
Hamerstrom Award in 2013.

I am sure you have noticed but in recent newsletters (since summer 2020) I have been presenting an unofficial series on grouse field research, from trapping field techniques to research topics. For this newsletter, I have to pause that series so I can tell you about our (Don Wolfe, Lena Larsson, and myself) trip to the 34th meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council held from October 3rd - 6th in Lewistown, central Montana (www.prairiegrousecouncil.org). The Prairie Grouse Technical Council is a group of prairie grouse scientists and managers from the prairie grouse states and provinces with attendees of this meeting coming from British Columbia to Texas. They have been meeting mostly biennially since 1957. If you recall, we cohosted the 33rd meeting in 2019 here in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. We heard presentations on sage-grouse, prairie-chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse and their

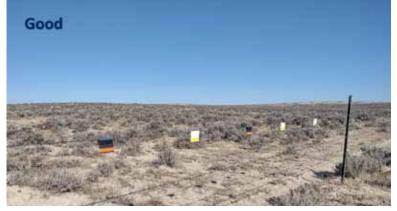
The Sutton Center was lead presenter for three presentations. First, Don and I (along with the late John Toepfer) presented a poster on several modifications to walk-in traps for capturing prairie grouse on leks. These modifications have helped increase capture rates, decrease technician effort, detect captured birds, etc. We developed these modifications over many years based on our combined experiences using walkin traps to capture greater prairie-chickens, lesser prairie-chickens, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, plains sharp-tailed grouse, and greater sage-grouse in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Illinois, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. Second, I presented (with coauthors from US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy) on factors affecting the survival of Attwater's prairie-chicken broods in the wild. This was a comprehensive analysis showing that broods were more likely to survive if they hatched in the middle of the season and were in areas with moderate soil moisture, moderate vegetation biomass, higher invertebrate biomass, and in areas treated to suppress red imported fire ants. Third, Lena presented (with coauthors from Sutton APC breeding facility staff) an update on Attwater's prairie-chicken breeding efforts at Sutton including a description of our experiments this year on fostering chicks with prairie-chicken hens.



White markers improve the visibility of fences during snow-free months and black markers improve visibility during winter



Unmarked fences increase grouse mortality, especially in areas of concentrated grouse use



Markers increase the visibility of fences



In a sage-grouse winter concentration area, Don inspects a drop fence with wires that will remain on the ground throughout winter

Fostering chicks has decreased early mortality from inanition, resulting in increased production and with a secondary benefit of reduced staff time requirements.

A field trip is always part of the conference, usually to see grouse habitat and habitat management conducted by federal and state agencies, non-government organizations, and others. This year we saw and heard about plains sharp-tailed grouse and greater sagegrouse habitat management on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the US Fish and Wildlife Service at the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, the American Prairie Foundation, and a conservation-minded private landowner/producer. During the banquet at the end of the conference, I presented the John Toepfer Prairie Grouse Research Scholarship to Kansas State University Master of Science student Ashley Messier. At the conference, Ashley presented on the applicability of using the remotely-sensed Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (a vegetation greenness index often used in plant phenology studies) to identify lesser prairiechicken nesting and brood-rearing habitat in Kansas. Her results suggested that lesser prairie-chickens were selecting areas of greater food abundance and denser herbaceous cover at nest and brood sites and that the remotely-sensed vegetation index can help to more easily locate these areas across the landscape. Besides her lesser prairie-chicken work, Ashley also has experience conducting fieldwork on greater sagegrouse in Idaho. The John Toepfer Prairie Grouse Research Scholarship was created to honor John's lifetime achievements in prairie grouse conservation and to continue his legacy of supporting students. Administering the scholarship is one way that the Sutton Center pays it forward by supporting young scientists in the field. Also presented at the banquet was the prestigious Hamerstrom Award, in memory of the pioneering prairie grouse husband and wife research and management team, and in recognition of those who have made significant and sustained contributions to prairie grouse research or management. There were 11 past and current recipients of the Hamerstrom Award who attended this year's meeting.

After the conference, instead of returning directly to Oklahoma, Don and I spent a couple of days marking 12 miles of livestock fence on Bureau of Land Management lands in western Wyoming. Fence markers increase the visibility of fences, reducing the number of grouse—fence collisions which are often fatal. We deployed a fence marker design that the Sutton Center initially designed for use in lesser prairie-chicken country and that is now widely used in sage-grouse country as well. We deployed two different colored markers: white markers are better during the spring to combat high mortality around strutting grounds, and black



Lena and Aaron survey greater sage-grouse country in Wyoming

markers combat high mortality in winter concentration areas. We are grateful to The Williams Companies for sponsoring this effort marking fences. Williams has also provided funds for us to convert livestock fences to seasonal drop fences. Marking fences reduces the number of collisions, but an even better solution is to convert fences to drop fences. Drop fences have wires that are lowered to the ground for most of the year when cattle are not present. Drop fences essentially eliminate collisions when the fence is on the ground but should still be marked so they are more visible during the months when standing. We are in the process of getting the necessary permissions to convert the fences we marked to drop fences.

Actually, I think I can bring describing this trip back around to my grouse field research newsletter series and briefly present 'Habitat Selection and Sage-Grouse - Part 3' (Ashley's research on lesser prairiechickens described previously was also an example of a habitat selection study). In past newsletters, I defined what habitat selection is and how it can be measured and how complex it can be. Now I will briefly show how research on habitat selection can be applied to conservation. Past research has shown that sage-grouse prefer treeless areas, avoiding areas of conifer encroachment (often juniper), and that management should combat this threat for the sake of conservation (for example, see Baruch-Mordo et al. 2013. Biol. Conserv. 167). Conifers are encroaching into many sagebrush-dominated landscapes because of a lack of fire that historically held them back. Conifers can spread in sagebrush areas that receive adequate precipitation. Though there is some disagreement to the extent as compared to historical levels, during our field trip to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana we were shown some encroaching juniper spreading into the sagebrush steppe from the nearby forested coulees. Besides during the day of the field trip during the conference, while traveling to Lewistown we also toured sage-grouse habitat while visiting a couple of past and current study areas in Wyoming and Montana. While there, we saw some masticated ("chewed-up" using machinery) juniper on Bureau of Land Management land around a strutting ground. This conservation action is the result of applying information gained from wildlife-habitat relationship studies to on-the-ground management. One of the avenues for passing this information between research and management is at the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meetings.



Juniper encroaching into the sagebrush steppe from forested coulees at the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana



Masticated juniper near a sage-grouse strutting ground in Wyoming. While snapping this picture, off to the side a ways, a dozen sage-grouse got up and flew toward the horizon

Planting Native

by Daniel Harris

The health and diversity of our native bird populations is directly related to health of our native plants and pollinators. Although many city neighborhoods and homeowners' associations push for homogeneous turfs of imported grasses, there are growing numbers of home owners making space for local foliage and inviting the beauty of nature back into their yards. With over 2500 plant species in our state to choose from, getting started can seem daunting, but there are loads of resources available to help. Here are our top tips for getting started:

Looks for what grows naturally or ask a locally owned nursery what does well in your region. If you see butterflies and bees swarming button bushes and bee balm on a walking trail in your area, they're likely to do well in your garden! When in doubt, there are social media groups, online resources, and state extension offices with great information about what natives grow well in your area.

Plant diversity in a sunny place. Most butterflies will prioritize sunny areas, and plants that bloom at different times of year will provide you and your pollinators a variety of blossoms to enjoy from spring through the first frost!

Check the rules for your area. While a city ordinance may not allow you to cover your yard in ragweed and goldenrod, there's a good chance that setting a portion of your yard aside and creating captivating landscaping for pollinators and birds will be a welcome addition to your neighborhood.

Avoid generic wildflower seed mixes as many of these have non-native plant seeds that have the potential to do more harm than good.

Ask about pesticide/insecticide use before purchasing plants. Avoid and look for alternatives that are not poisonous to our pollinators!

Share the experience and have fun! There are a number of groups involved in promoting pollinators and helping people get started. If you feel overwhelmed by the options, reach out for help. A bonus – if you include milkweeds in your garden, you can also register your habitat at monarchwatch.org!

A gulf fritillary visits a blazing star flower (genus Liatris) in a Sutton Center native plant bed. Photo by Dan Reinking

Sutton Center Loses a Special Former Employee

by Steve Sherrod



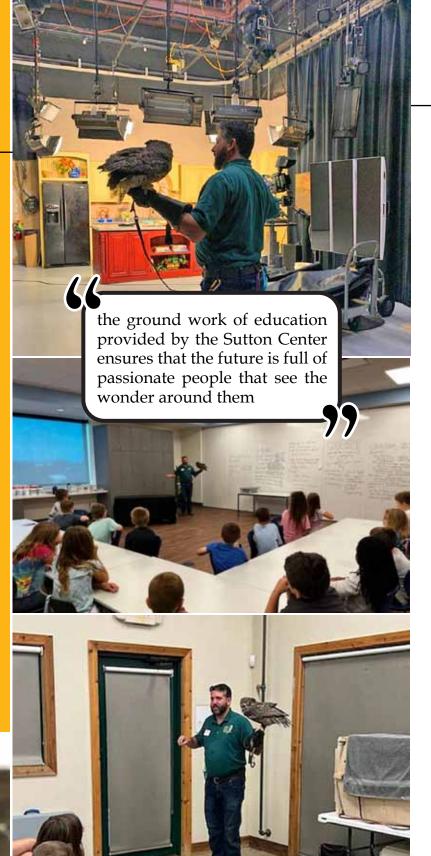
On July 11, 2022, the Sutton Center lost a good friend. Steve Belanger was a dedicated biologist and conservationist, a gifted musician (guitar), an expert diver, a hard-working Sutton employee, and a most pleasant soul. He succumbed to accelerated spinal stenosis after an extended bout with cancer. I, along with others, was most fortunate to have shared a lifelong friendship with Steve as we both majored in zoology at the University of Oklahoma, and we were brothers there in the Delta Tau Delta fraternity. After graduating from OU, Steve joined the Air Force, serving several years in England and exploring Europe. He fondly recalled being surrounded by thousands of tiny, bioluminescent fish while taking a midnight swim in the Mediterranean. He also fondly recalled (on his birthday) being assigned to escort and drive a special visitor for the day, who just happened to be one of the original Bond girls, Ursula Andress. Upon return to the States, Steve went to work for Enron, married and had two daughters to whom he was totally dedicated. After Enron shut down, Steve cared for our captive Coturnix quail flock, which was a big job, at the Sutton Center 2002-2006. He divorced, but met Claudia Cochran who was to be his life partner. Steve was ready to take on any task and always fun to be around. He was forever an OU sports fan with football and softball his favorites. It goes without saying that this special guy will be greatly missed.

From the **Education Barn**

by Daniel Harris

This has been an amazing year for the education department. Members of our flock of ambassadors have been traveling Green Country and finding audiences wherever they go. You may have even seen our favorite golden pheasant, Turbo, on TV! Everyone got the chance to have a close encounter at this year's Wild Brew, but the party doesn't stop at the door for our birds. They have continued making rounds at elementary and intermediate schools where students learn about the awesome traits that make birds so special. We continue to partner with the Discovery Lab on lessons focused on flight in nature as part of the Soaring Science camp and we have shared lessons on adaptations to private and home school groups right here in northeastern Oklahoma. We also had the privilege of presenting to all age groups at nature centers and expos where we really drum up excitement about the world in which we live. Those already invested in wildlife conservation have been entertained and informed by speaking engagements focused on the work we are doing and what can be done to help make sure that the world has a place for the diversity we love. The habitats we create and conserve today require continued support by those that care, and the ground work of education across all levels and demographics provided by the Sutton Center ensures that the future is full of passionate people that see the wonder around them and are committed to keeping it safe. If you would like to be a part of that effort, host an event, schedule a tour, or bring Sutton Center to your classroom, please reach out to dharris@suttoncenter.org.







The Future of Wildlife Conservation

by Daniel Harris

It is Wednesday, September 21st, as I pull into the parking lot of Rogers State University. I am hit with a flash of nostalgia while driving around campus and for a moment I forget that I need to find a place to unload. I park outside a building where so many of my classes were held, in a spot not far from where I would have parked on my way to lecture. Quickly greeted by the eco-club president, Lauren Ireland, I am escorted to a classroom very familiar to me. It was in room 112 of Loshbaugh Hall that I received my formal introduction to the world of ornithology. Today I wait, pacing behind a podium, birds set behind curtains, prepared props and posters now displayed in an all but empty room; a few visitors stop in to see what is happening or to get a sneak peek in the crates. Students enter the lecture hall and take their places for the upcoming presentation. As I greet the crowd and begin the introduction to today's topic, I look upon the future of wildlife conservation and smile.

We spend a lot of time with naturally engaged elementary and intermediate aged students, to whom everything is still amazing and new. We believe it is just as important to cultivate and engage those who already have an interest and are looking to make conservation a career. These students' thoughts and opinions are going to impact the discourse around conservation issues. Sharing our experience and knowledge, so that they are better informed and more capable decision makers, is an important part of the education mission.

Every year, Sutton provides internships to help aspiring conservationists break into the field and gain new skills while getting their hands dirty with live animals, some of which are among the most endangered birds in North America. Our interns start with basic husbandry duties, but quickly learn safe handling procedures and leading-edge techniques used in the captive breeding of endangered birds for release. Everything from biology to banding is covered and the experience of watching the candled eggs grow into mature, releasable adults is an experience we want to share.

For students and graduates wanting to share their love of nature with even more people, we also provide volunteer opportunities and internships with our education department. They can gain knowledge with several species in a hands-on environment. There are opportunities to interact with the public, and interns practice with the support of knowledgeable staff in an encouraging environment. This way, we help aspiring educators find their footing as they set out to inspire future generations with the wonder of the natural world.

For information about upcoming internship opportunities and more, visit suttoncenter.org/about/career-opportunities or email info@suttoncenter.org.





The Little-known Story of How a Local Engineer Helped the Sutton Center with Bald Eagle Recovery

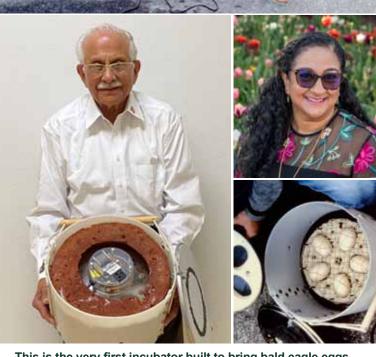
by Dan Reinking

Long-time members of the Sutton Center may be familiar with our first major project helping reestablish nesting bald eagles in the southeastern United States. Shortly after our formation as a conservation organization, we began moving towards that goal. We were initially working to overcome outside skepticism of our plan, as well as beginning to sort out methods and solutions for numerous existing difficulties, with many more potential roadblocks to success still lying in wait. The broad elements of our idea sound simple enough. We would, with the cooperation of many state and federal agency partners, travel to Florida to remove eagle eggs from nests, transport those eggs to Oklahoma, hatch and raise the chicks to fledging age, and release them into areas of suitable eagle nesting habitat in five southeastern states. The Florida eagle pairs would lay replacement clutches of eggs, minimizing our impact on the Florida population, and the eagle chicks we released would return to those areas four or five years later to establish their own nesting territories and begin repopulating areas where eagles had disappeared due to the pesticide DDT, as well as other problems.

If only it had all been as simple and straightforward as those two previous sentences make it sound! From raising the funds necessary to start and sustain such a major project, the networking and convincing required to obtain needed permits, the difficulties of getting into eagle nests to collect eggs, working out the best incubation and chick-raising techniques, establishing proper chick diets and obtaining enough food, finding optimal release sites and constructing release towers for the fledgling eagles, every stage of the process had pitfalls and potential roadblocks.

As the first Florida egg collecting trip was rapidly approaching in the fall of 1984, one serious roadblock loomed large. The delicate cargo of eagle eggs collected at Florida nests must initially be transported in portable incubators to more permanent incubators for the long drive back to Oklahoma, without compromising the structural integrity of the eggs or the temperature and humidity requirements needed to ensure the survival and continued development of the embryos. The incubator we had planned to obtain to transport eggs





This is the very first incubator built to bring bald eagle eggs from Florida to Bartlesville in order to rehabilitate the eagle population in Oklahoma and several other states.

The incubator was built in December 1984 by K. Vasudevan, helped by his daughter Sujatha — now Sujatha Krishnan — in their home garage.

Aided by the rehabilitation program of Dr. Steve Sherrod and the George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center, the bald eagle was removed from the endangered species list in June 2007.

was unexpectedly unavailable. Sutton Center founding Executive Director Dr. Steve Sherrod was in the "hot seat" to make sure all project details were considered, and all problems were overcome expeditiously. The timing of the nesting season for Florida eagles dictated

the timing of our project, and any delay in our plans would mean waiting an entire year for the next nesting season, provided our young organization could even survive that long without showing good results to donors.

Steve's thoughts turned to a local engineer whom he had met recently in Bartlesville. K. Vasudevan ("Vasu" to his friends and colleagues) was born and raised in southern India. Despite growing up without electricity, Vasu obtained an electrical engineering diploma by age 17. He came to the United States in the early 1960s and became a naturalized citizen in 1976. He worked for two U.S. companies before he established the first of several companies in Bartlesville in 1986, but now we are getting ahead of our story!

On the evening before Thanksgiving Day in 1984, an increasingly worried Steve Sherrod called Vasu at home and said "Vasu, I have a problem and need help!" After listening to Steve explain the problem of safely transporting live eggs of an endangered species, and learning of the strict temperature requirements needed to optimize the chances of egg survival during incubation, Vasu consulted with colleagues but realized that if this problem was to be solved in time, he would need to assume responsibility and make it happen on his own.

Engineering is all about the creative application of principles and equipment to solve problems. Laboring in his garage and working late into the evenings with a basic set of Craftsman hand tools, Vasu worked on design after design, crafting a portable incubator that could reliably maintain a consistent temperature. A grateful Steve Sherrod accepted the incubator and soon put it to the test on our first egg collection trip to Florida. The portable incubator's precious cargo of 18 eggs that first year made it from the nests to the RV that we used for transportation back to Oklahoma, and it performed to all high expectations, eventually resulting in 17 hatched eggs that year. The number of eggs collected in Florida and transported first in Vasu's incubators would grow during subsequent years, ultimately resulting in the successful release of 275 young eagles in five states from 1985 through 1992 and launching the reputation of the Sutton Center for excellence in bird conservation that we maintain to the present day with our current endangered species captive breeding programs, long-term research and monitoring of bird populations, and public education programs.

Vasu's long, successful and ongoing engineering career has spanned many different industries and business sectors, and his philanthropy in education has benefited many students. Among his many professional accomplishments, his contribution to helping restore America's bald eagles is one that he holds dear, and one for which the Sutton Center is especially grateful, coming at a time when success for the eagles and for the Sutton Center was not just aspirational but essential. Thank you, Vasu!

Sutton Center's

Recent Scientific Publications:

Gelling EL, **Pratt AC**, and Beck JL. 2022. Linking microhabitat selection, range size, reproductive state, and behavioral state in greater sage-grouse. Wildlife Society Bulletin 46:e1293.

Morrow ME, Lehnen SE, Chester RE, **Pratt AC**, Sesnie SE, Kelso J, and Feuerbacher CK. 2022. Factors affecting survival of Attwater's prairie-chicken broods. Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management 13(2).

Smith KS, **Pratt AC**, Powell C, and Beck JL. 2021. Management recommendations for greater sage-grouse winter concentration areas: 2021 Technical Report. 106 pp.

Oklahoma Bird Records Committee. 2022. The Oklahoma Ornithological Society Checklist of Oklahoma Birds, 6th edition. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Norman, Oklahoma. Authors: Carver C, Cox JA, Grzybowski JA (Chair), Leukering T, Loyd MJ, Neumann L, Poland Z, Tharp J, **Reinking DL**, and Wood D.

Svedarsky WD, **Toepfer JE**, Westemeier RL, Robel RJ, Igl LD, and Shaffer JA. 2022. The effects of management practices on grassland birds—greater prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*). DOI: 10.3133/pp1842C. In: The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1842-C.

Sutton Center's Recent Scientific Presentations:

Larsson LC, Hoolihan JP, Brown CL, Ring H, Caster H, and Sherrod SK. 2022 Captive propagation of Attwater's prairie-chickens for release into the wild: updates on production and fostering methodologies. Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Lewistown, MT.

Lautenbach JD, **Pratt AC**, and Beck JL. 2022. Linking landscape features and seasonal habitats to sharp-tailed grouse lek occurrence. Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society Annual Conference, Jackson Hole.

Lautenbach JD, Beck JL, **Pratt AC**, and Gregory AJ. 2022. Understanding sharp-tailed grouse subspecies status in south-central Wyoming. 34th Meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Lewistown, MT.

Morrow ME, Lehnen SE, Chester RE, **Pratt AC**, Sesnie SE, Kelso J, and Feuerbacher CK. 2022. Factors affecting survival of Attwater's prairie-chicken broods. 34th Meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Lewistown, MT.

Smith KT, **Pratt AC**, Wanner CP, and Beck JL. 2021 and 2022. Management recommendations for greater sage-grouse winter concentration areas. Wyoming Sage-Grouse Implementation Team: Winter Concentration Area Sub-Group Meeting, Cheyenne *and* Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society Annual Conference, Jackson Hole *and* Wyoming Sage-Grouse Implementation Team Meeting, Lander.

Wanner CP, Smith KT, **Pratt AC**, and Beck JL. 2022. Evaluating recommended surface disturbance guidelines within greater sage-grouse winter concentration areas. Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society Annual Conference, Jackson Hole.

Wolfe DH, Pratt AC, and Toepfer JE. 2022. Modifications to walk-in traps for capturing prairie grouse on leks. 34th Meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Lewistown, MT.

Wolfe DH, Johnson LA, Butler MJ, Chester R, Goodwin JG, Harris GM, and Sesnie S. 2022. Masked Bobwhite recovery: the need for a multifaceted approach. Quail 9 Symposium, Springfield, Missouri.

Pull on Your Boots, We've Got A Mountain to Climb

2022 Year in Review

The Sutton Center, with the support of conservationminded companies, foundations and individuals has worked diligently to make a difference for birds and our natural world in spite of challenges to our climate and our economy over the past 38 years. We have been able to navigate COVID so far; and, the birds that depend on us are thriving and multiplying. But, our race to save endangered birds faces an uphill battle with new reports emerging to show that our critical partner, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, is not being provided with enough resources to help the endangered species they've been charged with saving (Eberhard et al. 2022), and the 2022 U.S. State of the Birds Report showing 3 billion birds lost (1 in 4 breeding birds have been lost from the United States and Canada in the past 50 years). According to the report, U.S. grassland birds are among the fastest declining (Rosenberg et al. 2019; NABCI 2022). Despite these challenges, there is hope, and with tenacity, passion, hard work, and your support...success in saving our declining bird populations is the only acceptable response!

YOU Can Help in These Ways:

Make a generous year end donation

Donate online, by phone or return the enclosed envelope. We make it easy to help! Donations of stock are also welcomed.

Sign up for Amazon Smile-Save birds while doing your Christmas shopping! Simply turn AmazonSmile ON to benefit George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center and Amazon will donate a percentage of your purchases!

Become a Member

The Sutton Center Membership Program gives monthly and annual donors the opportunity to truly become insiders. Members receive welcome gifts and special discounts (including Wild Brew), as well as access to exclusive digital content. suttoncenter.org/membership

Follow the Sutton Center on social media

Check us out on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We appreciate your likes and shares and especially your comments!



This year came with new challenges letting Attwater's prairie-chicken hens hatch and foster chicks. Chick survival increased and we saw behaviors we hadn't experienced yet. Not all hens were good moms but some excelled! Hearing the sounds of a hen calling her chicks back to her or watching an angry mama defend her babies was not only rewarding but evidenced wild behavior. All of our efforts resulted in increased chick survival and more birds transferred for release. Cara Brown, Attwater's Prairie-chicken Program Lead Aviculturist



We were challenged by unusual weather patterns this spring that shifted the breeding season with delayed egg laying. But, because of our partnership with LightHawk, we were able to adjust the transfer dates to fit the shifted breeding season and successfully transport 653 masked bobwhite chicks and their foster dads to Arizona to begin their life in the wild, with no mortality to the fragile one to two-week-old chicks.

Don Wolfe, Sutton Center Senior Biologist



Saving endangered birds is important and remains a significant part of what we do, but it is always better and more efficient to conserve birds prior to or during a decline. In this third year of the Sutton Center's second Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas, data regarding bird population trends continue to emerge that will help guide conservation actions in Oklahoma to identify and restore our declining bird species.

Dan Reinking, Sutton Center Senior Biologist

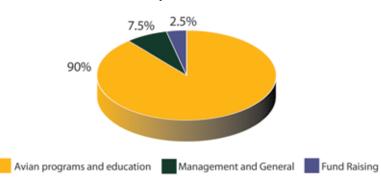
Sign up for Sutton's ROUND-UP program

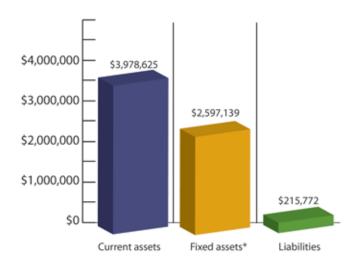
Who knew your pocket change could conserve wildlife and help sustain healthy ecosystems? Sutton's roundup program takes less than 5 minutes to sign up and automatically donates the change from purchases to Sutton's conservation work. suttoncenter.org/roundup

Annual Report

Financially Sound, Fiscally Responsible

From fiscal year 2021 Form 990





*Properties, buildings, equipment etc., net depreciation



Long-term bird monitoring projects such as the Sutton Center's Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas provide crucial information about a wide range of Oklahoma birds, including this ruby-throated hummingbird on a pint-sized nest in Le Flore County. Photo by Dan Reinking

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August 26th, 2023 at the COX BUSINESS CENTER

After 2 years apart, Wild Brew SOARS to new heights with MORE People, MORE Beer and MORE Birds.





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Mia Revels

David Riggs

Justin Roach

Don Rolfson

Lisa Riggs

Cynthia Reese

 ${f S}$ utton Center volunteer Kevin Doggett has been especially busy helping us this year, after his retirement from the oil industry. He has tackled many jobs for us recently, including tree trimming, light fixture replacements, landscaping, and helping with delivering masked bobwhite quail hatched at Sutton Center for release in Arizona. He and his wife, Katrina, have also helped us with a variety of projects in past years, including scanning our large 35 mm slide collection and painting signs and doors. When he is not donating his time to our "to-do list," he enjoys long-distance endurance bicycling and watching documentaries. Thank you so much Kevin, for all of your contributions to the Sutton Center!

Thank you to Our Loyal Sutton Supporters! October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022

Commonwealth Foundation, The Lyon Foundation, Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Williams, Wolf Creek Charitable Foundation.

The Duke Energy Foundation, NatureWorks, The Pauline Dwyer Macklanburg & Robert A. Macklanburg Jr. Foundation, Phillips 66 Company – Bartlesville.

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Memorials and Honoraria

In memory of Steven Belanger: Russell & Mary Ann Grady, Mary Burden, Claudia Cochran, Edgar & Jorja Houk, Mary Ann Lough, Jean & David McLaughlin, Valerie Gulick, Teresa Landry. In memory of Steven Belanger with sympathy and love to his whole family: Kim & George Morales. In memory of Echo Kopp who had a great heart for the mission of the Sutton Center: Andi Boutwell. In honor of Kirby Lehman: Stacey Butterfield. In memory of Gary Srader: Roy & Donna Prevett. In honor of Roger Box: Celeste Cleary. In honor of the early retirement of James Michael Harman and Sandra Kaye Otto: Jim Harman. In honor of my forever friend, Leslie Wilson, on her birthday: Kathy Bunch. In memory/honor of Lee Holcombe: Joe & Dottie Allen, Roger & Angela Box, Michael Rhode, Patricia Benson, Ford & Vanessa Drummond, Janet Drummond, Elizabeth B. Kane, Jeff & Mary Ann Grisham, Greg Feinberg. In memory of Bonnie Hope Gall: Merl & Cheryl Lindstrom, Tom & Melba Burchfield, Zoe Ann Stinchcomb, Roger & Angela Box, George & Suzy Harris, Dan & Melinda Droege, Helen Raible, David & Betty Turner, Terrence Mitchell, Dan Reinking, Jody Romano, Shannon Caldwell. In honor of Thad and Linda Holcombe, Joe and Kathy Holcombe: Lee Holcombe. In honor of Dan Reinking for the Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas: Carl & Nan Reinking. In honor of Lily Grant: Michael Ramsey.