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*The*

**SUTTON**

**NEWSLETTER**

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

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*Volume 29, Winter 2007*



*Marsh Birds  
of Oklahoma*

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Nests of the Virginia Rail, an elusive member of Oklahoma's avifauna, are rarely found. In 2007, Eric Beck discovered the first clutch of eggs found in our state since 1860. *Photography by © G. McElroy/VIREO.*



# The search for my “Holy Grail”

by Eric J. Beck

## Where it all began:

In the late winter/early spring of 2006, I was fortunate enough to be hired as a technician for the Sutton Center’s Lesser Prairie-Chicken Project (thanks Don!). Not only did this job give me a chance to get my hands dirty doing the kind of work about which I had always dreamed, but it also put me right in the center of some great birding opportunities. Before I jumped on board, I got myself familiar with some of the species that are and have been found in that region. It just so happened that the ultimate birder’s bird (no, not the Ivory-bill), the Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*), had been found in Beaver County in the past. I made it my personal goal to find one, maybe two, while I was up there.

I should first explain the difficulty of finding a Black Rail for some readers who might not be familiar with the species. It is a small (about the size of a mouse), mostly black bird with a bit of rust color along the nape of the neck. It rarely flies; instead, it mostly uses small, mouse-like paths to travel through the understory of dense marshes. It is primarily a bird of the east and west coasts, but there is a small interior population that is not well understood. The best way to find one is by recognizing its strange *kee-kee-drr* call, either heard well after dusk or before and around first light in the early morning.

I think a few people thought I was either joking or just crazy when I told them my intentions of finding this bird. I also think they thought I was crazy when I sent an e-mail mentioning a small blackish rail-type bird and some interesting calls that I had heard in the dead of night. Crazy or not (it really depends on to whom you are talking), a few recordings and some additional observers later, I had confirmed the presence of at least one calling Black Rail with a high probability of multiple birds. From that point on, I have considered myself a bit of a “marsh bird junkie.” There is a certain challenge that appeals to me about getting up well before the sun and slogging out into mosquito ridden marsh to maybe find a target bird or two, “maybe” being the key word in this sentence.

After that summer, I began to realize just how little was known about marsh birds in Oklahoma. So with a thirst for knowledge and a chance to do something that hasn’t been done in our state, I started forming some ideas about how to census these birds in order to truly find out how they are doing.

## Design and Planning:

After a little research and comparison, I found gaps in knowledge on a handful of species that inhabit marshes in Oklahoma: the Virginia, King, and Black Rails, Least and American Bitterns, Common Moorhen, Purple Gallinule, and Pied-billed Grebe. All of these species were known to have bred in the state at least once, but none of them have been well studied, or in a couple cases studied at all. It was then time to form some questions. Are these birds breeding regularly in the state? Where are they breeding? Does this occur annually or are they mainly accidental? What kinds of marshes are they using? Is water depth important? I could go on and on and on. With these questions floating around in my head, I started picking the brains of Dan Reinking (Sutton Senior Biologist) and Michael Patten (Sutton Director of Research). I’m sure they got tired of my calls which were sometimes daily (guys, I’m really making an effort on toning it down with that!). My questions answered and ideas solidified, I then needed to find a way to do it. The Sutton Center, Oklahoma Biological Survey and the Oklahoma Ornithological Society obliged and all pitched in with grants and awards to get the equipment, gas and stipend for the first field season.

It was the goal of the project to set up and twice survey 16 locations throughout western Oklahoma. My surveys took me all the way from the Red River region  
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This marsh in Harper County, Oklahoma, was the site of the American Bittern nest found by Eric Beck. Three Black Terns (visible in the photo) were foraging here in May during their northward migration. *Photography by Eric Beck.*



Dan Reinking

The Purple Gallinule (above) and Common Moorhen (below) are rare and locally breeding marsh birds in Oklahoma. Both can be seen at Red Slough in southeastern Oklahoma. Note the gallinule’s very elongated toes which help it walk on floating lily pads.



Dan Reinking

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in the south to the Cimarron River in the north. Some of these locations were on private property which I received permission to access; others were public domain, such as the Washita National Wildlife Refuge in Blaine County. I now realize that saying and doing are two separate and very different beasts. Unfortunately the spring weather patterns had not read my proposals and decided to dump record amounts of rain in western Oklahoma. Not only can you not survey in the rain, but there was so much rain I would have been putting my life at risk in a few instances (to which my wife wouldn't have agreed). I was able to visit twelve of the sites at least once. Some of the locations chosen were reservoirs and lakes, and after surveying for suitable habitat it was found that there were none present so those sites were not visited again. However, there is good news in this story. Those sites I was able to visit produced some very good records and data that will significantly contribute to the understanding of these species in Oklahoma and the region.

### **Highlights from the first field season:**

Aside from the beautiful sunrises and the solitude that this kind of work provides, there were several high points of the season. While surveying a slough of the Beaver River in Harper County one morning, I noticed two American Bitterns flying together and then landing in a small side marsh that I hadn't checked yet. I made note of the location where they flew and moved on. I didn't return to that location for almost two weeks, giving the birds ample time. I decided to wade into the marsh in pursuit of a possible nest; I put my hip waders on and started pushing my way through the thick cattails in a zigzag pattern. I did this for about twenty minutes when finally two bitterns burst out of hiding. I took another couple steps and a third bittern did the same. This third bird was much closer than the first two, only three feet from me, so close I nearly fell over backwards from the startle. It was very soon after that I realized this third bird had been sitting tight, and I could barely contain my excitement when I found the nest containing four eggs. I took some photos and moved on. The only known active breeding site for the American Bittern in Oklahoma was at the Red Slough in McCurtain County, which is in the opposite corner of the state 420 miles away. There are some historical accounts of nesting American Bitterns in the NW region, but these accounts are over fifty years old.

Another highlight from the season was finding three Black Rails. This is always exciting for me. Just hearing that *Kee-kee-drr* in the early morning is enough to make me want to keep doing this work until my bones become too brittle to walk. The first two birds I located were in the same place that I found calling individuals the year prior, just as I mentioned in the beginning of this article. They were countering one another from across the marsh, which was exciting to hear. The third individual was truly unexpected. I was running a survey route at Hackberry Flats WMA. It was at my second calling point that I heard a faint *Kee-kee-drr* call carried by the wind. Of course I questioned myself and waited, then *Kee-kee-drr* got louder and louder as the bird got closer and closer. I ran to my truck and stumbled around trying to get the recording equipment out, something I finally succeeded in doing. I recorded about two minutes of the call, stopped, set the equipment back in the truck and then proceeded to whoop and dance with excitement. I'm sure most of you are saying, "I wish I could have seen that!" Sorry you missed it! This is the first confirmed record for the Black Rail in the southwest region of Oklahoma; I hope my surveys in years to follow will continue to produce more accounts for this area.

That day at Hackberry proved to be monumental because fifteen minutes after finding the Black Rail, I found two Virginia Rails that were associating with one another. In other words, NEST! I made note and finished my survey and then came back. I had called a few regional birders about the Black Rail and by the time I finished up, they had arrived. I took them to listen for the Black Rail, which, to everyone's excitement, obliged us by calling. I then took them to the Virginia Rail location; after a little walking around I decided to put my hip-waders on to try to get a look at them. Well, it seems I have a lucky pair of hip-waders. Low and behold I found a nest. It wasn't until I returned home and checked my books that I realized the last time someone had seen an active nest in Oklahoma was in 1860! This was actually the second nest I located, the first being at Optima National Wildlife Refuge. The first nest didn't contain any eggs, though the adults were present and I suspect they were actively building.

Well, I think I've already surpassed the page limit so I had better wrap it up. As you can see, this project is full of excitement and lots of new and interesting information. The goal is to continue to expand the number of marshes and keep moving east. I still have a few personal goals to reach and records to make, such as a Black Rail nest (which I now refer to as my Holy Grail). It would be very important to try and locate more American Bittern nests in the Northwest, and I'm well on the way of proving a range expansion for breeding Virginia Rails. Before I finish, I need to thank the Sutton Center once again. Their support of this project is what made it such a success, even though the weather became a factor. Their staff continues to help me in many ways and I hope that one day I can return that support in some manner. Thanks again.



**This American Bittern nest in Harper County is one of very few nest records in Oklahoma. Photography by Eric Beck.**

*“I think a few people thought I was either joking or just crazy when I told them my intentions of finding this bird.”*



# New Mexico's *other* grouse.

by Donald H. Wolfe



Don Wolfe

**Above:** Typical White-tailed Ptarmigan habitat, rock slides with grasses and sedges growing between the rocks. Can you spot the ptarmigan chick in this photo? **Below:** White-tailed Ptarmigan chick, about eight weeks old, in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area.



Don Wolfe

When you think of New Mexico's avifauna, you probably envision birds normally associated with the Southwest deserts or the High Plains. In fact, there have been several articles in previous editions of The Sutton Newsletter about ongoing conservation efforts for one such bird, the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. And in the montane forests of northern New Mexico, Dusky Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*, formerly known as the Blue Grouse) are quite abundant. What may surprise some people, though, is that there is a third grouse species in New Mexico, which has, without doubt, the most restricted range and the smallest population size in the state. Additionally, it is a species that is more typically associated with higher latitudes.

The White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura*) is a year-round alpine obligate, which means that it is found only above the timberline—above 12,000 feet in New Mexico except for occasional foraging trips to the upper montane zones

in winter. Ptarmigan were first noted in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico in 1865 by Elliot Coues. Little is known about the species' historical range or abundance, but today it is found only on a few high mountains in the Sangre de Cristo range. In 1981, it was thought that the species had been extirpated from the state, and some birds were "reintroduced" from Colorado (some authors have even called this an "introduction to suitable habitat outside of the species' range"). However, extirpation was an erroneous assumption, as sightings from as late as 1979 had been recorded. It is especially noteworthy to realize that the species is difficult to find, let alone survey, due to the high elevations and secretive nature of the birds.

In 2007, with funding from the Oklahoma Biological Survey, we conducted extensive surveys in the Pecos Wilderness Area as well as additional surveys around Wheeler Peak. The surveyors included Christy Pruett, Stephanie Manes, Mike Allen, Kenny Knowles, and me. While a cock and a hen were found on Jicarita Ridge in the Pecos Wilderness Area (near where Eric Beck and I also found three birds in 2006), and feathers and feces were found a few other places on that ridge and on Barbara Peak (near where I found a nest in 1993), most of the alpine habitat in the Pecos Wilderness Area was devoid of any sign. I did, however, find five cocks, one hen, and two chicks on Mount Walter, in the

Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area. It would appear that ptarmigan are holding their own in the Wheeler Peak area, while not thriving as well in the Pecos Wilderness Area, in spite of more extensive alpine in the latter. However, the cryptic colorations and behavior of ptarmigan can make it extremely difficult to say definitively where they do not occur. It might be worth noting, though, that no birds were seen near the heavily used trails in Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area; this may possibly be related to the number of unleashed dogs that accompany many of the hikers, and are frequently seen ranging more than 100 yards from the trail.

Two questions still remain, though: 1) Why aren't White-tailed Ptarmigan more abundant in the vast expanses of alpine habitat in the Pecos Wilderness Area? and 2) Can White-tailed Ptarmigan populations persist in New Mexico in the face of global climate change? While we do not know the full answers to either question, there may at least be some things to think about. A first consideration would be climate or, more specifically, climate change. A mere decade ago at the Alpine Visitor's Center in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, temperatures never hit 70° F, but now it is happening on a fairly regular basis. The exact thermal tolerance level for White-tailed Ptarmigan is not completely determined, but for a cold-weather adapted species, that thermal tolerance level is unlikely to be very high. It is also not so much that the species cannot survive at a particular temperature either, but it depends much on the duration of that temperature, what the "low" temperatures are during the warm times,



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and how many refugia, in the form of microclimate in crevasses between boulders, are available. It is possible that competition with other alpine obligates, such as pikas and marmots, may intensify competition for refugia. Climate change can also affect ptarmigan in a number of other ways: first, there can be changes in the amount or consistency of snow. Ptarmigan rely on snow for insulation in the winter, and if snow is not deep enough or of the right consistency for burrowing, then there is little to protect them from the harsh alpine cold and aridity. Second, timberlines are advancing. In many places, there will be an upper limit to tree advancement due to soil or moisture, but until that limit is attained, tree advancement will continue to fragment many alpine areas. Third, vegetation in the alpine areas is changing. Where once the alpine was dominated by sedges and forbs, with small mottes of willow and

k r u m m h o l z

spruces and firs, grasses are beginning to take

over. Seeds and leaves from the sedges and forbs are valuable food sources for ptarmigan. Perhaps they will be able to utilize seeds from grasses equally well, but that is yet another part of their ecology that we do not yet fully understand. I can say, though, that there are many vast areas of alpine habitat in New Mexico that have grasses that are now knee-high, with a paucity of the forbs or willows that one would expect.

It is probably apparent that there are many unknowns requiring more research before they can be addressed. I established a number of photo points this year that can be revisited in the future and may provide some indication of vegetation changes. One other factor that we do not yet have a handle on, though, is the question of genetic viability. As climate continues to change and trees continue to advance, the remaining ptarmigan populations in the southern extent of their range will likely suffer from a loss of gene flow and bottlenecks, and populations will shrink. This is already happening to Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*) in many parts of Europe and Asia. It may be that the augmentation in 1981 has contributed to ptarmigan persistence today. If this is true, such augmentations may be necessary in the future as well. As a subpermittee under the Museum of Southwestern Biology in Albuquerque, we were also able to salvage feathers from both areas that may be used for genetic analyses.

It seems that pikas have become a sort of “poster child” for climate change, especially for changes in alpine habitats. Pikas are most deserving of such a designation, as they are certainly “cute and cuddly” and can appeal to a much broader segment of the human population than ptarmigan, in addition to having a very low thermal tolerance. But, I fear, as do many other grouse enthusiasts, that ptarmigan will disappear from many areas years or possibly decades before the habitat becomes unsuitable for pikas.

Are there solutions aside from the clear need to reduce greenhouse gases? Unfortunately, the climate changes that have already occurred can be reversed neither easily nor quickly. Nor is it likely there will be much of a slowing of climate change in the immediate future. There may be short-term “fixes” to aiding the persistence of ptarmigan, such as translocations, and perhaps mechanical vegetation management, but the scope and magnitude of these fixes, or even the proper prescriptions are challenges that still lie ahead. For now, White-tailed Ptarmigan will likely retain their status as the least known and most restricted grouse in the Southwest.



Don Wolfe

A White-tailed Ptarmigan hen on Jicarita Ridge in the Pecos Wilderness Area.



Don Wolfe

Above: White-tailed Ptarmigan hen in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area. Below: A Whited-tailed Ptarmigan cock photographed in the same area.



Don Wolfe



# Outreach Rwanda

by Michael A. Patten and Brenda D. Smith-Patten

Brenda Smith-Patten



**Lush montane forest (left) in the Parc National des Volcans, Rwanda, and cleared forest (right) bordering the park. The tall stone wall marks the park's boundary. Outside the park, one finds almost nothing but subsistence farms and non-native vegetation, with the associated "weedy" birds. Inside the park, however, there remain populations of many localized endemics, such as the Rwenzori Turaco and Grauer's Swamp-Warbler, to say nothing of the Mountain Gorilla and Golden Monkey.**

front runner in this endeavor. Their commitment to starting a research and education program dedicated to birds is a perfect example.

Under these auspices, we were invited to Rwanda this summer by Karisoke's Director, Katie Fawcett, to go on what she called "a fact-finding mission," entailing a tour of the country and a lot of meetings with officials to discuss needs of an ornithology program and how such a program can benefit conservation of Rwanda's biodiversity. Not coincidentally, the timing of our trip corresponded with Rwanda's International Research Conference on Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, the first conference of its kind to be held in Africa. The three-day conference was sponsored by the Rwandan government and was attended by a plethora of international scientists and government officials, including Rwandan president Paul Kagame, who delivered the opening address. We were asked to speak at the conference on our research on the impacts of deforestation on birds in the tropical forests of Mexico (see the winter 2006 Sutton Newsletter). We used this opportunity to tie what we have learned in Mexico to what can be learned in Rwanda and the region. Our talk, titled "Loss of Tropical Forest and Avian Extinction and Decline: Predictions and Research Needs for Central Africa," was a hit, despite (or because of) being given while in the throes of some wicked jet lag. Over the next several days we completed our manuscript about our presentation and submitted it before leaving the country. Watch for a handsome proceedings of the conference in early 2008. . . .

After the conference we spent a week at the Karisoke Research Center in Musanze (formerly Ruhengeri). While there, Karisoke staffer and young ornithologist Claudien Nsabagasani escorted us to two of the country's three National Parks and to three more of its seven designated Important Bird Areas. In the field, we were both thrilled to see some wonderful habitat preserved and saddened to see just how thorough deforestation and habitat loss can be. During our meetings, we discussed at length the conservation needs of Karisoke and Rwanda and how best to develop an ornithological research and education program that will both gather data crucial to conservation planning and train Rwandan students in conducting and eventually designing and directing ornithological research. We also discussed future scientific products, such as books and atlases, and public outreach efforts, the latter to teach Rwandans the importance of conserving their dwindling natural resources. In a country where 85% of the people are subsistence farmers and with a sky-high population density (nearly 900 people per square mile), it is critical to instill a long-term outlook: using all natural resources today means

When you think of the Sutton Center do you think of Africa? Well, get used to the idea. Ever increasing globalization has ensured that the world is getting smaller every day, so perhaps we should not have been surprised when, roughly a year ago, the Sutton Center was contacted by the Karisoke Research Center. Why would the world-renowned Mountain Gorilla research center, founded by Dian Fossey in 1967, be interested in the Sutton Center? Karisoke does not study birds . . . or does it?

With the Sutton Center's help, Karisoke Research Center plans to establish an ornithological research and education program with the goal of creating the first generation of Rwandan ornithologists. Rwanda, a tiny country about the size of Maryland, is tucked away in the central highlands of the Albertine Rift and, in the face of long odds, will soon be the leader in conservation in central Africa. Despite copious amounts of research conducted in neighboring countries, Rwanda largely has been ignored outside of the field of primatology. Now that political stability has returned to this forgotten country—Rwandan governance was just named the "most improved" in Africa by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation—research in all areas of conservation can spring to life. Karisoke, with the support of the Rwandan government, is a



Brenda Smith-Patten

**The setting for the conference, held in Kigali, Rwanda, 23–25 July 2007. Our talk was delivered the first morning, not long after President Kagame's address.**

# Bird Surveys at Four Canyon Preserve

by Dan L. Reinking

In 2005, the Sutton Center conducted bird surveys at a relatively new preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy in southern Ellis County, northwestern Oklahoma. The preserve consists of 4,000 acres of varied habitat, including mixed-grass prairie uplands separated from Canadian River floodplain by steep, rugged canyons. The 2005 surveys included visits during the period April through December, to gather information on birds present in each season. These surveys produced a total of 97 species, and were described in detail in a 2006 *Publications of the Oklahoma Biological Survey* paper available through the OSU Digital Library, or the Oklahoma Biological Survey or Sutton Center web sites.

Common summer residents included Mourning Doves, Bewick's Wrens, Lark Sparrows, Painted Buntings, and Eastern Meadowlarks, while Cedar Waxwings and Dark-eyed Juncos were common in winter. The preserve's geographic location in northwestern Oklahoma and its diversity of habitats make it a meeting ground for eastern and western species. Wooded Canyons provide habitat for eastern species that are near the western limit of their ranges, including the Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Carolina Chickadee. Arid grasslands and rocky slopes provide habitat for western species near the eastern limit of their ranges, including the Scaled Quail, Rock Wren, and Cassin's Sparrow.

Based on the results of our initial survey work, The Nature Conservancy asked us to conduct additional bird surveys at the preserve in 2007. These surveys were to document any use of the preserve by Lesser Prairie-Chickens, rails and bitterns, and spring migrants. We conducted 10 days of survey work from March through June, with the early visits concentrating on upland areas where prairie-chickens might be expected, the late visits concentrating on marshy habitats along the river where rails or bitterns might be found, and all visits including time spent in the wooded canyons seeking landbird migrants. We did not locate any prairie-chicken activity, though Chris Hise, the preserve manager, had on one previous occasion seen chickens on the preserve, and the habitat appears suitable for them. Nor did we locate any rails or bitterns, though exceptional spring and early summer rainfall raised water levels to such an extent that adequate habitat was not available.

Thirteen new species were added to our 2005 survey results this year. These included four species associated with water: Wood Duck, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, and Sandhill Crane; four landbird species with the potential to nest on the preserve: Common Poorwill, House Wren, Yellow Warbler, and Baltimore Oriole; two spring landbird migrants utilizing the preserve as a stopover site: Least Flycatcher and Clay-colored Sparrow; and three species that may have wintered on the preserve and were detected on early spring visits: Townsend's Solitaire, LeConte's Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird.



Plans are underway for a visitor's center and more public access to this rugged and scenic preserve. *Photography by Dan Reinking.*



Dan Reinking

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destroying your own future. A fledgling program like Karisoke's has the potential to inspire a generation of scientists and citizens and may bring hope to a country currently mired in a conservation crisis.

After departing Rwanda we spent several days in Nairobi, Kenya, where we met with a Kenyan ornithologist, Chege Kariuki, whom we convinced to help with Karisoke's program. We also met with various BirdLife International representatives, including the Head of the Africa Division of the Africa Partnership Secretariat, Hazel Shokellu Thompson. BirdLife International and their Rwandan affiliate, Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR), are excited about this budding ornithology program and plan on supporting our efforts.

We are thrilled with the idea of helping Karisoke establish their bird program and excited at the prospects of conducting research in Rwanda. Currently we are writing a report of our findings and looking at ways of funding the program. We hope that good things are in store for the Sutton Center and Karisoke Research Center and that this is a relationship both long lived and prosperous. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Harold and Sandy Price, long-time supporters of Sutton and Karisoke, for facilitating our travels to Rwanda. Finally, if you would like to support this program financially or by donating field equipment, such as old binoculars, please contact the Sutton Center. Your support will be greatly appreciated.



# OKLAHOMA NESTING BALD EAGLES 2007

by M. Alan Jenkins

The beginning of the 2007 Oklahoma nesting Bald Eagle season showed promise of being another banner year, with several new nests in the Tulsa metropolitan corridor along the Arkansas River from Keystone Dam downstream to the small town of Leonard, Oklahoma. However, a long drought seemed to have taken its toll on these birds, with the river drying up for most of this stretch. I was on the river in January and watched a party of artifact hunters cross the river in an ATV. The water level was below the axle of their vehicle. Shortly after that I came upon some semi-fossilized bison bones that the low water had exposed owing to the low water level; but that's another story. One problem with low water is that the wintering and nesting eagles, both of which rely on the river for hunting during the late winter, had probably depleted the fish resource. Normally this would not have been a problem except no water was being released from Keystone Dam; which usually replenishes the fish in the channel downstream. Nor could the fish come upstream because of the low water dam that forms Zink Lake. Subsequent rains and water released from the dam were too late to prevent the nests from Keystone to Zink Lake from failing. And rain it did! The spring months were downright soggy. The heavy rains can cause problems with eagles obtaining food as the large runoff makes the water turbid and deep, both of which serve to hide fish from hunting eagles.

Regardless of these circumstances, the remainder of the nesting eagles almost made up for the failing Tulsa corridor birds to make 2007 a successful nesting year. I began checking known nests for signs of occupancy in January by making my annual flight with Mr. Jim Bredy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service along the Arkansas River from Eufaula Reservoir to the Arkansas state line; and checked the rest of the nests on the ground via vehicle, foot, or kayak. Many birders and other observers served to tell me the status of widely scattered nests which I could not easily check. The volunteer efforts of photographers, landowners, and birders make my job simpler by half; someday I owe them all a BIG party.

In April and May I was prepared to check all the nests for ready-to-fledge youngsters by driving, hoofing and paddling because the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service couldn't afford to send their Albuquerque-based plane to fly the Arkansas River route with me. But one of our Board of Directors, Mr. Steve Adams, stepped up to the plate, and volunteered his plane and services as a pilot to make the check. Because his plane is hangared in Sand Springs, OK, we were able to check nests along the Arkansas River from Keystone Dam to Kerr Reservoir in addition to the nests the FWS used to fly.

The 2007 nesting eagle results are: 63 occupied (pairs of adults present) nests, 57 active (eggs were laid) nests, 34 successful (one or more young fledged) nests, and a total of 51 young fledged from the 34 nests on their journey of life. These data compare well with the past results, despite the drought-deluge weather. The numbers of occupied and active nests are records, but the productivity measures are slightly below most of the past two years. Given the weird weather and the large number of nesting eagle pairs (compared to populations two decades ago), these data aren't cause for worry.

Lastly, as you probably already have read or heard, the Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states were 'downlisted' from threatened status, that is to say, taken off the list of endangered and threatened species altogether. This happened in June. We at the Sutton Avian Research Center approve of this move, and have worked for years to reach this point. Bald Eagles will still be protected by two federal and all state laws, and research into their population trends is planned as a post-downlisting check for 20 more years to ensure that the downlisting was not premature, and the species continues to thrive.

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## *It's All About Birds! at the Tulsa Zoo*

by Ryan A. VanZant

The Sutton Center teamed up with the Tulsa Zoo this past July to expand the variety of audiences that gets to experience *It's All About Birds!*, GMSARC's unique education program featuring free-flight birds. The Sutton education team put on their program every Wednesday and Thursday, with two shows per day, throughout the month of July for sold out crowds in nearly all of their performances.

These shows allowed the Sutton Center to reach new audiences, which normally consist of Oklahoma school children in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Families of all ages were given the chance to see our birds, most of which are found here in Oklahoma, flying just inches above their heads and giving many of them an experience that may last a lifetime along with the knowledge of how important birds are in many aspects of human life.

New experiences were not just had by the audiences, though. Our Common Raven, Chupacabra, performed in his first shows, showing people just how easy it is to recycle by picking up aluminum cans and placing them into a recycling container. Arroyo, one of our Harris's Hawks, also performed in his first shows by giving the audience a look at just how close a hawk can fly over one's head. Another first for this show at the zoo, as well as for the Sutton education staff, was the addition of our Striped Skunk. She came out at the end of the shows to mill about on stage, getting used to seeing the crowds and allowing us to educate regarding the sense of smell, of which, there is little with most birds, excluding new world vultures and a few others. Last but not least, performing in her first shows on stage was our very own Cheryl Jackson, who put her vocal and training skills to work. She did a wonderful job with the not so easy art of walking, talking, PowerPoint slide flipping,

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# Meet an Education Bird

by Cheryl A. Jackson



Dan Reinking

**Above:** Cheryl shows the Center's Bald Eagle, Fiona. Fiona is blind in one eye as a result of West Nile virus. **Middle:** Ravens are known for their intelligence as well as their ability to use tools. **Below:** Rose, our Striped Skunk, hides among the panda toys at the zoo.

working birds, improvising when things don't go exactly as planned, and keeping the attention of the very young children, all without missing a beat. *It's All About Birds!* at the Tulsa Zoo turned out to be a success for both the Sutton Avian Research Center and the zoo. By teaming up these two facilities both benefited; the Zoo got a show for their interested audiences and the Sutton Center got a summer audience for their show. Mostly though, both furthered their missions by educating about the importance of wildlife in our lives and the why and how we should protect these resources.



Dan Reinking



Rebecca Remfro

Meet our Harris's Hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) Arroyo and Zephyr. Both hawks were acquired by the Sutton Center in October of 2005 from a falconer/breeder in Louisiana. Harris's Hawks live around 11 years in the wild but can live for up to 25 years in captivity. Both birds are male, weigh between 600-700 grams (1 ¼ - 1 ½ pounds), stand around 22 inches high, and have wingspans of about 4 feet. Harris's Hawks occur in deserts and savannahs from the southwestern U.S. through parts of Central and South America. They are fast, maneuverable, and social predators that feed on small mammals, birds, and lizards.

Zephyr is an old pro and is always raring to go. He's been performing in our *It's All About Birds!* education program for 1 ½ years and he's only 2 years old! In the show, Zephyr delights audiences with a spectacular flight which takes him back and forth from the stage and out over the crowd. Zephyr's low flying has had many audience members quickly ducking their heads. But don't bother folks, if you duck he just flies lower!

Arroyo is 2 ½ years old and is the calmer of the two. He takes more time adjusting to new situations but once he's got it he performs beautifully. Arroyo performed in his first show at our annual Sutton Center picnic in June 2007 and wowed the crowds at the Tulsa Zoo throughout the month of July 2007.

Arroyo and Zephyr can be flown interchangeably in shows. By having two Harris's Hawks that are nearly identically trained, it allows each hawk to have resting time. That's important when you do back to back programs as we often do. Switching between Arroyo and Zephyr assures that each hawk gets plenty of down time.



Dan Reinking

Can you tell the difference between us? Zephyr is on the left, Arroyo on the right. Because of the more prominent brow ridge on Zephyr, Arroyo's eyes appear larger and more protruding. Seeing these two side by side in person allows you to see the birds' size difference as well – Zephyr is the larger of the two hawks. As a quick cheat, look at the leg bands. Zephyr's metal identity band is on his right leg, Arroyo's is on his left.





# Another W

Wild Brew 2007 took place on August 18th and, the (Event Chairperson) and Vicki and Steve Adams (Honorary/Patrons Chairpersons), we

The evening began at the Exchange Center 1 with a Patrons Only Hour attended by Mark Bruner while the guests sampled more than 80 fine beers that were on hand. As a intern Jake Aaron, gave a demonstration of the flying abilities of Zephyr, one of our Har and grace from one handler to another. Fiona, a Bald Eagle, was also on display on stag List.

Of course, the main attraction for the 1400 plus attendees was the fine array of beer they gave advice and information on the varieties, flavors and brewing techniques that door, our thoughtful Beer Chairperson, David Ernst, made sure I was treated to my own different flavors in the beers he chose for me.

To compliment these fine brews, 25 of Tulsa's favorite restaurants were on hand to found on the Wild Brew website at [www.wildbrew.org](http://www.wildbrew.org). And be sure to check back on the on the huge screen during the event.

To make the evening perfect, our friends and great musicians from Mid Life Crisis o ber, they had the crowd on their feet and wouldn't let them sit down again until the mus

We especially want to thank our patrons for their generous support, including: Tulsa Trust; Riggs Abney Neal Turpin Orbison and Lewis Law Firm, IdeaStudio, Shamrock C Once again, we give a huge THANK YOU to all of the great volunteers who gave t







# Wild, Wild Brew!

by Margie T. Nolan

Thanks to the untiring efforts of a dedicated committee of volunteers led by Tom Byers we had our best year yet for the Sutton Center.

Over 500 guests. Our patrons were entertained by the lively tunes of Shelby Eicher and an added treat this year, our bird crew consisting of Ryan VanZant, Cheryl Jackson and his Hawks. Zephyr made several trips over the heads of the audience, flying with speed to celebrate the removal of these birds from the Endangered and Threatened Species

list from all over the world. No 3.2 beers here! Not only did our vendors pour samples, but they also made each beer so distinctive. Since I had to spend much of the evening at the front of the house, I took a lesson in beer tasting. And even an uninitiated palate like mine could distinguish the

flavors and serve up samples of their best fare. A complete list of participating restaurants can be found on the website to see some of the great photos of many of you that were taken and displayed

around the room. The music once again provided the crowd with exceptional dance music. From their very first number, the music stopped.

Special thanks to the World; the John Steele Zink Foundation; the H.A. and Mary K. Chapman Charitable Foundation; and many others.

Thank you for your time and energy to make this a "wildly" successful event. See you all next year!

Photography by Jake Aaron, M. Alan Jenkins, Dan Reinking, and Ryan VanZant





# Fallen Comrades

by Steve Sherrod

During approximately the last year, three leaders in conservation, all known well to me, have ended their tour on planet earth all too soon: Brian Walton of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Group based in California, Bill Burnham of The Peregrine Fund based in Idaho, and Tim Gillum of the Oklahoma Falconers' Association. All were involved in various efforts to save the natural world, but they were more than biologists, more than number crunchers, more than naturalists, more than meeting attendees. They were the kind of men who devoted their lives to changing the world for the better, to living their lives with passion and to thinking of solutions that would allow wild things to continue to exist as wild things, even in this continually racing and confused world. I conferred regularly with Brian during my tenure with The Peregrine Fund and during the early days when Alan Jenkins and I were initiating operations at the Sutton Center, and I accompanied Brian to Russia and Kazakhstan along with Clay White and Brian Latta and Dan Brimm in order to search for Altai Falcons. Tim Gillum was the president of the Oklahoma Falconers' Association, something perhaps not noteworthy for this newsletter except that Tim was a most positive figure within that group of field hunters pointing the way toward wildlife conservation and its importance for the future of all outdoors-people. I spent many hours talking to Tim over the years regarding everything from his veterinary experience to wildlife conservation philosophies. Bill Burnham and I served as Master's students under Clayton White at Brigham Young University, traveled to Greenland together to study peregrines, and then spent years working for The Peregrine Fund before Bill became the leader of the organization and I moved on to help establish the Sutton Research Center. Below for your interest are greatly abbreviated obituaries, owing to our limited space, some borrowed, with permission, from other authors in other places. We share this information with you to honor and offer our respect for these outstanding, fallen heroes of the conservation community.

## Brian James Walton (1951-2007)

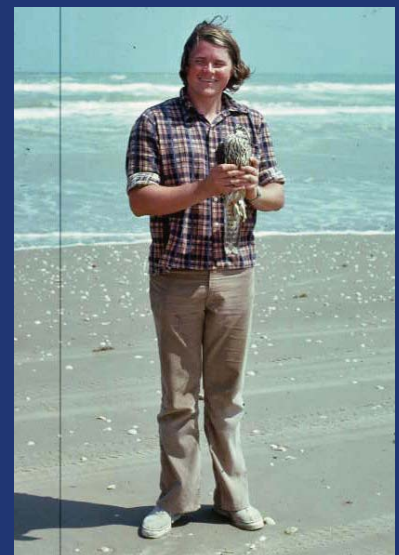
*from Jim Burns, UC Santa Cruz Public Information Staff Member and SCPBRG web site*



Carl Thelander

Brian James Walton, whose 31 years of leadership of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group was highlighted by the pivotal role the group played in the restoration of the peregrine falcon on the West Coast, died of a stroke at age 55 on June 15, 2007, at a Santa Cruz hospital. Walton, who first began studying Prairie Falcons and Peregrine Falcons while a high school student, participated in the first California Peregrine Falcon survey in 1970 that found, due to DDT, only two successfully nesting pairs of falcons remaining in California. Walton coordinated the work of 50 staff members, oversaw the program's breeding and release activities and became the face of the SCPBRG, speaking tirelessly of the peregrine's plight and leading fundraising efforts to support the recovery. As evidence of success, last year, SCPBRG staff conducted a statewide census of peregrines in California and documented 179 active nest territories.

In addition to its peregrine falcon work, the SCPBRG under Walton's leadership has been involved in research in captive breeding and wildlife management of eagles, condors, Aplomado Falcons, Harris's Hawks, Elf Owls, and other rare or endangered raptors. He was a member of the California Bald Eagle Working Group, Peregrine Falcon Working Team, California Condor Recovery Team, and Research Associate of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology as well as a board member and former vice-president of The Peregrine Fund. In 2004, Walton was honored as an Audubon champion at the annual Audubon California awards luncheon in San Francisco. Walton earned degrees in biological sciences from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo (bachelor's), and San Jose State University (master's).



Brian Latta



*Continued from page 12*

Brian's accomplishments become even more meaningful when one considers he overcame diabetes thanks to successful pancreas and kidney transplants in the early 1990s. Walton's other passion was baseball, having served as a coach in Santa Cruz High School's baseball program for almost 10 years. Walton's survivors include his wife, Hollis Feurtado of Santa Cruz; a son, Neil Walton of Santa Cruz; a daughter, Eleanor Walton of Santa Cruz; a father, James Walton, and a brother, Ron Walton, both of Arroyo Grande, California; former wife, Cheryl Walton of Santa Cruz; and three stepchildren, Peter, Fallon, and Katie Feurtado of Santa Cruz.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Brian James Walton Memorial Fund. The fund is managed by the Bank of America; donations should be mailed to 849 Almar Avenue, Suite C, Box 332, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

## **William A. Burnham (1947-2006)**

*from Tom J. Cade and The Peregrine Fund Newsletter 2006*

Bill Burnham, President and CEO of The Peregrine Fund from 1986-2006, died from brain cancer on 16 October 2006. Until the very end, Bill maintained his passion for nature and the outdoors. Burnham grew up in Colorado where he developed an interest in raptors through falconry that culminated in a life of dedicated conservation efforts. After completing his M.Sc. in Zoology at Brigham Young University on Greenlandic peregrines, Bill joined the Peregrine Fund and established the organization's western propagation facility in Ft. Collins, CO, soon becoming a Board Member and later elected a Founding Member. Bill received his PhD from Colorado State University in 1984 and spearheaded the establishment of the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho in the same year.

Under Bill's direction, the Peregrine Fund staff worked on more than 95 species of raptors in 55 different countries from the Arctic to the tropics, around the world. Bill encouraged large, captive breeding and reintroduction programs for the Aplomado Falcon and California Condor in North America. He founded the Maya Project in Guatemala and Belize, and he initiated bird work in Madagascar as well as on the African mainland and in Hawaii. He helped found the High Arctic Institute in Greenland in 1997 from which bird work continued since Bill's first Greenland efforts in 1972.

Bill believed strongly in education, and with help from The Peregrine Fund patrons, established an extensive collections building, an impressive library, an egg and specimen collection, and The Archives of Falconry. He made significant efforts to help educate locals regarding conservation of the birds in the countries where P-Fund projects were underway, and this included supporting local students who followed by continuing the same conservation efforts in years that followed.

He served as a government appointed advisor in several capacities including the National Public Lands Advisory Council and for the Snake River Birds of Prey Area. He received the Explorers' Club's Champion of Conservation Award in 2004 and the Zoological Society of San Diego's prestigious Conservation Medal in 2006. He also dedicated a significant amount of time to re-writing the Endangered Species Act and to making it more user-friendly to conservation organizations.

Bill left behind his wife of 40 years, Patricia, and his son Kurt who is following in his footsteps.



**Bill was an extremely active and hands-on President and was regularly seen in the field climbing into falcon eyries until the year prior to his untimely death. Photography by Kurt K. Burnham.**



*Continued on page 14*

*The Sutton Newsletter 13*



*Continued from page 13*

## **Timothy Dean Gillum (1956-2007)**

*by Steve K. Sherrod  
Photography by Oscar Pack*



“Tim?, Tim Gillum? Sure I know him. He is one of my very best friends. There is not a nicer guy out there.” This was a statement I always made when someone asked me about my buddy Tim. What I didn’t realize but soon became apparent was that there were several hundred others out there, falconers, cyclists, pole vaulters, workout enthusiasts, people of dedicated faith, and conservationists and other outdoors people who would make exactly the same statement if asked about Timothy Dean Gillum. In other words, Tim was in a circle of best friends for many, many others as well as for me, and he gave to each and every one of those individuals in the same positive spirit of a most trusted confidant. His joy of life and his love for others were remarkable!

But let me tell you a bit more about this guy Tim. He was born in Denver on June 13, 1956. He graduated from Principia High School in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1974 where he was the Missouri state pole vaulting champion, and where he received various other athletic honors as both a football and track star. In 1979, he graduated from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, with a B.S. in biology. From there his great love for and his intense interest about animals led him to work in a variety of zoos around the country. For the past 10 years Tim had served as a Territory Manager for NLS Animal Health, a veterinary supply company based in Oklahoma. But his career took him to many other states and other countries including the Middle East. Tim continued his athletic endeavors as an adult including (bi)cycling, teaching spinning classes, pole vaulting, extensive physical fitness, and skiing, activities all within which he established many lasting friendships. He was always competitive but in a wonderful way, and his encouragement spurred me on during many difficult times both mentally and physically. He had great ability but was never a braggart, just fun!

Like many of us, his intense interest and obsession with birds of prey were consuming, and he was an extremely accomplished falconer. He was interested in all raptors and all birds, and he served with great pride, accomplished ability, and always friendship to all falconers as President of the Oklahoma Falconers’ Association. He played an ideal role model, falconry coach, and naturalist guide for several, successful apprentices. Since Tim had lived in many areas of the country he had friends everywhere, and he continued those friendships, both falconry-related and otherwise, up to his last days.

Tim was both a “Dad” and a husband in the real meanings of the words. He was always telling me about something he was planning or about to do tomorrow with his kids or with his wonderful wife, Laurie. The family had just completed a small vacation cabin in Medicine Park where they could spend weekends and where Tim could work out by repeatedly climbing Mt. Scott on his custom built bicycle. The day before his death I talked to him when he called from Atlanta where he was attending his oldest son’s pole vaulting competition. He had even gotten into taking his family to see NasCar races as well as involved in many natural outdoor activities. He was active in his son’s Cub Scout pack as well as coach of the boys’ basketball team. Tim and his family attended New Church in Oklahoma City.

Tim is survived by his wife Laurie MacIvor Gillum, an effervescent, capable, and accomplished biologist and dedicated mother, son Trevor (17) of Atlanta, GA, daughter Haley (13) and son Jack (10) of the home. The entire family shares Tim’s love of animals, conservation, and the outdoors and the spirit of endless activities. In addition to his dad, he also leaves behind five siblings of kindred, positive spirit about life, Jack, his senior, and his juniors, Rick, Traci, Chuck, and Chris, as well as a long string of extended family.

Tim’s memorial service in OKC on May 5 was attended by hundreds, testimonial to his great popularity. His positive life spirit, his joy at simply being alive, his amazement and happiness of all things wonderful define Tim, and were portrayed in the multitude of projected photographs depicting his life. His departure has left a hole in the hearts of many. When we got the word that Tim had died, we were all left absolutely speechless. A guy who had worked out all his life, was in spectacular shape, and lived a great life had succumbed to genetics that over-ruled his physical condition. We wondered how such a great person who was so important to so many could just leave us without as much as saying “goodbye?” How could he just disappear without letting us tell him how much he meant to our lives, how much fun we had together and how much fun would be the things we were planning for the future. How could he just leave and take away that super positive attitude that always said, “OK, let’s do it?” The guy who had the cell phone message that said “Hey, make it a GREAT day!” The one who always says “Gollllleeeee! And “OHH-HHHHH MANNNNNN!” no matter what. What a wonderful role model not only for his kids but for all of us, a role model about positive living. We all need Tim and others like him. I really, really miss this man, and I know many, many others do as well. Goodbye, my buddy, my brother. Goodbye from all of us. We love you dearly.



# Species Profile: Peregrine Falcon

by M. Alan Jenkins

The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), is considered the most cosmopolitan of falcons, which is not to say that it frequents upscale hotel wine bars, but that it's widespread throughout the world. One clue for its extensive range lies in its scientific name which means wandering falcon; other vernacular names for the peregrine (as it is nicknamed) are Great-footed Hawk, Duck Hawk, and even Blue Meanie (by a researcher who has been the target of many nest defense attacks). Some peregrine populations are highly migratory, and therefore the species has been able to colonize most areas of the world. It can thrive in many climates and habitats. Although peregrines do require relatively open country, they can live in tropical jungle or northern forested areas if there is an open edge such as a lake or seashore. The usual Peregrine Falcon nest (eyrie or aerie, for the crossword addicts) is a cavity in the side of a cliff (often a HUGE cliff), a cavity in a tree, or even a ledge on a city building or bridge (the better to eat urban pigeons). However, nesting on the ground is common enough in bogs or on small islands where land predators can't reach them.

The Peregrine Falcon's hunting technique is to dive and strike flying birds out of the air. In doing this it needs acres of open air to catch up to its prey—almost exclusively small (occasionally a hummingbird) to medium-large birds (waterfowl), but also bats. Pigeons and their kin are favorite foods. The attack on prey is launched from above when hapless prey blunders underneath, or the falcon can fly out and climb above the prey to make its fatal dive. Witnessing the dive, or “stoop” of a Peregrine Falcon on its prey is the main objective in falconry, and peregrines are a favored species of falcon for this hunting sport. The unleashed power of a bird diving at speeds of 250 miles per hour is, to use an overused word, awesome - full of awe - incredible! I always thought that claims of peregrines diving at 100 mph were exaggerations; the true extent of my error was quantified when a skydiving falconer clocked his trained peregrine stooping alongside him in freefall at the 250 mph rate; I had underrated it 150%. The prey can be grabbed by the long-toed foot or struck (KA-POW-BANG-walloped actually) by the foot using the power of its dive momentum.

Being on the apex of an avian food chain, the species was susceptible to accumulating eggshell-thinning amounts of DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides. This brought the species populations to frighteningly low levels following the widespread use of pesticides after 1947. As a nesting species they disappeared from the eastern U.S., and even the remote nests in apparently pristine Arctic regions didn't escape the long arm of the pesticide chain, experiencing drastic declines. The species was placed on the early Endangered Species List, and became a symbol for the deleterious effects of pollution. Because they are so glamorous and have a dedicated following of enthusiasts, (they are probably the most studied of falcons), there was a concerted and widespread cooperative effort led by falconers to stop the use of the pesticides and captive-breed and reintroduce the species. In 1999 the species was taken off the endangered and threatened category. Today its populations have rebounded and it is more abundant than ever in some areas. Peregrines haven't been known to nest in Oklahoma, although, there is a record of a nest in a tree cavity in southeastern Kansas. During the spring and fall migration periods it can be seen, especially in cities or areas of waterfowl concentrations, in any part of Oklahoma, but it is uncommon.



M. Alan Jenkins

**Above: An adult male Peregrine Falcon trapped, banded and released during fall migration on the Texas Gulf Coast. Below: An adult female Peregrine Falcon perches on the facade of the Mayo Hotel in downtown Tulsa, OK.**



M. Alan Jenkins

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## Sutton Center to co-host scientific conference

In 1995, the Sutton Center co-hosted a well-attended and informative scientific conference on the ecology and conservation of grassland birds. After receiving suggestions that we hold another such meeting, we are now planning for a conference entitled **Conservation and Ecology of Grassland Vertebrates** to be held on the campus at the University of Oklahoma in Norman from 15–19 April 2008. This conference is co-sponsored by the Sutton Center, (along with our parent agency, the Oklahoma Biological Survey), and the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. As the name of the conference suggests, it will not be limited to birds, but will instead include research on other grassland vertebrates such as mammals and reptiles.

The purpose of this special conference is to bring together researchers from several disciplines in order to share ideas and findings related to grassland ecosystems. Session topics may include the effects of climate change, fire, and habitat fragmentation; grasslands as winter habitat; grazing impacts; energy development; woody plant invasion; breeding ecology; stream alteration; toxicology; conservation and management strategies; habitat selection; capacity building and outreach; and partnering among stakeholders. A call for papers and registration information for the conference is placed on the Sutton Center's web site.

# Our Heartfelt Thanks...



*This article is a tribute to Rebecca Renfro for all of her hard work, patience, caring, and cookies!*

*by Cheryl A. Jackson*

Rebecca spent most of her life traveling around, being a child in a military family. She settled briefly in Louisiana, which she talks about very fondly, before making her way to Oklahoma. She has been involved with birds and birding since her college years. Her freshman biology teacher, Helen Miller, was a great inspiration to her.

Rebecca met Sutton Center biologist Don Wolfe one day on an OK Mozart sponsored bird walk. She inquired about volunteer opportunities at the Sutton Avian Research Center, and was introduced to Dan Reinking and the rest of the staff. She began taking part in the Christmas Bird Count and joined the Oklahoma Ornithological Society. Later, she became heavily involved with Ryan VanZant and Cheryl Jackson with the educational bird program *It's All About Birds!*. Rebecca has done just about everything here at the Sutton Center, from learning to make study skins, to assisting with WildBrew, to helping teach Harris's Hawks not to land on their trainers' heads (that's how she got her nickname Rebecca "bird head" Renfro!). Her caring nature and assistance has been an invaluable asset to us at the Center, and we really appreciate everything she has done for us. Thank You, Rebecca.

**Above:** When Rebecca isn't volunteering for the Sutton Center or working as a pediatric physical therapist, she may also be found doing her duties as a member and president-elect for the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, volunteering for the SPCA and the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, taking part in political activism to promote peace, participating in drumming circles, being a "magpie" (Rebecca has this uncanny knack for finding coins on the ground), folk dancing, being a great friend, and, of course, bird watching.

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## Sutton Picnic 2007

*Text by Margie T. Nolan*

*Photography by M. Alan Jenkins, Sally A. Jenkins, and Dan L. Reinking*

We had a great day for the annual Sutton Center Picnic this year. While it did get hot, it was clear and sunny and just right for a day with friends and family.

Our fantastic Riggs-Abney volunteers arrived bright and early to fire up the grills and to help ferry our guests to the Center from the parking lot of the American Christian School. The school was once again kind enough to let us use their lot as a staging area and this year we had a generous donation of coffee from The Coffeehouse on Cherry Street to keep everyone going until the vans arrived.

This year's activities were once again kicked off by Dan Reinking demonstrating the capture and release of wild birds. Although there wasn't a great deal of activity in the nets, they did get a Carolina Chickadee, a Northern Cardinal, and a female Indigo Bunting. Following Dan's demonstration, Sutton employees Ryan VanZant and Cheryl Jackson kept things rolling with the help of volunteer Rebecca Renfro and our intern, Jake Aaron, with an outstanding bird show. It's great to see Cheryl spending more time out in front instead of back stage!

New this year was the opportunity provided by Christy Pruett, another Sutton Center employee, to learn how study skins are made. Working with a Cooper's Hawk that had been killed on the road, Christy demonstrated how to prepare the bones of the wings, legs and skull, and the skin and feathers of the hawk and then stuff it with cotton. She also took a tissue sample to send to the frozen tissue collection at the Sam Noble Museum for possible future research. Our study skins are used for educational and research purposes.

By noon, Kris Koepsel and his volunteer staff of chefs had a fabulous lunch ready and people ate to the accompaniment of music by Finnegan's Awake. There were even a few people dancing!







*Continued from page 16*

Throughout the day, various birds of prey were brought out for informative lectures on the biology and natural history of each species. Alan Jenkins spoke about owls, while Steve Sherrod and Ryan VanZant discussed Bald Eagles.

A real highlight of the day was the final activity: a water balloon tossing contest. The winners both received a super soaker water gun. But the real fun began after the contest when the Sutton Center staff and guests got the chance to pelt Steve Sherrod with the leftover balloons! A wet and wild ending to a great day!

Extra special thanks go to Steve Adams and David Delahay for their donations of beverages and vans. Their continued support of the Sutton Center and the work we do is invaluable, and we greatly appreciate them.







## 2007 Publications

This year saw the appearance of the Sutton Center's 100th (\*) publication!

- Beck E, **Patten MA** (2007) Status of the Black Rail in Oklahoma, with recommendations for future research. *Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society* **40**:5-10.
- Bell LA, Pitman JC, **Patten MA**, **Wolfe DH**, **Sherrod SK**, Fuhlendorf SD (2007) Juvenile Lesser Prairie Chicken growth and development in south east New Mexico. *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* **119**:386-391.
- Hamilton RA, **Patten MA**, Erickson RA, editors (2007) *Rare Birds of California*. Western Field Ornithologists, San Diego, California. viii+ 582 pp.
- Patten MA** (2007) Geographic variation in calcium and clutch size. *Journal of Avian Biology* **38**:in press. (doi: 10.1111/j.2007.0908-8857.04203.x)
- Pruett CL**, Winker K (2007) The effects of sample size on population genetic diversity estimates in Song Sparrows. *Journal of Avian Biology* **38**: in press.
- Pruett CL**, Winker K (2007) Evidence for cryptic northern refugia among high-and temperate-latitude species in Beringia. *Climatic Change* **85**: in press.
- Sibley DA, Bevier LR, **Patten MA**, Elphick CS (2007a) Ivory billed or Pileated Woodpecker? *Science* **315**:1495-1496.
- Sibley, DA, Bevier LR, **Patten MA**, Elphick CS (2007b). Your letters: Ivory billed Woodpecker. *Birding* **39**(4):11-16.
- \***Wolfe DH**, **Patten MA**, **Shochat E**, **Pruett CL**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Causes and patterns of mortality in Lesser Prairie Chickens and implications for management. *Wildlife Biology* **13** (Suppl. 1):95-104.

## 2007 Presentations

- Patten MA**, Gómez de Silva Garza H, Smith-Patten BD (2007) Changes in the avifaunal community of Palenque, Chiapas, in response to loss of rainforest. Association of Tropical Biology and Conservation, Morelia, México, 16 Jul. (oral)
- Patten MA**, Marantz CA (2007) Patterns of morphometric variation in *Dendrocolaptes* woodcreepers. Neotropical Ornithological Congress, Maturín, Venezuela, 15 May. (oral)
- Patten MA**, Smith-Patten BD (2007) Biogeographical boundaries and Monmonier's algorithm: A case study in the northern Neotropics. International Biogeography Society, Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands, 10 Jan. (poster)
- Patten MA**, Smith-Patten BD (2007) Loss of tropical forest and avian extinction and decline. International Research Conference on Biodiversity and the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, Kigali, Rwanda, 23 Jul. (oral)
- Patten MA**, Smith Patten BD (2007) Mexico's birds: A natural history. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma 27 Oct. (plenary address)
- Pruett CL**, Winker K (2007) Conservation genetics of Aleutian Island Rock Ptarmigan. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma 27 Oct. (oral)
- Pruett CL**, **Wolfe DH**, **Patten MA**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Effects of climate change on mortality in a declining prairie bird. The Wildlife Society, Tucson, Arizona 26 Sep. (poster)
- Pruett CL**, **Wolfe DH**, **Patten MA**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Effects of climate change on mortality in a declining prairie bird. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma 27 Oct. (poster)
- Reinking DL** (2007) Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas. Poster, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation State Wildlife Grant and ODWC Nongame Technical Committee Meeting, Norman, Oklahoma. (poster)
- Reinking DL** (2007) Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma, 27 Oct. (poster)
- Smith-Patten BD, **Patten MA** (2007) Diversity, seasonality, and context of mammalian roadkills in the southern Great Plains. American Society of Mammalogists, Albuquerque, New Mexico 09 Jun. (poster)
- Wolfe DH**, **Patten MA**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Mitigating collision risks for Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Prairie Grouse Technical Council, Chamberlain, South Dakota, 10 Oct. (oral)
- Wolfe DH**, **Patten MA**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Lesser Prairie-Chicken habitat use: Predator avoidance or thermoregulation? Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma 27 Oct. (poster)
- Wolfe DH**, **Pruett CL**, **Patten MA**, **Sherrod SK** (2007) Mitigating collision risks for Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Lawton, Oklahoma 27 Oct. (oral)



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G. M. Sutton Avian Research Center  
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