

WETLAND

Published bi-monthly for the Friends and Members of Oxbow, Inc.

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August Shorebird Windfall

.....by Jay Stenger

Great regional excitement, at least among local birders and naturalists, was generated the week of August 21 when Jon Seymour visited the Oxbow and found an assemblage of shorebirds on the mudflats along the shrinking and exposed shoreline of Osprey Lake. Some of the species that Jon found included three Willets (very rare) and a Sanderling (rare). Jon reported his finds through the local birding channels and for the next week many area birders were treated to some excellent shorebirding. Over the next few days, as is often the case, the makeup of the flock seemed to be in continuous flux with numerous comings and goings. Sometimes only 30 birds would be found and other times there would be as many as 80 or more present. The species makeup also seemed to change regularly. By the end of the period only one Willet remained, but an equally rare Wilson's Phalarope had arrived. From Jon's first report on Monday August 21, through our last report on Sunday August 27, fourteen species of shorebirds were found at Osprey Lake, with a high count of around 90 individual birds. Some of the rare and uncommon species included three Willets, a Wilson's Phalarope, a Sanderling, and two Baird's Sandpipers. Three Stilt Sandpipers and an early Wilson's Snipe were also uncommon finds. The rest of the list was made up of more common species, which included Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpipers, Spotted Sandpipers, Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers and Killdeer.

During the overnight hours of August 27th, we received 1.7 inches of rain and that was the end of the Osprey Lake mudflats, and sadly, the shore

birds that had relied on that habitat. As we all know, during the month of September we received a record 6+ inches of rain, so water conditions remained high in the Oxbow and shorebird habitat remained non-existent.

Plans are now under way that will hopefully allow us to manage water levels in certain areas of the Oxbow. If this can be achieved, we will be able to provide the habitat necessary to shorebirds during their migrations. Shorebird assemblages of this type could become the rule instead of the exception. These projects will be mostly funded by contributions that were generated by the Oxbow Birdathons and private grants. Look to future letters for more details about these exiting projects.

NOTE: Check out the photos taken by Lana Hays of some of the Osprey Lake birds in the photo section

Announcement of Upcoming Elections

Board members and officers of Oxbow, Inc. will be elected at our January members meeting at Winton Centre in Winton Woods Park at 10245 Winton Road on Tuesday, January 9, 2007. The following Board members are standing for reelection:

- Jerry Lippert
- Aaron Perlman
- Jim Poehlmann
- Jon Seymour
- Mike Miller

The following officers are standing for reelection:

- President – Jon Seymour
- Vice-president – Kani Meyer
- Recording Secretary – Dwight Poffenberger
- Corresponding – Dennis Mason
- Treasurer – Jim Poehlmann
- Ohio Agent – Dwight Poffenberger
- Indiana Agent – John Getzendanner

Wing, Beak, and Talon

.....by Jon Seymour

Susan Williams of Raptor, Inc. was our lecturer on September 12, 2006 at EarthConnection. Susan is the new Director of Education at Raptor, Inc., replacing our old friend Dave Tennant who is off to teach school. Susan brought some interesting feathered creatures for all to admire. The stormy night made it more difficult than usual for Susan to collect her charges and come for a visit, as the thunder and lightning made it nearly impossible to coax the raptors into their travel boxes. It was well worth the effort, as Susan introduced us up close and personal to an American Kestrel, an Eastern Screech Owl, and a magnificent Peregrine Falcon. We were all amused as Susan first laid out a blue tarpaulin to catch any droppings with a large target printed in the middle of it. Susan explained that the target was a great game for small children who would root for the birds to "hit" the target. As we were introduced to each of the raptors Susan explained some of the unusual features of each species. She demonstrated the ability of the Kestrel to keep its head still while its body is moving allowing it to focus on its prey while in flight, drew our attention to the edges of the owl flight feathers that silence its flight for surprise attack, and extolled the power and speed of the Peregrine that enables it to kill efficiently merely by striking a blow in the air. Raptor Inc. will soon move from its covered bridge site in Winton Woods to its new site on the Wildwood property of the Cincinnati Nature Center. This move should help Raptor Inc. increase its visibility in the community as well as provide it with much needed updated facilities.

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Oxbow, Inc. Memorials

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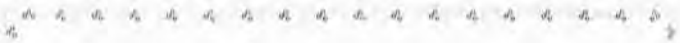
In Memory of

Karl Maslowski
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Mr. & Mrs. Paul Tenan Larry Wissman's 90th Birthday

Stan Trosset - Long Term supporter of Oxbow Inc.

It is with sadness that we mourn the passing in August of 2006, of Stan Trosset, age 95, a good friend to Oxbow, Inc. Stan and his wife Ruth (died in 2003) were long-term generous supporters of Oxbow, Inc.



Oxbow, Inc. is pleased to accept two very generous donations.

Our thanks to Kathryn & Vishnoo Shahani for their generous donation to support education programs conducted by Oxbow volunteers.

Oxbow Inc. is grateful for the generous donation from Jinny Witte (formerly Wiseman) one of the founders of the organization. Jinny has made a donation to specifically support habitat improvement projects.

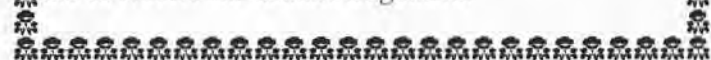
The Board of Directors thanks you for your support and belief in the Oxbow.



Oxbow, Inc. has established Memorials in honor of those who have passed on. Each Memorial established in the name of a friend or relative will be enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Each contribution to a Memorial will be acknowledged to the family or to those selected by the donor.

Tributes are also enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Some tributes are birthday or anniversary remembrances, holiday greetings or gratitude acknowledgements. If so desired "Happy Birthday!" or the like can be inscribed in the tribute notice.

Contributions should be sent to: Oxbow, Inc. P. O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, OH 45243-0391. Be sure to enclose the names and addresses of those who are to receive the acknowledgement.



Shorebirds and the Oxbow

.....by Jay Stenger

For many of us, birds and the Oxbow are synonymous. The Oxbow provides a home for many species of birds and is a magnet for many more during their migrations. In fact, preserving the bird life of the Oxbow was originally the major impetus that led to the formation of Oxbow Inc. many years ago. When we think of the birds of the Oxbow, waterfowl (ducks and geese) quickly come to mind. Many people might have been inspired by the stately grace of the many herons and egrets that gather here. Maybe others have been awed when they were fortunate enough to see one of the Bald Eagles that seasonally frequent the area. But when I, and many others think of the Oxbow, the first birds that come to mind are shorebirds.

Shorebirds is the colloquial name given to that family of birds which includes the plovers and sandpipers. Some folks may be surprised to know that some of the same birds they may have encountered along beaches while vacationing along the Atlantic or Gulf coasts are also regular visitors to the Oxbow. Shorebirds are such a symbol of the Oxbow that a silhouette of a shorebird was chosen as our logo (there has been considerable argument over which species this silhouette represents).

There are 62 species of shorebirds that occur in North America. Of these, 40 are regularly found in the eastern United States. Of these, 33 species have been recorded in the Oxbow, at least 18 of which occur regularly. The joy of seeing these long distance migrants in our local patch and the excitement of the possibility of finding a rare species motivates many birders to visit the Oxbow during the migratory seasons.

Shorebirds pass through the Oxbow each year during their spring and fall migrations. Only three species breed or summer in the Oxbow and include the Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper and to a lesser degree, the American Woodcock. Excluding Killdeer, which is our most common shorebird and can be found in small numbers even in winter, shorebirds of one type or another can be found in the Oxbow from late February through early November. The best times to find shorebirds are during spring (April & May) and fall (July, August & September) migration. The Oxbow is one of only a few regional locations where shorebirds can be found with regularity.

Predicting the dates when shorebirds will arrive or depart is fairly easy. What is unpredictable, however, is when the habitat conditions that are necessary to attract shorebirds will occur. If suitable habitat is not available, shorebirds will fly right past without stopping. Most species of shorebirds have adapted to feed on minute invertebrates that they find in very shallow water or in the damp earth just slightly above the water line (shores). These habitats may be either salt or fresh water and include open areas near water such as beaches, tidal flats, estuaries, sand and gravel bars, flooded fields, shorelines of rivers, lakes,

and ponds, exposed mudflats that occur at times of low water, and the shallow water margins of marshes and other wetlands.

To understand why, when and how shorebirds use the Oxbow it is important to understand the basics of their ecology. A simplified version goes something like this. Most North American shorebirds winter in coastal areas, estuaries and wetlands found in the fairly mild temperate or tropical parts of the southern United States, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America. Those habitats and moderate climate provide them with everything they need for their survival. But due to the competition for food and nesting sites, shorebirds have evolved over the ages to take advantage of the relatively mild, short summers and wide open spaces of the northern hemisphere. So early each spring millions of shorebirds undertake a northward migration that is paced so they arrive on the barren ground regions of the arctic and boreal regions of the far north (some species also breed in the northern U.S.) by summer. After the winter snows and ice melt in these regions, millions of acres of shallow water habitats are formed. Since the ground in the arctic and sub arctic is permanently frozen (permafrost) just below the surface, this melt water is not absorbed into the ground and thousands of shallow water pools of all sizes form and remain throughout the summer until the next freeze. This standing water also produces billions of mosquitoes and other insects that provide an abundant food source for these shorebirds and their newly hatched young. Because of the short arctic summer, no time is wasted and they begin nesting upon arrival. They complete their breeding cycle very rapidly. Incubation last 3 to 4 weeks and the young fledge in 2-3 weeks, timing varying slightly by species. Young shorebirds are born precocial. This means they are able to follow their parents and feed themselves on the ample and easy pickings right after they hatch. Their cryptic coloration provides an excellent defense from predators.

All of this allows the adults of most shorebird species to begin their southward migration quite early, leaving their offspring behind to fend for themselves. Because of this early "fall" migration, some adult shorebirds have already made it as far south as the Oxbow by mid-July. Dave Styer would often say that fall shorebird migration begins in the Oxbow on July 4th. Since the pressure of the breeding season is over, the fall migration is more protracted, as there is no rush to get back to their wintering grounds. Migrant shorebirds can be found from July through November depending on species.

Places like the Oxbow are critical to the survival of these species. When we travel we need places to refuel, eat and rest overnight. The same situation applies to migrating birds, especially habitat restricted species like shorebirds. These birds need wetland habitats that provide food and a refuge to rest before continuing their long distance journeys.

(continued on page 10)



Musings

by Dave Styer

The Willet

On August 21st Jon Seymour saw 3 Willets at the Oxbow. These birds would be "fall" migrants, perhaps the first for the Oxbow. Following Jon's sighting several others got to see at least one Willet there. The last record I saw on Ned Keller's web page was one bird seen by Mike Busam and Bob Lasker on the 26th. I gather that it rained, the water rose, and shorebird habitat at the Oxbow vanished about then. Shorebird watching at the Oxbow is certainly weather dependent.

To add a little perspective, here is the local Willet report through 1950, compliments of Kemsies and Randle, *Birds of Southwestern Ohio*:

A rare migrant. Dury reports a single specimen, collected in April, 1870, and there is a mounted specimen in the Gregg collection taken at Ellis Lake [near Glimore Ponds]. On March 21, 1948 two were seen by Randle at Kellogg Pond. Sjodahl records one from Lake Gloria, November 9, 1946. Throughout the state, the Willet is a rare migrant.

In spring on three different years (1983, 1989, and 1990) anywhere from 10 to 32 Willets were seen at the Oxbow. That represents an immense increase over what Kemsies and Randle wrote about in 1953. Bruce Peterjohn (*The Birds of Ohio*, 1989) provides a broader framework to understand the larger number of Willets seen at the Oxbow in the past 25 years:

Their status changed during the 1950s and Willets have been observed annually since 1959. Numbers of migrants steadily increased through the late 1970s but remained stable in subsequent years.

This change has been seen throughout the Greater Cincinnati area wherever shorebirds settle during migration. To understand why there might be more Willets now than there were fifty years ago we'll look at the entire range of the species. Much of this information will come from the article on the Willet by Peter Lowther, Hector Douglas III, and Cheri Gratto-Trevor in *the Birds of North America* (BNA). To begin, they note that the Willet "is the only North American sandpiper with a breeding range that extends south of the North-temperate region."

There are two subspecies, the Eastern Willet and the Western Willet. The Eastern Willet nests in wetlands along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Newfoundland all the way to northern Mexico, and it also nests in the West Indies in the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, and even northern South America. North of South Carolina "market-hunting and eggging" nearly eliminated the Eastern Willets by 1890. By now, they have recovered nicely. However, Eastern Willets appear to be diehard Easterners so that they would not be expected in Ohio or at the Oxbow.

The Western Willet breeds in wetlands over the northern Great Plains and the Great Basin. When they finish breeding they migrate to the coasts. On the Atlantic coast, they normally winter all the way from the Mid-Atlantic States to South America.

On the Pacific coast, they normally winter from northern California to South America. I sort of imagine Western Willets as fanning out and flying just about anywhere between their breeding grounds and the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean, and landing wherever they see some mud flats. The Western Willet population may be so large that it swamps out Eastern Willets. According to the BNA Willet article, fall Western Willet specimens in Massachusetts outnumber Eastern Willet specimens 33 to 6. It seems entirely reasonable that sooner or later a few Willets would show up at the Oxbow.

The BNA Willet article states that the population of the Western Willet "has declined due to conversion of wetlands and uplands to grain and other crops." This certainly doesn't explain an increase in Ohio migrants from the 1950s through the 1970s. The *Handbook of the Birds of the World* states that the Western Willet is "still moderately abundant over much of the original range, perhaps because of considerable tolerance for human activities such as modification and burning of marshes." I haven't found out why the migrant Willet population increased so dramatically in Ohio, so I'll guess. Perhaps the human disturbance in the west was more drastic prior to 1950. In Ohio, the initial clearing and draining was much more severe than today. Possibly, the great expansion of the National Wildlife Refuge system has boosted the Willet population. The system has been so strongly focused on wetlands that it would have helped the Willets.

While we are guessing, let's speculate about something else. Is the Western Willet actually a separate species from the Eastern Willet? After all, the two subspecies breed over a thousand miles apart. *The Birds of North America* is definitely into stating facts, not conjectures. The authors of the Willet article stick by the rules, but they come as close as any to the suggestion that we read between the lines. It's in the nature of DNA to change slightly from generation to generation. If Eastern and Western Willets don't occasionally cross breed the changes would eventually build up to the point where they would surely be separate species. How do things stand now? According to BNA, "this species is composed of 2 distinct breeding populations differing in ecology, in morphology, and subtly in vocalizations." As the extensive article covers the topics: Habitat, Food Habits, Sounds, Behavior, etc., it often separates its treatment of the two subspecies. I'm beginning to get the picture: maybe they are two species.

Here is one of the more subtle features, indeed. "Eastern Willets do discriminate between male songs of the 2 subspecies, responding preferentially to Eastern song." Under Priorities for Future Research, Lowther, Douglas, and Gratto-Trevor state that "an inventory of the vocal array of Western Willets, to match the work done with Eastern Willets, would also provide interesting comparisons." Indeed! Western Willets might just prefer Western song.

P.S. Thanks to Ned Keller for a bit of literature search for this article.

Horseshoe Bottoms Diary

September 11, 2006 by Jon Seymour

It is the fifth anniversary of the tragedy we now call 9/11 and seeking the tranquility of the Oxbow seems to be an appropriate way to spend the afternoon. My mother turned 90 this last February and she is visiting us from her home in Wisconsin. It has been a long weekend since my youngest daughter, Mandy, married Miles Spathelf on Saturday the 9th and we have just started to recover from the activity. The weather is good and the roads are dry so I am taking Mom down to the Oxbow to just look around. I admit it is a bit of a test. One of my goals in opening the Oxbow area up to more traffic has been to make some of it accessible to people with limited physical abilities. My mother, at 90, uses a walker but we are headed for the Oxbow anyway. I know the roads are dry enough to drive so my plan is to stop at Juno Pond and just watch the Pond from the car for awhile.

We pull up to Juno Pond and I tell her that there doesn't look like there is much going on. As soon as I utter this hearsay a Great Egret flies into view at the edge of the pond and in only a few minutes we have located Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron all sitting nicely here and there around the pond. Mom looks through the binoculars and indicates that she has seen each bird. Her macular degeneration does not allow her to see the details as well as either she or I like, but she seems pleased. As we admire the heron an Osprey sweeps in from the north and lands in a tree opposite our car. It struggles to get a grip on the twig it has decided to perch on. Several attempts and a lot of flapping result in a satisfactory grip and balance and now the Osprey can think about where its next snack will come from. With the lakes and ponds teeming with fish it should only be a matter of selecting the size of the catch. Mom takes a long look through the binoculars and has trouble finding its perch in the sky. Suddenly she finds the bird and takes her time looking it over.

I pull out of Juno Pond with a good feeling of having seen a lot and never having left the car and thinking, "This is something you can do even if your normal mode of transportation is a wheel chair". A slow drive down to the Oxbow Lake overlook results in a constant rustle of Song Sparrows and Indigo Buntings crossing the road, while monarch butterflies flit and float over the same dusty ribbon. At the overlook I get Mom out of the car and with her walker she walks over and sits down on the benches installed by Alex Rowe and his helpers for his Eagle Scout project. Cormorants are swimming and flying the length of Oxbow Lake and there are numerous Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets scattered around the lake. I can see ducks and a few shorebirds through my spotting scope but with Mom's eyesight she cannot see them. The cormorants are big enough and they are providing some entertainment. Occasional squawks of Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons break the relative silence and it is just good to sit here and be absorbed

into nature. I notice on my right something moving through the water, two small heads followed by a third, suddenly there are two more heads trailing the first three. "Otter" I exclaim to Mom but I cannot show her since my view is obstructed by the Jerusalem Artichoke around the bench and tree branches nearer the lake. "They are swimming toward the middle; they should come into view soon. I will hand you the binoculars as soon as they clear the trunk of the tree and you will be able to see them." I take the binoculars off and prepare to hand them to Mom and the otter disappears. We sit and wait for a few minutes but do not see them again. I am disappointed but I reflect that my Mother almost got to see the otter and how cool is that.

September 24, 2006 by Jon Seymour

It is 8:40 am and I pull my car into the Oxbow parking area for the second day of the Great Outdoor Weekend. The day is beautiful, sunny, bright, crisp, clear – the best! The forecast has not been so great, so I am concerned that that will keep some people away. It rained most of Saturday morning so I know the roads are muddy and not drivable. I start to get on my insect repellent when the first car of guests pulls in and I think that we may have a large group this morning after all. However, by 9:00 a.m. only five guests have come and Kani Meyer and Steve Pelikan have joined up to guide the tour. Everyone is dressed for mud and looks vigorous so we decide to walk to Oxbow Lake overlook. Along the way I mention the history and geology of the area while Kani and Steve point out insects and plants of interest. We get a few looks at some of the resident heron species and continue our walk to Osprey Lake. Here we talk about the prairie restoration and planned burns. Steve and Kani answer questions regarding the native plants and invasives. I sit back and listen since I am less than useful in this area.

Our next stop is the Oxbow Lake Overlook. By this time everyone has a pound of Oxbow river silt mud attached to their shoes and is doing the Oxbow version of an aerobic workout. Coming into the overlook there is a general gasp as the full beauty of the lake in the early morning sun makes itself apparent. I set up the scope and focus on the cormorants sunning themselves in the south end of the lake. There is another moment of amazement since the birds, and there are many, are not noticeable to the naked eye until you put them in the scope view. I find more good looks at our resident heron species for our guests and Steve does the same with his scope. We find that we have disturbed a couple of Black-crowned Night Herons near the overlook and they are flying out over the lake and returning to the near shoreline trees, then doing it all over again. A small flight of Wood Ducks sails down lake and immature Purple Martins circle above us. No spectacular raptors as we had the day before but everyone seems well satisfied. We start back to the entrance and as I come back near Osprey Lake I look to the right onto Oxbow Lake and see a large area of water in the middle of the lake in a big swirl, something large has moved in the water. I step to a clearing and look through an opening in the trees for a better look and almost at once five heads appear in a small area. Almost as quickly they are gone

(continued on page 8)



The Masters class for the Miami University Environmental Studies visits the Oxbow. Dr. Mark Boardman brings the candidates for the Masters Degree for a class in the Oxbow as part of their introduction to a wide variety of environmental projects and interests in the Greater Oxford area. Oxbow is an example of what a successful grass roots group can do to help save the environment. We lecture the class on the formation of the organization and some of the difficulties we have overcome in order to grow the organization into what it is today. The students come from all over the United States and several come from foreign countries. They take back the message and feel of Oxbow as part of their educational background and apply it to their own careers in Environmental Science.



Least Sandpiper



Pectoral Sandpiper

Killdeer



Lesser Yellowlegs



Sanderling



Semi-palmated Sandpiper



Stilt Sandpiper



Solitary Sandpiper



Willet

**Osprey Lake shorebird
photos by Lana Hays**

2007 Ohio Invasive Plant Research Conference

January 18, 2007

Ohio Wesleyan University
Delaware, OH
\$25 Registration, \$15 Students

The conference will include lectures by prominent workers in the field of invasive plant species management and research. There will be lectures, poster sessions, and case studies.

Contacts: <http://www.oipc.info> or Chad Kirschbaum, 740-534-6535, ckirschbaum@fs.fed.us



Can you identify this hawk? This picture was taken near editor's home. Email meggster@fuse.net or drop a note by mail to my attention. (Photo by Jim Poehlmann)

(Horseshoe Bottoms—cont'd)

but now they are popping up two and three at a time. I call out to the rest of the group – Otter! Kani comes running up and spots them and we both try to point them out to our guests. Steve and a couple of the guests are 30 yards ahead of the rest of us and they did not hear my first call. There is more distance now and I call out louder – Otter! Steve and the rest of the party come back at a trot. Fortunately the otter stay playing in the middle of the lake for several minutes and everyone in the party gets to see them. Steve gets his scope on them but I did not even try, preferring to stay with binoculars. Kani and the rest see no more than three heads above the surface at any one time but they all get to watch them for a while and then they just disappear.

Everyone is excited. Walking up the hill to the entrance parking area I am once again impressed by the contrast. Minutes ago we watched herons, cormorants, and otter; now we stand next to a cement plant, trailer park and auto parts yard. Just on the other side of the levee thousands of cars speed by, unseeing and unknowing. One of the guests thanks Steve, Kani and me for what we have done to preserve the Oxbow. I feel very blessed.

October 6, 2006 by Wayne Wauligman

A Friday "walk to the night" brings eighteen guests out for my "Birds and Beavers" hike starting at 6pm and going to 8 pm, after dark. Earlier, I noticed a Northern Harrier cruising the soybean fields. I bet she will stay and follow the harvester when the mice are ejected out the back! Minutes before the official start time, several early arrivals are treated to an Osprey's crashing dives into Juno Pond. Three Pied-billed Grebes dove away from the circling Osprey. Near the parking area, an early Golden-crowned Kinglet called, along with several Yellow-rumped Warblers. My nephew Blake Wauligman and his friend Matt Harpenau, high school students, catch and show the guests many Killifish and several Glass Shrimp from Juno Pond. Cricket Frogs are numerous, with several young metamorphs caught. This indicates it has been a good breeding year for them. Red-ear Sliders are also common, soaking up the sunlight on all available logs. Over at Mercer Pond, about 80 Cormorants are gathering to roost in the trees. A line of thirteen Great Egrets fly by, with the setting sun lighting them a brilliant white. A swirling cauldron of Black Vultures stirs high over the Miami Fort Power Plant, surrounded by numerous Turkey Vultures.

Driving to the Oxbow Lake Overlook we are able to beat the setting sun. The end of the Lake was alive with Great Blue Heron, Egrets, Wood Ducks, and even a Black-crowned Night Heron. At dusk a beaver comes out nearby, splashing and leaving a sparkling wake in the moonlight. Arising over the Miami Fort Plant smokestacks, the Harvest Moon, looking incredibly large, allows us the sights of several birds migrating across its face as seen through a scope. Turning around and looking where the sun had just set, Jupiter and four of its moons are readily seen. This is truly one of the most beautiful evenings imaginable to be spending in the Oxbow.



by Jon Seymour

"... we are asked to show by our deeds whether we think human minorities are worth bothering about; whether we regard the current ideals of the majority as ultimate truth or as a phase of social evolution; whether we weigh the value of any human need (like recreation) wholly by quantitative measurements; whether we too have forgotten that economic prosperity is a means, not an end." Aldo Leopold, 1928

Realizing the full potential of being human by being part of nature is an end, and drawing natural sustenance and comfort from being close to nature is part of the message of the Great Outdoor Weekend. This year's weekend started out too wet to be outdoors. Well not really, but we had indicated that we would cancel if it rained, and on Saturday it rained. It had been raining for several days (3 inches in my rain gauge). However, all four guides, Darlena Graham, Steve Pelikan, Kani Meyer and myself, showed up at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning and four more brave souls came for the walk. We could not walk very far without sinking over the boot tops in the mud so we restricted our tour to the Juno Pond causeway. I thought a simple walk out and back along the causeway, which has a high percentage of gravel, would be doable and if we were lucky something of interest might be there. Just before 9:00 a.m. it stopped raining so at least our heads and binoculars would be dry. Down at Juno Pond representatives from all four regular heron species were hanging around and our guests were able to get good looks at Great Blue, Black-crowned Night, and Green Herons and Great Egrets. Out at the end of the causeway where it opens up into farm fields we were able to set up the telescope and find dozens of Great-crested Cormorants in the trees flanking Mercer Pond. As we were discussing cormorants, a single Peregrine Falcon lazily flew at low level across the farm fields.

It started to drizzle so we walked back along the causeway and stopped under the trees at Juno Pond to talk a little more about the Oxbow and get out of the rain. As we talked a Belted Kingfisher spotted lunch and dove from 30 feet into Juno Pond sending a splash of water two feet in the air. Then he was up, out of the water, and flying back over our heads, empty beaked, to hunt another pond. Just as I noted that we had come to the end of our scheduled hour, a single Osprey floated directly over our heads and settled on an impossibly small twig in a tall tree directly opposite our position across Juno Pond. An excellent view through the scope gave everyone a personal experience with the amazing "fish hawk".

So ended another "dull" hour of just standing around the Oxbow! I almost always tell groups that I lead down into the Oxbow that you never know what you will see once you descend into the flood plain. It also doesn't seem to matter if you hike the entire Oxbow or just sit and wait for the wildlife to come to you. Either way, there is an excitement in getting outdoors and experiencing being part of nature. One might even feel fully human. (See Horseshoe Bottoms diary for a look at day 2 of the Great Outdoor Weekend.)

Travels with Maggie

(With No Apologies to Charlie or John)

A Moving Story by an Octogenarian (Part II)
by Jeanne K. Bocklage

Day 2: Tuesday, August 16, 2005 (398 Miles)

In bed, can't sleep, and I find myself trying to fathom the fact that at this moment I am a drifter, no longer attached to any one place. I think of all the special treatment I got from friends and feel so privileged. I dined out with Alice, Bob and Ginny, Mary and Bob. My cousin, Peggy, arranged a family picnic supper party. Alice and Rosie fancied up our book club luncheon. Margie and Claire got the high school gang together at Mike Fink's and Gloria sent me copies of the photos she took. I loved my last tea party with Eric and Austin and the special goodbyes at the Oxbow board meeting and the fun luncheon with the warm water sprites from Mercy Healthplex and the last dinner at Ginny's and Bob's, delicious as always. The cards, farewell tokens and phone calls made me feel so special. Thanks to Marian, Ann, Sis, Bernice, Lou, Dave, Ginny, Eileen, Mary, Ruth, Betty, Helen, Dolores, Jon-Bill, Margie, Marge, Jeanne, Jean, Kay C, Adelaide. I'm getting sleepy. Oh, and wasn't that kind of Mary to come yesterday afternoon with her *sweeper* (I sold mine) to tidy up for me *zzzzzzz*.

Day 3: Wednesday, August 17, 2005 (394 Miles)

Looks like a beautiful sunny day ahead! My Corgi companion slept through the night, no barking at outside noises. Off we go, following a continental breakfast at the motel and a gas-up. \$2.56 per gallon, price going up.

Beau winds around familiar-to-him Memphis, then past the gigantic Southern Baptist Church with the swimming pool suggesting that Catholics should go one better with a pool of holy water, past the Pyramid (the basketball arena), past Danny Thomas's impressive Research Hospital, over the muddy Mississippi and along the rice fields and on to Route 40 which could take us straight to Albuquerque. Well, maybe not straight. By 9:20 a.m., we have left Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee behind us and are headed for Little Rock and Hot Springs National Park.

I must get a cell phone. Every day in the car, we talk to Cam, Paula, Therese and, of course, Megan. Today Beau phoned his younger brother Erik, who is visiting in L.A., to ask if Hot Springs has a Steak 'n' Shake because their milk shakes are "pretty good". Erik would know since he spent two summers near here counseling at a kids' summer camp. Erik's answer: "No." We made do with a Sonic Drive-In. My fast food experiences are being broadened. The sun cooks us in the car but as said earlier, Mags can't shed her fur coat and relax in a closed automobile.

Hot Springs National Park About 50 Miles SW of Little Rock

If you're interested in hot tubs, this is the place. You can still come to drink and bathe if you can manage an average temperature of 143 degrees. A row of handsome bathhouses are being renovated although many have expired since their heydays from the 1880s to the 1920s. The first bathhouses were tents thrown over individual springs. Next came wooded structures that easily burned to the ground or rotted because of the steam. Water flows per day at an average of 850,000 gallons to this day. Scientists claim the springs are more than 4,000 years old. Buried deep underground, they pick up minerals as they pass through rocks. The old stream that carried off excess waters today lies under Central Avenue, home of the bathhouses. Mags waited in the heat with Beau, Maggie panting heavily, while I whipped through the

National Park Visitor Center located in the historic Fordyce Bathhouse. Interesting cubicles with tubs and other equipment, each one private, line the women's and men's sides of the basement of the building. On the other floors, beauty shops, massage rooms, gyms, a lovely lounge with a baby grand - all made one feel healthier by the hour. Most visitors came for a three week "cure"-- for lumbago, kidney problems, even liver problems. In 1919, one could take 21 baths for \$15.00. I had to buy some postcards and get an official stamp-of-attendance for my N. P. booklet.

While Beau toured the bathhouse, I sat on the porch with Maggie. She suffered through thunder and lightning and tried to hide as close to the building as she possibly could. But all the noise and fireworks were bravado and since it didn't rain we drove up Hot Springs Mountain, a two and a half mile one-way drive that in early summer must be wildflower heaven. Hot Springs is a small town with no room to grow in the historic area. Parking is almost impossible but Beau and I are pleased we scheduled time for this short visit.

A short distance from the national park is De Gray Lake State Park. A beautiful, unspoiled, big resort lake. We find gas for \$2.51 per gallon. Price going down but not much. Southwest Arkansas is pine forested. It boasts the only North American diamond mine. In the FAR corner of the state is a town named Hope, famous as the birthplace of Bill Clinton. Route 30 takes us into Texarkana where one side of the city belongs to Arkansas and the other side to Texas. We spend the night at a LaQuinta Inn (I think in Texas) where Mags gets free lodging. Beau goes out for Taco Bell. Later when I phone Tee I learn that National Van Lines delivered my belongings this afternoon to Albuquerque. That took only two days.

Day 4: Thursday, August 18, 2005 (390 Miles)

Hurrah! We're in our fifth and final state--Texas-- on this leg of our journey, traveling I-30 to Dallas, land of the Caddo Indians, Blue skies, hotter temps and our first cattle ranch with a house to embarrass any on the TV drama named for Big D. If Monticello has 33 rooms, this magnificent home has 66.

As the woods give way to flat Texas plains, Beau and I play the Texas Alphabet Game, his version: triple entries for each letter and you need not sight the listings. Here's our beginning: A for Alamo, Austin, armadillo. B for Bar-B-Q, bats, Bluebonnets. C for chaparral, chaps, Crawford Ranch. Every entry must have that Texas flavor.

Outside of Dallas is a long bridge over Lake Hubbard. Trucks abound. One truck whizzes by advertising "Rhett Butler Trucking Co." I'd like to see what the owner looks like. We pick up some necessary gas around 11 at \$2.70 per gallon and a short time later fill up at Mobil for \$2.58. I luck out with an easy stretch of driving. Beau has our luncheon dining adventure in view: Whataburger, a burger found only in Texas, Beau says. He tells me that on April 9, 2001, the Great State of Texas declared Whataburger "A Texas Treasure". I must admit the burger wasn't bad but the milk shake was stupendous.

Waco soon slips into the rear view mirror, followed by Temple. About 35 miles north of Austin, the hill country begins in earnest, a welcome change after miles of flatland. We check off Round Rock, home of Dell Computers, and feel a lift in our spirits because Madrone Ranch where Paula and her husband Michael have their home is little more than an hour away.

(continued on page 11)

Shorebirds and the Oxbow (cont'd from pg 3)

Due to humankind's modification of our natural habitats, very few places now exist in the interior U.S. that provide conditions suitable for migrating shorebirds. Unfortunately, without management suitable shorebird habitat is not always available, even in great places like the Oxbow. Shorebird habitat is determined by water levels. If water levels are too high, shorelines and mudflats are inundated. On the other hand not enough water can sometimes be a problem.

In the Oxbow, spring and fall shorebird habitats are considerably different. Our springs are usually quite wet and Oxbow Lake and the various ponds are usually full to the brim at that season. These are bad conditions for shorebirds because no shoreline or mudflats are exposed. During very wet springs however, especially when floods occur in April or May, conditions for shorebirds can be quite good. When the rivers flood or Oxbow Lake overflows, many acres of the adjacent fallow farm fields become inundated, creating excellent shorebird conditions. As the floodwaters recede several skypools remain behind and might last for weeks before they dry up. But of course, these conditions are random and erratic. Fall has a separate set of problems. Compared to our springs, late summer and early fall is a generally dry season. While we don't receive the amount of rain that causes spring floods, we often get enough to keep water levels well up, exposing little shoreline. When these conditions prevail we see few shorebirds. In very dry seasons, however, shorebird conditions are best. Prolonged droughts reduce the water levels, exposing considerable shoreline and mudflats. When these conditions occur hundreds of shorebirds can be found in the Oxbow. It might be hard to believe looking at it today, but prior to 1990, the east/low shoreline of Oxbow Lake was entirely barren and had no willows. During the average late summer, even a wet one, there was always some exposed shoreline. You could walk the entire shoreline of the lake from one end to the other as easily as strolling on a beach. In those days, shorebirds were a common and daily sight during fall migration all along that shoreline. I believe that the farmers plowed closer to the shore in those days, keeping the willows at bay. Once that practice stopped, it didn't take long for the willows to invade. Unfortunately that shoreline is lost to shorebirds these days, except during the driest of years.

But the good news is that plans are underway for Oxbow Inc. to begin managing the water levels of certain selected areas in the Oxbow. These projects will be partially funded by the contributions raised from Oxbow's annual Birdathon. Hopefully in the near future, and with your support, we will be able to maintain at least some suitable shorebird habitat in the Oxbow throughout the year. Look for future articles updating our progress.

OXBOW, INC. PROGRAMS

Tuesday, November 14th, 2006, 7:30 p.m.

River Journey

Earth Connection, College of Mount St. Joseph

Jim Williams, retired Chief Naturalist of the Hamilton County Park District, will present "River Journey", a look at the Ohio River from the late 1700's to our time, including natural history and human history, with a focus on steamboat history. The theme of this talk is transportation on the river and how river transportation changed over the years. Jim will also provide descriptions of how the river and its surrounding landscape looked in times past. If you have further questions, email Jim at jwfrom@oxbowinc.com. To reach Earth Connection in Delhi, go south on Neeb Rd. past the Delhi Rd. traffic light, turn up the second drive on the left.

Tuesday, December 12th, 2006, 7:30 p.m.

Lawrenceburg Public Library, Lawrenceburg, Indiana
Grasslands and Birds

Mike Busam, birder and former officer of the Gilmore Ponds Conservancy, will discuss grassland habitats and the birds associated with them. Grasslands such as those at Voice Of America Park, the Shaker Trace area of Miami Whitewater Forest, the Oxbow, and others will be considered, and Mike will provide answers to questions like, "Why are you more likely to see Grasshopper Sparrows at certain construction sites than at VOA Park?" For more information, email Mike at mjb@shaffer.cc. The Lawrenceburg Public Library is downtown at 123 High Street. Turn left going west off US 50 onto Walnut St., then right on High St.

SAVE THE DATE - 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 9th, 2007
Winton Centre in Winton Woods

Natural History of the Greater Cincinnati Region

Stan Hedeem, locally acclaimed author and recently retired Xavier University professor will speak on the natural history of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana region, focusing on how the Oxbow fits into this natural setting. More details next newsletter.

OXBOW INC. FIELD TRIPS

To reach the Shawnee Lookout lower boat ramp parking lot, take Lawrenceburg Road south into Shawnee Lookout Park, and at the first Park intersection, take a right turn down the hill, and the parking lot will be on the right.

Saturday, November 18th, 2006, 8:30 a.m.

Birds All Around

Meet Jay and Jack Stenger, expert birders and trip leaders, at the Shawnee Lookout lower boat ramp parking lot. The plan is to spend an hour looking for sparrows and other songbirds at Shawnee Lookout, then drive over Lost Bridge and find a Bald Eagle or two, a few waterfowl on the gravel pit, some Sandhill Cranes in the field stubble, then move over to the Oxbow to pick up the really good stuff! Hah! That is the plan, anyway, and we can hope for those sightings, as Bald Eagles and Sandhill Cranes can sometimes be seen in the Oxbow region at this time of year. If the Oxbow is too muddy we may go up to Hidden Valley Lake from there.

NO December Field Trip is scheduled

Travels with Maggie (cont'd from page 9)

And then we are there. And Paula and Megan are waiting in the street out front from the house (cell phones are wonderful) with Dakota. Paula's two-year-old German Shepherd. It's soooo good for me to see Paula --and Beau to see Megan. Hugs and kisses all around!

It's another story with Mags. I've been dreading the moment Maggie and Dakota would meet. Our vet advised they meet on neutral ground which is what we are doing. Dakota dances around Beau, happy to see him, then comes over to sniff this furry stranger which makes her very unhappy. In fact, Maggie bares her teeth. Ever the perfect host, Dakota prances away, not the least insulted.

The odometer reads 49544 (we will have to pile in the car a la Garrison Keillor's folks in Lake Wobegone to watch the rollover to 50,000) for a total of 1204 miles from my house to Paula's house. It's 4:30 p.m. and we made it in one piece.

Day 5: Friday, August 19, 2005 (First Full Day in Austin)

Very tired. Mini depression. Life as I knew it is ancient history. Missing my home and friends. Hoping Mags and Dakota become friends. Wondering if this was a wise move to undertake.

By nightfall, after a long nap and a hot shower, negative thoughts vanish. Michael arrives home from a business trip to L.A. We have a great dinner together and all's well.

Day 6: Saturday, August 20, 2005

Dakota is a Ball Dog. There is nothing he likes better than to chase a ball. If there were a dog ball game, Dakota would be the star player. If a ball goes under the sofa and he can't reach it, he runs off and comes back with another ball. He has caches of balls all over the house and yard. He loves to drop a ball into the swimming pool, walk down the pool steps and swim out and retrieve the ball. Then repeat the dropping and retrieving over and over and over.

This afternoon, Maggie got fed up with Dakota playing ball constantly and stole one of his balls. Dakota, the prince, let it go. After all, he has balls to spare -- but not for Maggie to chew to pieces which she proceeds to do. Later, they both go after the same ball and an altercation takes place. Paula grabs Dakota and I grab Maggie. Dakota looks at Maggie as if to say, "What is that mean little tailless thing?" She does look strange when she wears her white plastic collar (now part time).

Austin is very proud to be part of Texas. The current fad is proclaiming how weird the city is. One newspaper columnist wrote "Austin has a sometimes lovable, sometimes irritating permanent adolescence", "Keeping It Weird" is a popular three-act play currently running downtown. Erik's favorite cap reads "Keep Austin Weird". You can buy a coffee table globe that shakes up bats over the city's skyline. Mexican Free-tailed Bats live under the Congress Street Bridge. These bats actually were used by the thousands in WW II in a research project. Small incendiary time bombs were attached to their chests and they were dropped in crates over Japan. The bats were then supposed to crawl into buildings and cause damage. I'm not making this up, check *Collier's Encyclopedia*. Sensibly, the idea soon was abandoned. Austin houses the Capitol, University of Texas, LBJ Presidential Wildflower Center, Texas' most beautiful governor's mansion, Library and Ladybird's Wildflower Center.

Day 7: Sunday, August 21, 2005

Dogs are tolerating each other. I feel I have recuperated from the long drive and the worry over the dogs bonding.

A lot has happened in this one week. I got to spend the most time ever with my grandson and loved every minute. We had two previous trailer trips with Bill, the one west and one a few years later covering a dozen Civil War sites and battlefields in the east, but this was a one-on-one and it was fun. I certainly appreciate Beau's generous giving of self. Who says ages 82 and 27 aren't compatible? And for over 1200 miles!

Days 8 - 59: August 22 to October 19, 2005 (Treatments)

I was mistreated at Paula's. One morning I walked out to the street to fetch the newspaper, came in, sat in a lounge chair, leaned back and got a whopper of a pain in my left shoulder. I jumped up and got a second one in my upper left arm. Then I saw the culprit. A huge brown-winged wasp (everything IS bigger in Texas).

Quickly I cracked him with the newspaper. He didn't fight back since I had squeezed him rather badly on the back of the chair when I sat down. That's the price he had to pay for piggy-backing me in the first place. I looked him up in an insect book. He was a 2-inch Paper Wasp with a painful sting, serious only if you get multiple bites.

Another day I volunteered to drive down to the mailbox to collect the mail, about a short mile away. About six feet from the garage door, there's one step down to the car parking level. I knew it was there, stepped down it many times. This time I flew over it. In mid-air, this thought went through my mind: Don't land on your hips.

My orthopedic surgeon warns me annually not to fall. Particularly on cement, that I could "disturb" my hip replacements and that would be "bad news". Ever the perfect patient, I conscientiously landed on my left knee and shoulder. Mags was going bye-bye with me and since I now was sitting, she sat next to me while I checked for any disabilities. Nothing seemed broken. I managed to stand up and walk even though my knee hurt badly. I crossed the garage, got in the car, drove down for the mail, came back, parked, crossed the breezeway, entered the hall, then the kitchen and stunned Paula when I asked for an ice bag for my knee.

Later, Therese, a surgical pathologist, informed me that my Fosamax was working, that almost everyone who falls onto concrete breaks a bone. How lucky can you get? About five weeks later with my knee still painful and needing a cane for the stairs, Lucky Me went to see an orthopedic surgeon. He said a little more patience was necessary, the knee was healing but it was badly bruised into the bone.

Every day wasn't written in a minor key. When everyone else was out, Paula and I enjoyed a Jane Austen Film Festival in her cozy home theater. We watched *Pride and Prejudice* with Cohn Firth, *Emma* with Gwyneth Paltrow, and *Sense and Sensibility* with Emma Thompson. All beautiful productions but our favorite is P'n'P. A real bonus is the rainbow I have in my shower. The sun shines through a small high window that creates a delicate rainbow in the spray.

We may need a traffic cop at Madrone Vista Drive. My 17-year-old grandson from California, Grant, flew in for a four day visit. (He spent part of the summer in D.C. as a page in the House of Representatives. He loves politics and has awards for debating.) Siblings Erik and Elly flew off to the Big Apple for a short vacation and later Erik took off for Australia as part of a church project. (Erik, 22, graduated in June from the University of Texas and Elle, 25, assistant manager at a Walgreen's, is about to begin studies in pharmacy. She loves chemistry.)

(to be continued next issue)

Oxbow, Inc.

A nonprofit organization formed by conservation groups and concerned citizens of Ohio and Indiana for the purpose of preserving and protecting a wetlands ecosystem known locally as the Oxbow, Hardintown, or Horseshoe Bottoms, from industrial development and to preserve the floodplain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers for use as a staging area for the seasonal migrations of waterfowl. This agricultural area is rich in geological, archaeological, and anthropological history.

Help us save this unique wetland ecosystem. Make your state a richer place in which to live by helping us preserve this precious resource. **Membership in Oxbow, Inc. is encouraged and solicited.**

Prothonotary Warbler	\$ 15	Wood Duck	\$ 25
Great Blue Heron	\$ 50	Green-winged Teal	\$100
Great Egret	\$250	Osprey	\$500
Bald Eagle	\$1000		
Charm of Goldfinches (Group Level)	\$25		

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