

January-February 2009

No. 135

WETLAND *matters*

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

Have you visited our website?... www.oxbowinc.info

Need a speaker? Call 513-851-9835

What's Taking Flight

.....by Jon Seymour

With the end of the year coming up fast, I am reminded that it is again time to review our progress for the year 2008. It has been a very busy year with lots going on but in one way it was disappointing. That disappointment was our inability to expand Oxbow holdings during the year. We are willing buyers but the purchase of land requires willing sellers and currently that is not happening. We continue to wait and watch in the hope that the few remaining owners in the valley will reach a point where they wish to sell their land. While the number of parcels remaining is few, the number of acres in those parcels is large and will require a great deal of money to close the purchase. We continue to build our funds to make the purchase of these acres a reality when they become available.

Now for the good news! This has been another banner year for Oxbow on many fronts. With the aid of a grant from the Earl and Florence Simmonds Foundation we rented our first office space for the business end of Oxbow, Inc. The new office located at 301 Walnut St. in downtown Lawrenceburg gives us a face and location in our next door neighbor city. It also provides a wonderful space for our collection of corporate records, research files and donated items (previously stored in a variety of basements). In addition it serves as a center of operations for Oxbow, Inc. becoming our new meeting space for educational programs, tours, and Board meetings. The office is open by appointment only, since there is no staff, but if you wish to visit come for an educational meeting or call me at 513-851-9835.

At the beginning of the year the Board decided that an effort to improve the roads within the Oxbow would yield a series of benefits. First, better roads would allow greater access (more drivable days per year) to viewing the wildlife in the Oxbow, allowing members and visitors to share in the wonder and excitement of the active ecosystem the Oxbow represents. Second, better roads would keep drivers from using the fields to get around bad spots in the road thereby preventing destruction of the agricultural fields by well meaning visitors. Third, better roads discourage people who see Oxbow roads as a "truck commercial" and

like to challenge their 4-wheel drive trucks to see if they can handle the mud ruts of the Oxbow roads. With fewer ruts and less damage to adjacent fields we would save a lot of volunteer time and expense in repairing the roads each year. We graveled the Oxbow Lake road between the Hardintown entrance and the Oxbow Lake overlook. We also graveled some low spots in the road that abuts the Lawrenceburg Conservancy District (LCD) mitigation area. These two projects together made the "Shell to Slot" auto trip a low risk reality most of 2009. We also graveled the road that parallels the railroad track from the LCD to the railroad track crossover near Wood Duck Slough. In future years we will continue the project to gravel most of the roads in the Oxbow where we have ownership and work with other land owners to see if we can cooperate on roads crossing their property. We realize that due to the nature of the soils within the Oxbow we will need to apply fresh "skim" coats on previous graveled areas from time to time in order to maintain drivability.

We continued our clean-up days to get rid of trash in the Oxbow. We still get a lot of trash each year from floods and unfortunately a lot that is directly dumped in the Oxbow by individuals that we wish were better educated about protecting the environment. The good news is that we are getting less and less trash each year and finding fewer tires. If the area has never been picked up (and there are a few of the more remote areas that have not been) we still find years of trash accumulation. But if we have cleaned an area, it now stays pretty clean. We are getting to the point where we only have to clear away the most recent accumulation of trash. In addition to the trash removal we have added removal of invasive plants from key areas of the Oxbow. This effort will continue to grow as the problem of invasive plants is growing throughout the Midwest. You will see more opportunities to help in this effort as we schedule days for removal and announce them in *Wetland Matters* and on our website.

In the Spring we received a legacy gift from the estate of Jinny (Wiseman) Witte that the Board decided to dedicate as an endowment for Oxbow, Inc. The income from the endowment will be put back into the endowment to build it for future use. Since the gift was in form of stocks

(continued page 2)

(What's Taking Flight—Continued from page 1)

and bonds it has taken a hit from the current financial situation. However the gift does not completely come under our control for 10 years from the time of Jinny's passing - there should be plenty of time for recovery and growth. Jinny also left a smaller legacy gift from a charitable trust she had established. The Board decided to honor Jinny and her first husband, Art Wiseman, both founders of Oxbow, Inc., by establishing a fund for nature education. The first grant from this Fund, covered in part by an additional education grant from Kathryn and Vishnoo Shahani, supported the first Cincinnati Birding Festival, sponsored through the auspices of the College of Mount St. Joseph. The grant provided binoculars, bird books, and reusable instructional materials for the young people attending the festival's scheduled bird walks and for participating community school teachers to teach classes related to the birding festival.

The spring brought the return of our major yearly fund raiser, the Cincinnati Area Birdathon. This year was spectacular with an outstanding 197 species being identified within the Birdathon Area during a single 24 hour period. An astonishing 17 teams participated with two teams splitting their donations between Oxbow and the team sponsoring organization (Audubon Society and the Cincinnati Nature Center). Over \$5500 was raised for habitat and access improvement projects within the Oxbow.

The work of several years of collecting observations of bird life in the Oxbow bore fruit this summer. The efforts of Dave Styer and Jay Stenger in collecting and submitting those observations to the Ohio Audubon Society resulted in the Oxbow Area being named part of an Important Bird Area (Lower Great Miami Valley) by the Ohio Audubon Society. This honor is shared with the Hamilton County Park District parks that line the lower Great Miami Valley. Look for Important Bird Area signs at our entrances. This designation recognizes the preservation of crucial habitat in the lower Great Miami Valley by Oxbow, Inc. and the Hamilton County Park District. In the case of the Oxbow area we have records for 283 species of birds using the Oxbow. It is not only the variety but the rarity and numbers of the birds using the area. Migrating ducks and summering herons and egrets use the area in large concentrations. More recently the number and variety of raptor sightings in the area has increased markedly, adding an exclamation point to the value of the habitat.

Habitat improvement remains one of our primary goals. Here we have had some setbacks as well as some successes. We had two setbacks on our plans to make some major habitat improvements. The first setback was finding out that our application for a waiver from needing a state permit to impound about 14 acres of water during the winter in a flooded farm field, was rejected by the Indiana DNR. This is only a temporary setback and we will be pursuing getting the necessary permits to allow us to complete the Seasonal Flooding Project. Unfortunately the permit process is more costly than doing it without the need for a permit. However the Board feels that the value to wildlife of the impoundment during the winter is well worth the expenditure of the money needed to obtain the permit. The other

setback involved our agreement with the Indiana DOT for a mitigation project along the southwest border of Oxbow Lake. This agreement was made several years ago and we expected the project to be completed a long time ago. As time dragged on without the INDOT starting the project, our inquiries uncovered the fact that the State had failed to consider the need to do archaeological work in the area prior to starting the shoreline restoration. This was going to add an appreciable extra cost to the project and the State was getting cold feet on whether they wanted to do this or seek another property that was cheaper. We offered the State a way around their problem but we could not agree on the details and the deal was cancelled. The good news is that we had let the area go fallow for 4 years and bank restoration had started on its own due to natural succession of plants moving into the former agricultural field. Also on the positive side we have continued our association with the Friends of the Great Miami who have run projects planting trees in the former INDOT site to enhance the bank restoration. They also have started a project on the shore of the Great Miami River to plant about 2/3 of an acre in trees in a 1400 foot strip along the Great Miami River.

I have come this far without hardly mentioning any animals but they have been spectacular as usual. One of the highlights of the year was the great good fortune of photographer Ken Geiger who stumbled on a family of River Otters and who had the patience and the skill to turn his good fortune into over 400 photos of an otter family at rest and at play. Prior to this the photographs of otters using the Oxbow were just distant heads in the water. We were thrilled to have this intimate portrait of wild otters at home in the Oxbow. Thousands of ducks and geese took advantage of our new improved wildlife crop policies with our tenant farmers. Winter counts from the Oxbow showed heavy use of the flooded crop areas. During the Great Outdoor Weekend while the regular tour group was watching a Peregrine Falcon strafe shorebirds in the Oxbow, Jay Stenger and Paul Wharton were leading an Audubon class in the Oxbow across the valley under the shadow of the hill at Shawnee Lookout and spotted a record 8 Bald Eagles. A new specie sighted in the Oxbow was 3 Lesser Blackbacked Gulls that showed up for Jay and Paula Stenger this spring and at least 1 stayed for Paul Wharton to check it out the next morning. In June, Jon Seymour and Lonnie Parker found a Black Scoter and a Cattle Egret. A couple of intriguing sightings of summertime Sandhill Cranes in August and September rounded out the most unusual reports. The number of Bald Eagle sightings continues to climb in both numbers and frequency of reports.

Every trip to the Oxbow yields something new and I want to invite members and friends who have not been to the Oxbow or maybe have not been for a long time to come back and renew your acquaintance with the Oxbow area. In this day of local vacations, local foods, and local entertainment, the Oxbow is your local fix on nature as it is meant to be experienced. Come and enjoy and when you leave spread the word about (dating myself - as Jackie Gleason would say) "How Great It IS!"

Oxbow Inc. PROGRAMS

To reach the Oxbow, Inc. Office take Highway US 50 south from the #16 exit of I-275. Pass the Argosy exit and turn left at the second stop light onto Walnut St. 301 Walnut is on the right side at the second stop light where Walnut changes from two way to one way. Free parking is available on Walnut St., Center St., and in the parking lot behind the building.

Tuesday, January 13, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
301 Walnut St. Lawrenceburg
The Oxbow, Inc. Office

Learn about the early written history of the Oxbow through the eyes and lives of such larger than life characters such as John Cleves Symmes and William Henry Harrison. Discover the unique history of Fort Finney and its critical role in the formation of the United States of America. Tom Strohfeltdt, former curator of the Ohio Historical Society, is a student of frontier history and is an avid hiker and canoer. He worked at Williamsburg, VA for ten years as a trained rifle maker. He has published 47 articles on the American frontier.

February 10, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
301 Walnut St. Lawrenceburg
The Oxbow, Inc. Office

Invisible Landscapes:
Learning from Nature in the City

Mention "Nature", and most of us think of deserts, mountains, and lakes; we think of national parks, tropical rain forests, or remote wilderness areas. Nobody thinks of the urban landscapes where most of us actually live and work. Because of our own ignorance or neglect, such places remain largely invisible, and yet they are full of life and interest, offering essential lessons on the path toward sustainability. Author John Tallmadge shares ideas and stories from his recent book *The Cincinnati Arch*, which showcases the rich natural and cultural history of our own landscape.

For more information, see www.johntallmadge.com.

Oxbow Inc. FIELD TRIPS

Friday, January 9, 2009, 8:00 p.m.

A Moonlit Evening Winter Walk

Meet: Shawnee Lookout Golf Course Clubhouse
 Leader: John Klein, (513) 728-3551, extension # 227

Oxbow's beloved Morris Mercer loved the night winter woods, especially if there was snow on the ground. He and John Klein started doing this trip together many years ago and it has become an Oxbow Inc. annual January tradition. Morris is no longer with us, but his good friend John loves the tradition and has kept it alive. There will be a full moon and John plans to walk the Miami Fort Trail and see what nature has to offer. There is a good chance that owls and deer will be seen or heard and John will talk about the history of the area and have a scope available for stargazing. John, who is the Land Manager for the Hamilton County Park District, will meet us in the Parking Lot of the Shawnee Lookout Golf Course Clubhouse at 8:00 p.m. The walk should only take about an hour and a half. John is like Morris in that he would like a little snow on the ground. However, severe weather will cancel this trip. If you have any doubts as to whether the trip is cancelled or not, call John at (513) 728-3551, extension # 227. Join John for this unique experience, it's highly recommended. Dress warmly.

Sunday, February 22, 2009, 8:00 a.m.

Early Spring Waterfowl Migration

Meet in the upper Oxbow parking lot at the main entrance just beyond the cement plant
 Leader: Paul Wharton, (513) 353-3403,
pwharton@fuse.net

If you like to see ducks you should consider joining Paul for this morning trip into the Oxbow. Early spring waterfowl migration should be in full swing and they will be the primary focus of this trip. However a diverse number of other winter and early spring migrants will also be seen. It's also a great time of year to find Bald Eagles in the Oxbow. Paul is an expert birder and has great bird finding abilities so expectations are high. Paul will move around to several spots in the Oxbow area depending on accessibility and water conditions. Aside from seeing waterfowl and other birds, mud is also guaranteed, so dress appropriately. Feel free to contact Paul if you have any questions regarding the trip, (513) 353-3403, pwharton@fuse.net.

Conservation Corner

.....by Jon Seymour

"To those devoid of imagination, a blank place on the map is a useless waste; to others, the most valuable part." Aldo Leopold, Conservation Esthetic, 1938.

When I look at a road map the Oxbow area is just a white space where nothing of value goes. When I flip on my GPS navigator there are no roads in the Oxbow to follow. According to the technical workaday world nothing of value exists in the Oxbow. This we know to be false but it is still the attitude of most of the population.

In the last few months we have seen the economic world collapse upon itself and many dreams have collapsed with it. There will be hardship for many and charitable organizations like Oxbow, Inc. are not immune. We exist on the good will and generosity of many. During an economic collapse, like the one we are currently experiencing, good will may be unaffected but generosity is contracted by cold reality. There is less money to share and priorities have to be readjusted. Charitable donations are often the first to go.

We have set up Oxbow, Inc. to weather tough times and we have been blessed with many supporters who are more than willing to sacrifice for the sake of preserving the Oxbow area. But we have something to offer our supporters and any others that wish to avail themselves of the treasures the Oxbow offers. For the price of the gasoline it takes to visit, a drive to the Oxbow can place you in the middle of a seemingly ageless drama that is free of worries about the value of the dollar or concerns about job stability. At a time when we all need a little relief from the pressure of everyday worries, we can sit and watch a heron stealthily stalk a fish in an ice cold pond, an eagle perched regally on a branch surveying its domain, or a V of geese breaking up and descending in circles and waves to the safety of the water below. These things have been going on for eons and will continue for untold eons more. They are changeless, they are wild, they are comforting. Watching events unfold in nature during a single day reminds us of the age old and ceaseless tide of nature as it flows from one season to the next. There is a certain inevitability in the ebb and flow of nature's tide. It is comforting to the soul, and that is what we all need in these uncertain economic times.

Cranic Radar

In 1992 when Dave Styer published his book *Birds of the Oxbow* the entries under *Grus canadensis* were sparse. The common Sandhill Crane was none too common in the Oxbow area. He cites Kemsies and Randle in 1953 with only one recent record in Southwestern Ohio. Skip ahead all the way to 1972 to a report of an Oxbow flyover of 25 cranes for our next record. Between 1972 and 1992 Styer reports only 7 records.

Well, things have changed and continue to change. Now flyover sightings and migratory stops of Sandhill Cranes are common reports from all over the Great Miami River valley including the Oxbow area. While not abundant, it is not unusual to see Sandhills in the Oxbow during both the northern and southern migration. The adoption by thousands of cranes of Jasper-Pulaski Wildlife Area in northern Indiana as major migratory stopover and more recently the appearance of thousands of cranes wintering in Ewing Bottoms south of Indianapolis have made crane sightings more common in the area. Two years ago, frequent sightings of a family of cranes during the winter in the Oxbow, fueled speculation that the family wintered in the Lower Great Miami Valley.

This year has been a little unusual for Sandhill sightings in the Oxbow. A pair was heard by Tom Sturgeon duet calling on June 30, 2008. Two observers, Jim Lundberg and Jon Seymour separately sighted a single crane on September 10th. By late November the Sandhill migration was in full swing and several flocks were reported flying through the area. What makes this year unusual is that the Sandhills are hanging around more. On November 23rd, Jay Stenger and the Oxbow bird tour group found a flock of 67 cranes standing on the ice of Oxbow Lake. Paul Wharton reported a flock of 65 flying out of the Oxbow on December 11th. Denis Conover and Jon Seymour observe 8 cranes in a soybean field on the morning of December 13th. At sunset on the 13th Jon observed 12 Sandhills casually strolling the muddy shore of Oxbow Lake.

Are they staying??? Only time will tell, but many observers will be watching! Could we be seeing overflow from the Ewing Bottoms flock? Is global warming allowing the cranes to winter further north than in the historical past (suspected reason for the existence of the Ewing Bottoms flock)? The cranes have been seen in areas where we have wildlife crop standing. Is that part of what is drawing the cranes to the area? We will have to wait to see what happens, but it could be exciting. Sandhills are wonderful birds to watch and they are not particularly frightened by cars. Let's hope there is a match developing between the cranes and the Oxbow and that we will see more of these wild and beautiful birds in the future.

**Election Time Again
January Members Meeting
Tuesday, January 13, 2009**

Our January Members Meeting will be held Tuesday, January 13, 2009 at the new office at 301 Walnut St. in Lawrenceburg. We will hold our annual elections at the meeting and we hope as many members as possible will attend to conduct this important part of the annual business of Oxbow, Inc.

Standing for Officer Positions:

- President - Jon Seymour
- Vice-President – John Getzendanner
- Secretary – Dwight Poffenberger
- Treasurer – Jim Poehlmann
- Indiana Agent – John Getzendanner
- Ohio Agent – Dwight Poffenberger

Standing for election to a three-year term on the Board ending in February 2012:

- Denis Conover
- Dennis Mason
- Kani Meyer
- Meg Poehlmann
- Richard Pope
- David Styer

**SAVE THE DATE!!!
POLISH THE BINOCULARS LENS!!!
DUST OFF THE BIRD BOOKS!!!
GET OUT YOUR CHECK BOOKS!!!
START YOU PENS!!!**

That's right—**Birdathon 2009** will be back on **May 8-9**. We will be out to have more competing teams, more teams sharing receipts with co-sponsors, and of course more money raised for Oxbow that will be dedicated to habitat and access improvement. Stay tuned to upcoming **Wetland Matters** for all the news and announcements. Plan to count birds, plan to raise money, and plan to donate money. This is a wonderful way for everyone to participate in improving the Oxbow, have fun doing it, and reap the benefits of the improvements.

Oxbow, Inc. Memorials & Honorariums

Donor

Bob and Tina Schlegel
Ken and Shirley Durbin
Janet Todd

In Memory of

Anthony Wayne Riedel
Dale Durbin
Richard Todd



Oxbow, Inc. would like to thank:

Joanne Jeffery,
Jean A. Kearns
and
Ed and Marcia Wilz

for their generous gifts

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.



The new office of Oxbow, Inc. located at 301 Walnut St. Lawrenceburg, IN continues to take shape. Recently the window art for the office was completed identifying the office as that of Oxbow, Inc. Our motto, "The Duck Stops Here" is proudly displayed on the windows facing Central Ave. and our logo and mission statement are on the window and door facing Walnut St. The artwork was paid for by a grant from the Main Street Lawrenceburg organization, a civic organization dedicated to improving the business climate and the appearance of downtown Lawrenceburg. *Photo by Jon Seymour*



Cottontail Rabbits are frequent visitors to the yard of Jeanne and Therese Bocklage in Albuquerque, New Mexico. See story on page 9. *Photo by Jeanne Bocklage*



Scaled Quail are common in the southwest and provide a food source for predators such as the Bobcat mentioned in Jeanne Bocklage's tale about just how wild a yard can be. See story on page 9. *Photo by Jeanne Bocklage*



Farmers holding a lease from Oxbow, Inc. are required to leave a portion of their crop standing in the field so that wildlife can benefit from the increase food supply in the Oxbow. Both corn and soybean can be left in the field providing food and cover to a wide variety of animals. *Photo by Jon Seymour*



Corn crop left for wildlife provides an abundant source of food for everything from Sandhill Cranes and Beaver to Ducks and Geese all the way to field mice (and from there indirectly to raptors). *Photo by Jon Seymour*



With water levels low the entrance holes to beaver lodges are exposed. This lodge was the temporary home this past summer of a family of River Otters who took advantage of the construction after the water levels rose and stayed high through the Spring and early Summer. *Photo by Jon Seymour*



A pair of Levant water frogs were seen in the fen know as Abraham's Well near Al Asad See story on page 11. *Photo by Major Randel Rogers*



Many Eagles are being sighted in the Oxbow this fall. This nearly mature Bald Eagle was seen perched at the north end of the Oxbow area along the Great Miami River near Lost Bridge. *Photo by Bruce Leonhardt*



Ben Miller was exploring the north shore of Mercer Pond and found the abandoned hunters blind lying near the shore of the pond. While sitting in the blind Ben got a stately visitor. While the Great Blue Heron is common in the Oxbow they do not usually allow a close human approach. In this case the bird approached the human. The hunter's blind instantly became a bird blind. *Photo by Ben Miller*



This fen, near Al Asad, is known locally as "Abraham's Well" and is a year round water source for birds and wildlife. See story on page 11. *Photo by Major Randel Rogers*



Three Great Egrets rest and feed in the Oxbow. *Photo by Allan Claybon*



usings

by Dave Styer

The House Sparrow

Back when I became a teenage bird fanatic I read that Eastern Bluebirds were common residents of cities and towns prior to the introduction of House Sparrows. When the House Sparrows were introduced they displaced the bluebirds because they aggressively took the same nesting habitat. I resented growing up with House Sparrows rather than bluebirds around the buildings.

The House Sparrow, a native of Europe, Asia, and northern Africa, has cast its lot with mankind. It has been introduced in North, Central, and South America, Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and many islands. Since House Sparrows have done so well in many of these places, we can say that this bird has benefited greatly by its association with people.

For ornithologists who wish to study a bird in depth the House Sparrow has been a great boon. Several thousand articles have been published dealing with these birds. They deal with adaptability, food intake, evolution, pest control, population; you name it. In the House Sparrow article by Lowther and Cink in *The Birds of North America* we find the following:

While diving is not a normal component of daily behavior, Summer-Smith (1963) noted sparrows trapped in circular, multi-celled trap over a water dish regularly attempted escape by diving into 9 cm deep water and swimming 30 cm under water from one cell to another.

Although this experiment was performed with House Sparrows it may well apply to many bird species. I have felt that if a typical songbird landed on deep water it would likely drown, and if it went under it would almost surely drown. I was likely wrong. That same type of plasticity has enabled birds that regularly go under water to evolve from ones that don't. Dippers would be a good example. These thrush-like songbirds feed by walking under water in mountain streams. Possibly, all water birds (ducks, loons, grebes, etc.) have evolved from land birds. The same experiment could be carried out with other birds. Would you like to find out if Cerulean Warblers can swim under water?

Somewhere I have read that there is a recent decrease in the House Sparrow population. I don't know where I read it, so I did an Internet search under

"House Sparrow population trends." Nearly all the results of the search were from Europe, where there has been a precipitous decline of House Sparrows in their native range. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) informs us that in the past 25 years the UK population "has declined by 62%. Because of this decline in numbers, the House Sparrow is now red listed as a species of high conservation concern." The RSPB article mentions the decline a hundred years ago associated with the switch from horses to motor vehicles. The article gives multiple reasons for the recent decline. Cleaner agricultural processes make grain far less available. There are fewer nesting sites since buildings are tighter. It is important to feed nestlings insects for higher protein for growth, but the insect population has dramatically decreased. No doubt much of the House Sparrow decline in much of Western Europe has the same causes.

There may be an overabundance of House Sparrows here at the same time that they are threatened in their original homeland. I am reminded of the terrible invasive weed, Garlic Mustard, that spreads densely through our woods and must squeeze out many native woodland wildflowers. Several years ago a friend in the Cincinnati Wildflower Preservation Society attended a conference in England. One of the talks was about a native plant restoration project where they were planting the endangered Garlic Mustard!

I contacted Ned Keller, keeper of Cincinnati area bird records. On Christmas Bird Counts he sees no particular increase or decrease in the local House Sparrow population. In the late eighties and early nineties over 3,000 House Sparrows were counted three different years, but in the past 7 years under a thousand were counted per year. It's hard to tell whether that's due to a decreased House Sparrow population, or if there simply weren't as many people counting House Sparrows.

I also think back to a November day in 1976 when Bill Moring and I saw approximately 500 House Sparrows in the Oxbow area. We also saw approximately 10,000 Red-winged Blackbirds.



There must have been a lot of available corn. Do agricultural practices here still allow for these large numbers of birds?

All the Wild Things

.....by Jeanne Bocklage

Forty-five years ago, Maurice Sendak wrote and illustrated an award-winning children's book entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* about all the wild things that cavorted with a young mischief-maker named Max when he was sent to bed without supper. My daughter, Therese, and I have our own menagerie of wild things here in Albuquerque, New Mexico, but not in the bedrooms.

In late August, we drove up to the Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge in Las Vegas-- not that modern, glittery Las Vegas -- the near-ancient, historic village in northeastern New Mexico where Teddy Roosevelt once held a reunion of his Rough Riders.

We had hoped to see many bird species, maybe even one of my favorites, the Ruddy Duck. No such luck. We will have to return in winter when between 20 and 50 Bald Eagles are said to take up residence away from the cold and snow. However, we did count several Western Meadowlarks in the fields, Tree Swallows and Cliff Swallows lined up on the electric wires like Rockefeller Center Rockettes and a Swainson's Hawk did dive bomb us, not once but twice, while scolding us as we poked along the loop road. We did see cattle on both sides of the roadway grazing on refuge land. Also the road to the Visitor Center was locked -- this on a summer weekend. Could this be the result of insufficient government funding?

We gave up on the 8,672-acre preserve (that probably was a mistake) and headed for the nearby 1863 ruins of Fort Union, once an important stop along the Santa Fe Trail and today a National Monument. This fort, the third built on the grounds, almost could have qualified as a western frontier city. It had rows of homes, street lamps, a trader's store. It was a military garrison with guardhouse and prison, a territorial arsenal, a military supply depot for all other southwestern forts, a mechanic's corral (for wagons) plus a corral for thousands of draft animals. It had an 18-piece Regimental Band and a Fort Union Baseball Club. It had a 36-bed hospital with a "dead house" (mortuary), a surgeon and staff of eight. Soldiers and their families received free medical care while civilians had to pay about fifty cents per day for board. At its prime, Fort Union even had a hotel, restaurant, bowling alley and saloon. May 15, 1891, the fort became history but the ruins are intriguing. Seemingly appropriate, Turkey Vultures circled the ruins. A Jack Rabbit surprised Therese on the trail, jumped right in front of her amazing Therese with its speed of departure.

On the homeward drive, Therese and I congratulated ourselves on our own little wildlife refuge -- our yard. VW is our resident Desert Cottontail and Buster, a very large Greater Roadrunner, is our more-or-less once-

a-month visitor. Therese gets to watch the Black-chinned Hummingbirds while she exercises on her elliptical trainer as the hummers visit her Root Beer Hyssop outside her window. We love our Mourning Doves, White-winged Doves, House Finches, Say's Phoebes, Dark-eyed Juncos, Curve-billed Thrashers, Canyon Towhees, Western Scrub Jays (who hide their peanuts-in-the-shell in our planters) and all our LBJ varieties. Our chunky, handsome Scaled Quail come in all sizes as the females have their families at different times. Sweet joy is the single file parade of quail along the top of our five-foot adobe wall which surrounds our house. Miniature lizards clamber up the walls in the bright sun, but one likes to hide out of the heat behind my garden bird plaque. Once we had a tiny grey-green toad at our front door looking like he was about to ring the doorbell. Another time, a thick brown-striped Garter Snake almost made it inside our garage. But without doubt, our greatest thrills in the past three years have been the *really wild wild things* similar to Max's.

Saturday, September 6, about 3:30 p.m., I was talking on the phone with my daughter, Paula, in Texas. When she asked if I knew the dates for the presidential debates, I went to my desk for the list and happened to glance outside my glass door to my small patio. There, looking at me as I looked at her, was a beautiful bobcat, slimmer and seemingly younger than the bobcat Therese and I saw in the street in front of our house, 3:30 p.m., December 29, 2007. And this one was inside our wall. In the enclosed part of our yard! On my patio! I called for Therese to come quickly. After a minute or two, the animal turned and strolled to the back patio, looked around for an exit, then with one leap was on top of the wall, jumped down and was gone. Our parting view was of the short tail. Both of these cats made the local TV evening news.

Fast forward to Thursday, October 16, about 1:00 p.m. Just as I was going from our dining room to the back patio, I caught a glimpse of something furry dropping off our east wall into the wide world beyond. Could that be the bobcat returning? Inside our walled yard again? Very surprised and not being Max-like brave, I hesitated to go take a better look. When I did, there was no animal in sight so I then looked over the south wall and saw the traveler going west. He definitely was not a domestic pet but since I did not get a good sighting I was puzzled as to what this creature was.

Move forward to 4:00 p.m.-- same day. I went to our garage for supertime bird seed and to collect our mail from the mailbox column at the curb. As I stepped onto the driveway there was a tannish brown, and I think slightly startled, animal staring at me. (The noise of the garage door going up must have peaked his curiosity.) Stunned, I could do nothing but stare at him. After

(All the Wild Things - Continued from page 9)

a few seconds! Minutes?! He hurried to stand beneath a small tree in our neighbor's yard where he faced away from me but turned his face to look at me again. He had dark marks on his face, small ears. He was about the size of a German Shepherd but with shorter legs and a longer body. It was then that I noticed his long rope-like tail. Suddenly, he took off to the west, almost flying, he bounded so fast, through four or five front yards until I could no longer see him. I can only believe this wild beauty was a young mountain lion.

On Thursday, November 13, my bobcat returned. I was late feeding my birds but at noon I put seed out on my patio feeders and was walking to the back patio along a narrow fieldstone path when something stirred under a bush to my left. Not one foot from where I was walking! This bobcat made a fast dash for the back patio wall and crouched Cheshire cat-like staring at me. I turned and hurried back to my room and did not go outside the rest of the day except in the car via the garage. The following morning when feeding the birds I found a mound of Mourning Dove feathers under a different bush. The puzzle was solved why this bobcat preferred our yard to all the others.

Why do we have bobcats and mountain lions in our neighborhood within the city limits of ABQ? One reason may be a rule of the High Desert Home Association that only native plants may be grown in your yard. Swathes of land are kept undeveloped and they most probably act as mini corridors for wildlife travel. (We hear coyotes in certain seasons.) Also we abut the Cibola National Forest which encompasses the Sandia Mountains. Mountain lions are known to inhabit the other side, the eastern side, of the Sandias.

Therese and I know we are blessed with all these wild things in our personal preserve. We don't even have to make believe like Max. But then, we don't order our *wild things* to behave, either.

Horseshoe Bottoms Diary

November 23, 2008

Jay and Jack Stenger led the Oxbow Bird Walk on a cold November Sunday morning. While only a few hardy people showed up for the walk, the show was spectacular. Anyone who has ever closely observed a flock of Sandhill Cranes will tell you the experience of being near these birds, that have change little since the Pleistocene, is spiritual. Here is Jay's birding report as it appeared on the Cincinnati Birds website. Note that while freezing their tails at the end of November they saw an outstanding 55 species.

Jack and I led an Oxbow Inc. field trip in the Oxbow this morning. The 19-degree temperature at 7:30 this morning may have had something to do with our small turnout, as only 3 other hardy souls joined us. But the cold aside, it was a beautiful, clear, crisp morning with lots of bird activity. From 8:00 a.m. to noon we managed to find 55 total species in the Oxbow area. Our highlights included 67 Sandhill Cranes, a Snow Goose (white morph), and 2 Bald Eagles as well as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Fox Sparrow, Pine Siskin and abundant sparrows and other songbirds.

Water levels are still low in Oxbow Lake and it was completely frozen, as was Osprey Lake. Juno Pond, the Cement Pond and Jackpot pond were all about 60% open. Standing out on the ice in front of the Oxbow Lake Overlook at 8:00 a.m. were 67 Sandhill Cranes, which gave us spectacular and close looks. The birds remained there until about 11:00 a.m., when we heard them take flight and saw them head south as they flew right over our heads while we were over at Jackpot Pond. Around that same time, 1 Snow Goose was seen on Oxbow Lake before it took off with a flock of about 40 Canada Geese. The 2 Bald Eagles (a sub-adult and a 2nd year bird) were seen along the Great Miami River at Lost Bridge around 11:30 a.m. We didn't have a great diversity of waterfowl today, probably due to the ice and low water levels.

The complete list of the 55 species we had in the Oxbow area this morning included: Snow Goose (white morph) 1, Canada Geese 100+, Mute Swan 1, Gadwall 23, American Wigeon 2, American Black Duck 18, Mallard 125~, Northern Shoveler 3, Hooded Merganser 3, Pied-billed Grebe 1, Double-crested Cormorant 1, Great Blue Heron 40+, Bald Eagle 2, Red-tailed Hawk 7, American Coot 75~, Sandhill Crane 67, Killdeer 25, Ring-billed Gull 60+, Rock Pigeon 25, Mourning Dove 25, Belted Kingfisher 2, Red-bellied Woodpecker 4, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 1, Downy Woodpecker 5, Hairy Woodpecker 1, Northern Flicker 3, Blue Jay 1, American Crow 300+, Horned Lark 4, Carolina Chickadee 12, Tufted Titmouse 4, White-breasted Nuthatch 2, Carolina Wren 6, Golden-crowned Kinglet 1, American Robin 30+, European Starling 300~, Cedar Waxwing 6, Yellow-rumped Warbler 9, Eastern Towhee 2, American Tree Sparrow 50+, Field Sparrow 1, Fox Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 50+, Swamp Sparrow 25+, White-throated Sparrow 50+, White-crowned Sparrow 10+, Dark-eyed Junco 20+, Northern Cardinal 30~, Red-winged Blackbird 80, Common Grackle 15, Brown-headed Blackbird 10, House Finch 2, Pine Siskin 1, American Goldfinch 80+ and House Sparrow 2.

Moving your nest?

Make sure **WETLAND MATTERS** goes with you!

Name _____

Old Address:

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

New Address:

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

MAIL TO:

Oxbow Inc.
P.O. Box 43391
Cincinnati, OH 45243

Please mail right away - *Wetland Matters* is third class mail and is not forwarded!

Birder in Iraq

Maj. Randel Rogers' official job duties include making sure that troops in western Iraq have all the ammunition, food, water and fuel they need. But it's his unofficial duties that have attracted an audience on base, across Iraq, and throughout the United States.

Rogers, who is an Ohio Army National Guard member at Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, is an amateur birder, a naturalist and the go-to-guy for all questions of native plants, birds and animals. "Today, I got a pencil sketch of some kind of gerbil I'm trying to look up," Rogers said in a recent interview. "I've had people bring me pictures - usually they don't pick the plants. Once in a while, they bring me a sample in a container, or (hand me) rocks."

Rogers is a logistics officer with the 371st Sustainment Brigade who was sent to the largest air base in Iraq in July. Although many people see the country as only a war zone, it represents something else to Rogers. He sees it as an opportunity to study species he's never seen.

Within a month of deployment, he had published the first of his online newsletters to educate (and entertain) fellow troops and people back in the United States about the plants, animals and insects he and others spot in Anbar Province. Rogers publishes "Al Asad au Natural" every few weeks.

Rogers says the newsletter allows him to collectively answer questions, educate soldiers about their surroundings and build morale among troops. He shared the following thoughts with regard to the uniqueness of wetlands in Iraq during our correspondence about this article.

Since many of the wetlands in Iraq are vernal marshes in desert wadi systems, they are not always appreciated for their importance as wetlands to wildlife and plant diversity. Often these areas are subject to development when near existing infrastructure. A wadi is similar to what we might call a gully or a larger one a canyon - a topographic feature carved as water drains to the nearest river valley. The wadi at Al Asad is typical for the major wadis of western Iraq - several miles long with many branches draining to the Euphrates River, with sidewalls of 40-60' on average. In the case of the Al Asad wadi, the erosion has cut thru the sandstone and limestone down to a layer of clay, which forms an impermeable layer holding groundwater near the surface. This allows the existence of palm oasis and even a small fen. During the rainy season, this area becomes a wide marsh, but there are pockets of water present year round - and thanks at least in part to our water treatment plant, a year round stream flows thru part of the valley. Thanks to all of this geology, Al Asad has been a great place for a birder to be stationed. Rogers said that he recently was watching shorebirds like green sandpiper, common snipe, and red-wattled plover.

Wet areas here also face challenges as they are seen as mosquito breeding grounds, and the solutions that are usually reached for are chemical warfare or draining.

Because it is a desert environment, the vernal wetlands and small fens are incredibly important and support tremendous diversity. They are also critical habitat during bird migration.

Even modest support to Nature Iraq really helps - the Non-Governmental Organizations here do not yet have the same clout that they do in the States, and nurturing this young organization until it is as strong as our conservancy groups will pay major dividends in this environmentally important part of the world.

A good link to Maj. Rogers' newsletters is through the Columbus Audubon Society - www.columbusaudubon.org. It seems that communing with nature (and birds are one of the easiest ways to commune) brings a sense of comfort and normalcy even in a war zone. It is also something that can bring a sense of joy no matter where you are in the world or what takes you there.



Oxbow's Christmas Wish List 2008

It is the Christmas Season so like many others we have prepared our Wish List for Santa. Last year Santa filled several of our wishes so we must have been on the good list. We hope that if members know about items and talents that we need, they might realize ways they might be able to help, and may want to play the part of Santa.

- We need a volunteer to schedule our adult education program. This volunteer would contact speakers and arrange for them to make presentations to the Oxbow, Inc. membership once each month at our members meetings.
- We need a volunteer to look at our record keeping and recommend improvements to storage and filing systems.
- We need a volunteer to design an Oxbow based nature education program for High School level. We already have an adult education program and we are working on designing programs for K-8 level. We still need to develop an education program designed for kids in the 9-12 level and at the College level. If you have an interest in designing and/or delivering age appropriate programs based on the Oxbow please consider volunteering your time and talent.
- We need someone to donate a pickup truck in good working order so that we can have greater flexibility hauling trash out of the Oxbow.
- We need someone to donate the year round use of a dumpster in the Oxbow area so that we can take the trash we have on a daily basis there for dumping. (We will still ask Rumpke to donate a dumpster on site for large projects.)
- If you have a passion for destroying invasive plants we need someone to build an invasive plant control program for the Oxbow.

If you can help with any of these needs or think you know someone who can, please call Jon Seymour at 513-851-9835.

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 know 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			

Mail to: **Oxbow, Inc.**
P. O. Box 43391
Cincinnati OH 45243-0391
513-851-9835

Corporation Officers

President, Dr. Jon Seymour	(513) 851-9835
Vice President, John Getzendanner	(812) 537-5728
Recording Secretary, Dwight Poffenberger	(513) 241-2324
Corresponding Secretary, Dennis Mason	(513) 385-3607
Treasurer, Jim Poehlmann	(513) 931-4072
Ohio Agent, Dwight Poffenberger	(513) 241-2324
Indiana Agent, John Getzendanner	(812) 537-5728

Committee Chairpersons

Conservation, Dr. Jon Seymour	(513) 851-9835
Easement Inspection, Mike Kluesener	(812) 623-7800
Land Management, Karl Meyer	(513) 948-8630
Programs	open
Research, Dr. Steve Pelikan	(513) 681-2574
Speakers Bureau, Dr. Jon Seymour	(513) 851-9835
Newsletter Editor, Meg Poehlmann	(513) 931-4072
Newsletter Email: meggster@fuse.net	

Member Communications: Joanne Earls, Kathleen Corneil, Lynda Mason, Velda Miller, Pat Shanklin, Sarah Shell, Suzanne Skidmore, Barb Varland, Jim Wilgenbusch

Wetland Matters, the newsletter for members of Oxbow, Inc., is published bimonthly.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cincinnati, Ohio
Permit No. 7271

