



WETLAND *matters*

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

Cincinnati Nature Center To Sponsor 2000 Birdathon

The Cincinnati Nature Center will conduct the 2000 Birdathon, it was announced in early April. The annual Birdathon, which was initiated in 1989, was formerly sponsored by Oxbow, Inc.

The Birdathon this year will be held from 5:00 p.m., Friday, May 12, until 5:00 p.m., Saturday, May 13. Participants in the Birdathon are limited to birding in a 50-mile radius of Cincinnati. The tally for the Birdathon will be held at CNC's Rowe Woods location instead of Winton Woods as it has been in recent years.

The Nature Center is contacting by mail teams and individuals who took part in the 1999 Birdathon. Other persons who may wish to participate can call the Nature Center, Tealtown Road, at 831-1711 for additional information.

CNC Chief Environmental Educator Bill Creasy said that the Birdathon this year due to time constraints will be a streamlined Birdathon compared to those in the past. Thus, there will be no T-shirts, no free food, and no awards of prizes, just immediate recognition of who had the good counts.

Oxbow, Inc., members can make pledges dependent on how many species of birds members of the official Oxbow, Inc., teams find. The pledges can be allotted 100% to Oxbow, Inc., or in some proportion to the Nature Center as well.

Three teams will represent Oxbow, Inc., in the Birdathon. A pledge form will be found on page 3 of this *Wetland Matters*.

OXBOW ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

Programs

May 9 (Tuesday) 2000, 7:30 p.m.

We will meet at the Cincinnati Zoo Education Building. Norma Flannery will share a trip she had and speak on the title "Cape May Birds and Horseshoe Crabs" (471-8001).

June 13 (Tuesday) 2000, 7:30 p.m.

We will meet at the Lawrenceburg Public Library. Velda Miller will have our program and will tell us about her studies and outdoor adventures working with the school children of Southeast Indiana (812-438-3920).

Field Trips

May 20 (Saturday) 2000, 9:00 a.m.

Meet Steve Wagner at the upper boat parking lot at Shawnee Lookout Park. Shawnee Lookout Park should provide an excellent opportunity for birding in May, and Steve will be able to find where the birds are. (513) 831-7606.

June 24 (Saturday) 2000, 8:00 a.m.

Meet Greg Mendell and Connie McNamee Mendell at Gardens Alive! for an early summer walk around the Oxbow. What is so rare as a day in June? (812-926-2522).

Numerous Plant Species Identified in Oxbow Area

Widespread Trespassing Cited In Extensive Two-Year Survey

In a survey that stretched over two years sponsored by Oxbow, Inc., Denis Conover found 422 species in 81 plant families in the Oxbow area. They were found in several different types of floodplain habitat: cultivated fields, floodplain forest, Oxbow Lake, Wood Duck Slough, channels, borrow pits, mudflats, sandy areas along the Great Miami and Ohio rivers edges, old-field scrub, a planted mitigation wetland partially surrounded by a planted tall-grass prairie, highway and railroad embankments, and mown grass levees.

Cultivated Fields: Most of the Oxbow area consists of this type of habitat, planted in corn and soy beans, although many wild plants are found, both native and alien, particularly between inundations and prior to the application of herbicides and the planting of crops. Conover writes: "In one case, Dave Styer and I found a small cluster of obedient plants along the edge of a corn field by the Ohio River." (Ed. Note: Does this mean all the other plants are disobedient?)

Floodplain Forest: The most abundant tree in this area is silver maple. Others include cottonwood, box-elder, sycamore, American elm, hackberry, black willow, and green ash. Some parts of these wooded areas are starting to be overrun by the alien plants, Amur honeysuckle and garlic mustard.

Argosy Mitigation Wetland and Prairie: Conover writes that this area is coming along well but is lacking much diversity. Part of the upper field of the mitigation area is being taken over by the invasive Canada thistle, which he suggests should be controlled.

Old-Fields: These are open areas not currently being cultivated and have not yet developed into woodland. Many of the forbs to be found in these areas are natives.

Corning Easement Property: Now in transition, this area was planted a few years ago with a variety of flood-tolerant woody species including bald cypress, swamp white oak, green ash and shrubby dogwoods. These trees are now several feet high and appear to be doing well.

River Shorelines: Some species were only observed growing along the Ohio River shoreline. They are smooth buttonwood, Virginia buttonwood, and erect primrose-willow, all of which are listed as rare in Indiana or Ohio.

Oxbow Lake: Woody vegetation around the lake consists primarily of willows and silver maple. Beavers cut down large numbers of these trees, but not enough to

maintain large, open mudflats that would provide shorebird habitat.

Embankments: The higher parts of the railroad and highway embankments provide an artificial habitat which is ordinarily out of the reach of flooding.

In his patrols either by foot or canoe, Conover also noted animal life and found deer and beavers. He speculates that the chances are good that the river otter may return to the area of the mouth of the Great Miami.

In his survey which began in October 1997 and was completed last February, he found evidence of widespread trespassing of Oxbow, Inc., property, some of which was dangerous to him. In one case, a hunter attached a note to Conover's windshield threatening bodily harm to him and in another came close to getting shot accidentally by target shooters. In other instances of inappropriate activity, old tires and other trash were being dumped on Oxbow territory; quad runners, dirt bikes and other off-the-road vehicles are destroying the native vegetation and disturbing wildlife. Deer, dove, duck, geese, squirrel and rabbit hunters as well as recreational shooters are using the no-hunting designated areas illegally; during the 1999-2000 waterfowl season hunters with boats and decoys were regular visitors to Oxbow Lake itself, which is a wildlife preserve strictly off-limits to hunting. "No Hunting" or "No Trespassing" signs are torn down by trespassers almost as fast as Oxbow, Inc., volunteers can put them up.

In concluding, Conover wrote: "Despite two hundred years of intensive use the Oxbow area still contains significant natural areas consisting of open fields, woodlands, wetlands, beaches and mudflats. The area supports a wide variety of native plants and animals. "Protection of the remainder of this unprotected portion of the Oxbow area is more critical now that ever before due to the rapid, uncontrolled development currently taking place in western Hamilton County and the Lawrenceburg area. Now is the time for action to protect and to restore this precious part of our natural heritage for future generations through further land acquisition, restoration and proper stewardship."

A biologist, Conover is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati and was recently elected to the Board of Trustees of Oxbow, Inc.

Indiana Farmers Boost Conservation

Wildlife habitat has been very positively impacted by landowners taking part in the conservation provisions of the 1985, 1990, and 1996 Farm Bills in Indiana. Most of Indiana's farmers have voluntarily complied with the highly erodible land provisions and the wetland provision. The Wetland Reserve Program and the Flood Plain Easement Program have exceeded 27,000 acres enrolled. This land is being restored to shallow water and moist soil wetlands through permanent easements and includes significant acreages of grasses, forbs, and other food plants. *From The Cardinal, Newsletter of the Indiana Audubon Society.*

Farming the Oxbow Area

"No Till" Procedure Utilized

The Oxbow, Inc., area that is farmed produced a bumper crop last year despite the drought, according to Richard Pope, who farms the land for Oxbow, Inc. He spoke at the December meeting of Oxbow, Inc., at the Lawrenceburg Library building .

He also addressed the January meeting at the Cincinnati Zoo Education Building.

The reason for the success of the crop, he said, was the fact that the water table is close to the surface and water percolates up to furnish sufficient moisture for the soy bean and corn plantings.

Pope said he uses a virtual "no till" procedure that leaves food for birds and other animals. He uses a minimum amount of herbicide which has to be judiciously applied at just the right time to minimize weed infestation. He does not use insecticide because, unlike in other areas, there is no great threat to the crops from insects. Part of the explanation is that the area he farms is quite hilly unlike the level lands elsewhere. He has a choice from over 100 species of corn and weighs all the variables before making a selection. Newer varieties allow closer planting to harvest more sunshine. What he is essentially doing, he said, is "harvesting sunshine."

The weeds that pose the greatest threat, he said, are Johnson grass, Canada thistle, big root morning glory, and giant ragweed. Unless stopped at the right time in the growth cycle, the ragweed can be unstoppable.

Among the animals that do damage to the crops, the deer do the most harm. He said it is estimated that there are now more deer in southeast Indiana than there have ever been.

The squirrels, he said, do more damage than the raccoons. Even beavers can do damage. He saw one take away a corn stalk just as it would a sampling.

Human trespassers also do harm by driving their trucks or other vehicles into the cultivated areas.

Pope serves on the Oxbow, Inc., Board of Directors. He is among other farmers of the area who bid for the use of the Oxbow, Inc., farm area.

Oxbow Memorials

Donor

Oak Hills Animal Hospital,
Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.
Norma L. Flannery
David and Suzanne Skidmore
Nell Vosmer
Oak Hills Animal Hospital,
Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.
Walter and Susan McBeath

In Memory of

Alf Baker Fowler
Julie Godsey
Marie Hill
Marie Hill
Rowdy Kortekamp
Boyd and Helen
Piper

Three Teams To Represent Oxbow, Inc., in Birdathon

Three veteran teams will represent Oxbow, Inc., in the 2000 Birdathon, May 12 and 13. Team #1, 'Geriatric Gents and a Junior' consists of George Laycock, Jerry Meyer, and Karl Maslowski; Team #2, "Fire and Brimstone Birders", consists of Joe Bens, Paul Wharton, and Jay Stenger; and Team #3, "No Seesums", is made up of David Styer, Charlie Saunders, and Steve Pelikan. Team #1 will be doing their birding a week early, May 5 and 6.

Oxbow, Inc., members can pledge support for one of the teams by filling out the pledge form that follows and mailing it:

BIRDATHON 2000

OXBOW PLEDGE FORM

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

My pledge is for _____ per species
found by team # _____.

Mail to Oxbow, Inc.,
4137 Jamestown
Cincinnati, OH 45205-2007

Field Notes

by
Morris Mercer

In my last *Field Notes* I closed with a thought, that if we received rain at the correct time, migration could be spectacular around the Oxbow. It all came together in February. That was earlier than I thought it would be. But the rain came and the river was rising. The waterfowl came. At times there were a couple of thousand Canada geese in the flood plain. One evening I saw a large flock of ducks on the flooded parking lot at Shawnee. They were mostly mallards and blacks. I've seen ducks in the flooded fields, but never so many on the parking lot. I talked to a fellow who had seen a large flock of canvasbacks.

I heard from several people that they were seeing large numbers of waterfowl and many species. Frances and I saw a swan near Cemetery Lake. Was it a tundra or a trumpeter swan? A few years ago, I would have called it a tundra and moved on, but with all the work going on with the trumpeter, you can't be sure. A mute swan has been staying around the Oxbow, but that is a much easier call. We have seen so many black vultures in the area too.

Things were looking good as the river rose above flood stage. I anticipated more great birding at the flooded Oxbow but instead I was looking out the window of the hospital from my room in intensive care. It seems I was bleeding inside. Caused by medicine or whatever. But I was more than a quart low and needed more blood. So once again, Frances had to get me some help.

I came home on a Thursday and went with Jim Simpson and a group from Dayton Audubon on an Oxbow field trip on Saturday. The river had gone down very fast. The walk back to the Oxbow was through a sea of mud. I stayed very close to the car, and I didn't see all the ducks the others saw, but it was good to be out. There were large flocks of birds moving through-- grackles, red-winged blackbirds, and more rusty blackbirds than I've seen in my lifetime. We guessed 300 or 400 rusty's.

March 17, 2000, St. Patrick's Day. Once again it was time for the Irish to gather at the Oxbow in quest of the green-winged teal. The morning was bright and clear with a cold strong wind out of the north. The Irishmen for the day were wearing our heavy green coats, and they did feel good. There were Karl Maslowski, George Laycock, Jim Simpson and myself. We have been making this quest for many years. Karl had the customary box of Lorna Doone cookies under his arm, but we all knew there would be no

cookies until we saw that first green-winged teal.

Our first stop was Oxbow's newly acquired water hole (Junior's Pond). There were several blue-winged teal, a few gadwalls, wigeons, pintails, a pair of wood ducks, and a large white mute swan. But no green-winged teal. We moved on over to Jackpot Pond. Since it had rained all day on the 16th, with all the mud it looked like a good idea to walk back. The mud was thick, and the wind was strong and cold, but Jim found us some high ground. He sat the scope up overlooking the water hole.

What a great view we had. There were a lot of flooded weeds at the bend, and the weeds were full of ducks. The greatest number were our St. Patrick's Day green-winged teal, all dressed in their spring plumage. In the clear, good light, the teal were putting on a great show just being themselves. There were several fine looking pintail, a few gadwall, wigeon, mallards, blue-winged teal, and around the point we saw a nice flock of divers, mostly the ring-necked ducks, but several scaup also. We then walked back to the car, and Karl opened the Lorna Doones. Jim got the first cookie.

We moved on over for a look at Cemetery Lake. Karl said he needed the mergansers for his year 2000 list. Jim set up the scope and found us 17 hooded mergansers. They were sure pretty out there on the water. A van pulled in behind us, and Rick Pope got out and had a look at the mergansers. We had a nice talk, and Rick pointed out much of the land he farms in the Oxbow area.

Then it was on over to the great Miami River for us. I guess there were 300 or 400 gulls around Lost Bridge. All seemed to be ring-billed gulls, but we didn't check that close. I saw a red-tailed hawk in a cloud of gulls, but the hawk seemed to be trying to find a way out of all those gulls. We crossed the bridge and came back toward "E'town" for a better look at the new gravel pit.

As Jim was checking some birds, he came up with something different. He said that all he could think to call them was "speckle-bellies." He said he was having trouble saying "white-fronted geese." They were on a small island less than a hundred years from us. With the scope we could see them better than if we had them in hand. What a classy bird! It has been a few years since I saw the white-fronted geese in the Oxbow area.

We moved on to check out a couple other water holes and added the bufflehead, ruddy duck, and the pied-billed grebe to our list. We had seen lots of wildlife. I believe it was 17 species of waterfowl and we had missed some of the easy ones. We had an enjoyable morning around the Oxbow. Over lunch we made our plans for next St. Patrick's Day. I was put in charge of weather. It's to be much like today without the cold wind. Jim is to find different species and to take care of us old WWII vets. That isn't easy any more. We can't hit the trails as we once could. How many years have sneaked away since WWII? Those years do take their toll.

Sometimes I look out over the flood plain, and I can hardly believe how much is protected. I've really enjoyed the migration, and there is so much to look forward to now that spring is here. The forsythia, daffodils, the hyacinth, and the flowering trees are in full bloom. Around the Oxbow, the tops of the willows and much of the brush are greening up. This is only the beginning. The wild flowers will soon be blooming; many birds will come back to nest while others will just pass through. Don't miss this great time of the year around the Oxbow.



Muscatatuck Wildlife Refuge Plans Bird Festival for May 13 and 14

"Wings over Muscatatuck", the annual bird festival at the National Wildlife Refuge in Indiana is set for May 13 and 14.

Activities will take place from before dawn till after dusk on Saturday, May 13. Guided field trips to the refuge and to Jefferson Proving Ground will take place both Saturday and Sunday mornings. Advance registration is required for the field trips and there is a small transportation fee. A box dinner will be available for purchase on Saturday evening and there will be "Wings and Strings" musical entertainment provided during the dinner hour.

Well-known Indiana bird artist Bill Zimmerman will be on hand both for a morning bird walk and to give an evening program on the creation of his many bird books.

Other events will include a bird banding demonstration, birdhouse building, a butterfly walk, a woodcock watch, and owl calling.

Interested persons can get more information by calling 812-522-4352.

Oxbow, Inc., Receives Grant From Campbell Fund

Oxbow, Inc., acknowledges with gratitude a grant from the Allan and Dorothy Campbell Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. Such grants enable Oxbow, Inc., to extend its efforts to protect the Oxbow area.

Birds of the Oxbow

This column from the pen (computer) of Dave Styer initiates a regular series that will appear in Wetland Matters.

Black Vultures

On Thursday evening, March 16, Denis Conover and I braved the overcast and stormy weather to check out the bird life in the woods at the far end of the Oxbow. Several Black Vultures had come in, perhaps to roost there. They seemed cautious, but not particularly scared. For us the experience was very dramatic, as these large black birds wheeled around just over the tree tops above us and settled a little farther back.

Black Vultures used to be rare in the Oxbow area, and it was something of a red-letter day whenever we saw them. In the past half dozen years their numbers have been picking up, and this past winter it has not been surprising to see from ten to thirty in a flock. This has been exciting for those of us used to the rarity of Black Vultures. In contrast, the large Turkey Vulture has always been relatively common in the Cincinnati area, except during the winter.

Before writing this, I read the Black Vulture account by Neil Buckley in *The Birds of North America*. read that Turkey Vultures have a really good sense of smell, and they can locate by smell alone the carrion they feed on. Black Vultures can't. Compared to mammals, most birds have a really poor sense of smell, and the Turkey Vulture is exceptional, the Black Vulture ordinary.

How does the Black Vulture find its food (carrion)? Visually. Like most birds, Black Vultures have excellent vision. [Turkey Vultures do, too.] While Turkey Vultures soar around looking for, or smelling for food, Black Vultures soar much higher where they can watch for miles around for other vultures descending to feed. Then the Black Vultures come down and join in the feast. In fact, the article says that Black Vultures rise so high they can't be seen..

On the pleasant morning of March 31, I went to the Oxbow to watch Black Vultures soar until they were too high to see. This was a natural history event I had never noticed, and I wanted to experience it. Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal were in Jack Pot Pond. Down by Wood Duck Slough, a Sharp-Shinned Hawk chased a Cardinal, and missed. A tiny Ruby-crowned Kinglet was singing so loudly I could hear it a hundred yards away over the roar of I-275 traffic. I hardly believed my ears, but I managed to see the bird singing away. Finally, I started seeing vultures. A couple of Turkey Vultures glided over the Oxbow. A couple more were fairly high and soaring down the Ohio River. The Black Vultures? I never saw one, but I'm going back to give it another try.



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 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.

Individual	\$10	Family	\$15
Contributing	\$25	Supporting	\$50
Patron	\$100	Cornerstone	\$250
Sponsor	\$500	Benefactor	\$1000
Organization/Club	\$25		

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