



# WETLAND *matters*

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

## Autumn Activities Schedule

### Field Trips

**Saturday, September 16, 2000, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet David Styer (772-1281) at Gardens Alive for a trip into the Oxbow area. This is a great time around the Oxbow, and no one knows the area better than Dave.

**Sunday, September 17, 2000, 8:00 a.m.**

Meet Ned Keller (941-6497) at Gardens Alive. Fall migration should be well under way. Ned will help you find the wildlife.

**Sunday, October 8, 2000, 8:00 a.m.**

Meet Jay Stenger (522-8147) at the upper boat ramp at Shawnee Lookout. Fall warblers will be on the move, and Jay will also lead the trip into the Oxbow area.

### Programs

**Tuesday, September 12, 2000, 7:30 p.m. at the Cincinnati Zoo Education Building.**

Dr. Gene Kritsky of the Biology Department of the College of Mount St. Joseph will tell of some of his studies. His topic is "Periodical Cicada, Plague and Puzzle".

**Tuesday, October 10, 2000. 7:30 p.m. at the Lawrenceburg Library,**

Tom Coates, photographer and fifth grade teacher at Bright Elementary School, will speak on the topic: "Getting a Close Look at the Creepy Crawlers in the Jungle of Your Backyard."

## Oxbow, Inc., to Add To Its Holdings

### Greendale Levee Project Is Source of Additional Property

Oxbow, Inc., has entered into an agreement with the city of Greendale, Ind., to acquire 70 acres of the former Don and Vera Evans property. Greendale purchased the property for the extraction of material it will use in restructuring the old railroad levee to comply with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's 100-year flood level criteria. When completed the new levee will provide protection to the Industrial Park located on the north side of U.S. 50.

Where material has been removed, that will fill with water, creating additional habitat for waterfowl, shore birds and mammals. Greendale has agreed to turn over the excavated area and sell the balance of the property to Oxbow, Inc. The agreement also conveys to Greendale a one-acre easement on existing Oxbow property to accommodate the extended toe of the heightened levee.

In a separate, unrelated action, Oxbow, Inc., has now acquired three acres of unclaimed land. An early survey erroneously established a property line at the south bank instead of the middle of the Great Miami River. A current survey, which revealed the discrepancy, allowed Oxbow to acquire the additional acreage.

These two acquisitions increase the total of Oxbow, Inc., owned land to 522 acres. Oxbow also holds conservation easements on 258 acres of other Indiana property. Oxbow, Inc., remains ready to speak with others who may own land in the flood plain area and who are ready to sell their property.

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## Field Notes

By Morris Mercer

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As summer came to the Oxbow, Frances and I found ourselves in Maine. Our daughter, Marilyn, son-in-law, Jim, and granddaughter, Sarah, had asked if we would like to join them on a vacation into the Northeast. Our first stop was Mystic, Conn., where we saw some of the tall ships. Moved to Plymouth, Mass. From the deck of the Lobster Hut we watched the least terns fish for their supper. We then moved on up to Machias, Maine, where we spent a couple of days in a motel along the Machias River.

Up the river from our motel we could see a nice waterfall. From our window we saw a bald eagle, Canada geese with young, five ospreys in the air at one time, the great black backed gull, herring gulls, and double crested cormorants. At high tide the river was wide and the harbor seals came up in front of our window to compete with the eagle and the ospreys for fish.

We had gone to the Machias area to make a trip to Machias Seal Island to see nesting puffins. The day we were to go out, the sea was too rough to get anyone on the island. We did get to go on a whale watch out of Bar Harbor. The boat took us out about 20 miles or so, and the sea water was 54 degrees. At times the boat was moving at about 20 knots. You might say that was "really cool" even if it was summer.

We did get to see humpback whales and many birds we don't see around the Oxbow. Our boat passed by an island where we saw Wilson's storm petrels, northern gannets, several species of gulls, common eiders, many with young, the Arctic tern and the Atlantic puffin. It was good to be back at sea again. I thought of my first trip on the sea back in the 40's. It was sure different for a boy from Illinois. We sailed away from the shore of California and some 32 days later we landed on Guadalcanal where we didn't seem all that welcome.

But here in Maine at Southwest Harbor, we had rented a cottage for a week. From our deck we could see lots of boats on Frenchman's Bay. We saw ospreys, and the black guillemots came to visit the area each day. There were seals and we watched fishermen run their lobster traps. It seemed about everything along the coast of Maine was centered on the lobster. There was a McDonald's in Ellsworth, Maine, that had lobster on the menu, but we went with the "Big Macs."

And there were places that had lobster ice cream. That we didn't even try.

Acadia National Park was near, and we did make several trips into the park. One morning the peregrine falcons had just fledged upon a high cliff. That isn't as exciting as it was once, since now we see peregrines around the Oxbow.

The weather was nice while we were in Maine. We had a fire in the fireplace each night. Sarah was our fire builder, Marilyn popped the corn for our pop-corn parties. And we had some beautiful moon-lit nights across Frenchman's Bay.

Back home we have made several trips to the Oxbow. The summer has been as pleasant as I can remember. Not as hot and dry as most days in July and August, and rain has come to keep things green. The willows around the Oxbow are beautiful. On a morning drive you will find the morning glories in full bloom. Along the roads, the corn flowers are so pretty all dressed in their blossoms of cornflower blue.

Several years ago, Cindy Starr, who writes for *The Cincinnati Post*, was planning a story on the Oxbow. She asked me to come to the Oxbow as her guide. Now she was going to do a follow-up story. Steve Pelikan was leading an Oxbow field trip, so Cindy went along with him. Jim Simpson and I caught up with them near Jack Pot Pond. It was sure nice to see everyone.

While we were standing there talking, someone noticed a deer come out in the open down near the water. Not far behind the doe were two spotted fawns. I'm not sure why she started to run, but the fawns were right behind her. You might say they hightailed it out of there. They took a trail where we could see them for some time. Several crows were making a lot of noise. Then we saw the reason -- a red tailed hawk the crows were harassing.

We had seen great egrets, great blue herons, black-crowned night-herons, and lots of young wood ducks. But it was time for us to move on and let Steve get on with his field trip. One morning we saw the treetops along Beaver Pond crowded with young purple martins. Soon they will gather for their flight to South America. How fast the seasons fly by.

The locust trees have turned brown for the first hint of autumn. There is so much to see around the Oxbow in late summer and early fall. Hope to see you there.



# Birds of the Oxbow

## Black-Crowned Night-Herons, Fact and Myth

By Dave Styer

One of my pleasures on summer evenings has been going to the Oxbow to watch the black-crowned night-herons come out at dusk. The night-herons seem to like the Oxbow area so much that Morris Mercer and I felt they would breed there if given a reasonable chance. There are good trees in which to build nests, but to this day there has been too much human disturbance. Nonetheless, when breeding season is over, black-crowned night-herons wander, perhaps looking for good fishing, and settle at the Oxbow. If someone comes roaring along on a quad-runner, the various herons and egrets just fly to another part of the Oxbow area.

For those who like to look back to the good old days we compare the 1990's with the 1970's. I have no records of anyone seeing ten black-crowned night-herons at a time during the 70's. In the 90's there are records most years of 30 to 50 night-herons at a time. Perhaps this increase is caused by recovery from the DDT era. The increase may also be related to the work of Oxbow, Inc., because most of the Oxbow is protected now, and none of it was twenty years ago.

Natural history accounts about black-crowned night-herons establish that the bird is nocturnal, but none that I read seem to mention how well their eyes are developed for night vision. Most of us have seen the eyes of night animals glow in the beam of headlights. This glow is formed by light reflecting off of a layer of reflective cells in back of the retina, the tapetum. The tapetum enhances night vision; light that isn't absorbed on the way into the eye may be absorbed when it reflects back from the tapetum. Diurnal animals, such as humans, do not have a tapetum. Often our problem is too much light (thus the need for sunglasses) and tapetum would just make things worse. Also the tapetum complicates where the light is coming from and is said to decrease sharpness of vision.

Birds and mammals whose eyes glow in the beam of a light have a tapetum. To check out if black-crowned night-herons have a tapetum, I decided to go to the Oxbow at dusk with flashlight and shine the light on the birds. On the overcast evening of August 5, I made my first attempt to find out. Unlike mammals that freeze in the beam of a light, the close night-herons simply flew away when I shone the light on them. I didn't see enough to tell. Farther away I could see the glow of animal eyes. Unfortunately, I could not see what was there. I might have been seeing beavers, although I doubted it. The eyes didn't move around much, behavior that was more suggestive of night-herons patiently standing than of busy beavers. Since

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the result was inconclusive, I decided to go back on August 13. This time there was a nearly full moon, and I was prepared to look just before it was too dark. Success! Night-heron eyes glowed like lights two hundred yards down the edge of the Oxbow.

I had just about finished adding natural history accounts about black-crowned night-herons when I came upon a myth about them that seemed appropriate to mention here. There is an ancient tale which has come down to us from the dim past to the effect that the night-heron can throw out light from its breast which shines on the water and attracts its finny prey, thereby enabling the canny bird to direct that swift stroke of its powerful beak by which it seizes the luckless creature. The account is in Edward Howe Forbush's *Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States*. Actually, Forbush had talked with reputable eye-witnesses of this alleged light. Forbush observed captive birds and spent an entire night near a great heronry, but never saw a hint of this light. He never met an ornithologist who has seen it. A Dr. Gross searched for phosphorescent organs in the powder-down tracts on the breast, but failed to find any (see *The Auk*, Vol. 40, 1923).

Myths are not necessarily based on truth, but I was reminded of a trip made with friends Carol and Eric to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on the Virginia coast. When dark came on, we went to the shore to watch out at sea for the luminescence created by the one-celled dinoflagellates that glow when disturbed. Now I wonder if these organisms might light up when they strike the breast of a night-heron standing in the waves near shore.

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## Plants of the Oxbow What the Early Settlers Found?

Biologist Denis Conover after conducting a three-year study of Oxbow plants speculated what the Oxbow looked like before the settlers came in the eighteenth century. "The floodplain forest was probably the dominant plant community type found in the Oxbow area," he wrote. "This type of forest is what typically develops on the thick silt deposits formed along the floodplains of the major rivers in Ohio."

He believes that it is possible some prairie habitat was also present in the Oxbow area. He reported that during his survey a couple of prairie grass species were observed growing wild along the Ohio River. One patch of prairie cord grass (*Spartina pectinata*) was just upstream from the Argosy Riverboat Casino and scattered specimens of switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*) were found in some other open areas along the Ohio River. The occurrence of prairie habitat was documented by early explorers along the Great Miami River, thus the possibility of an Oxbow prairie.

## Obituary

# Edward M. Thayer, Preeminent Birder, Board Member

Edward M. Thayer, an Oxbow, Inc., Board of Trustees member for many years died June 25 at the age of 85.

Ed, as he was familiarly known, qualified as one of the top birders in the world. This rating was given to him by the American Birding Association in 1999 for his having identified nearly 6,000 species of birds throughout the world. Just two years ago he rode a horse up a mountain in Mindanao, Philippines, to catch a glimpse of a native eagle.

Three years ago as I (the editor) was birding at the Malibu Lagoon in California, I struck up a conversation with another birder there. When he found out that I came from Cincinnati, he asked me if I knew Ed Thayer. It seems the Californian had been with Ed on one of his far flung birding expeditions.

Ed most recently served on a finance committee for Oxbow, Inc. His survivors include three daughters, a son, and eight grandchildren. He will be greatly missed.

### A Welcome Letter to Norma Flannery

Re: P & G Birdathon Donors

Dear Norma,

Here are the rest of the check donations to add to other \$987.50 I sent to you earlier. This amounts to an additional \$532.50 more for a grand total for the year 2000 of \$1,520.00. This represents a level of \$12.16 per species for my total of 125 species this year. While the net worth of most of the donors dropped by 50% in the two months just prior to the Birdathon, their level of donations remained the same as last year. I am extremely proud of the 54 donors that supported my efforts this year. They averaged an astounding \$27 donated per supporter. The marvelous people from P&G that support my efforts deserve all the credit in the world for their continuous year to year dedication to Oxbow, Inc. They are particularly proud that their donations go toward purchase and lease of the Oxbow land, thus helping to preserve it for future generations.

I am pleased to announce that the total donations sent by the P&G group to Oxbow, Inc., reached and passed the \$10,000 level to reach an approximate 12 year total of \$10,500.

We all wish you continued success.....

Sincerely,  
Jon L. Seymour

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## Memorials and Tributes

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### Donor

### In Memory of

David and Suzanne Skidmore	Russell L. Ahlbrand, Jr.
Peggy Ann Gatch	Ruth Caldwell
Peggy Ann Gatch	Ben Fern
Dr. Lynn Ryan and Dr. Alan Kohlhaas	Dr. Gordon Fessler
Oak Crest Animal Hospital Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.	Bonnie Fox
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Wendy Fuersch	Smitty
Cincinnati Bird Club	Edward M. Thayer
Norma L. Flannery	Edward M. Thayer
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Oxbow, Inc.	Edward M. Thayer
Suzanne Vosmer Skidmore	Edward M. Thayer

### Donor

### In Tribute to

Ciro and Ann Farina	Dick and Sis Miller Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary
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Oxbow, Inc., has established Memorials in honor of those who have passed on and Tributes to commemorate other occasions. Each Memorial or Tribute established in the name of a friend or loved one will be enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Each contribution to a Memorial or Tribute will be acknowledged to the family or to those selected by the donor. Contributions should be sent to Oxbow, Inc., PO Box 43391, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45243-0391.

### Hunting on Oxbow Property

Members wishing to hunt on Oxbow property must be current in membership dues, have signed a memorandum of understanding, and hold a valid Indiana hunting license. The Oxbow hunting area is in Indiana which requires out-of-state hunters also to hold an Indiana license.

## **William Rowell Chase, Greatest Benefactor Of Oxbow, Inc.**

It was astonishing news to members of the Oxbow, Inc., Board of Trustees to learn that William Rowell Chase, who died March 15, 1998, had bequeathed 9,000 shares of Procter and Gamble stock and some cash to Oxbow, Inc. Mr. Chase had made a generous contribution annually to Oxbow, Inc. By selling the stock before the precipitous decline in its value, Oxbow, Inc., realized almost one million dollars.

A native of Massachusetts, Mr. Chase was an alumnus of Harvard College and Harvard Business School. He joined P&G in 1931 and held such positions as vice president of advertising, vice president of the soap products division, and a director of the company before being named an executive vice-president in 1960.

He retired in 1970 but kept an office downtown where he worked daily until age 89 on behalf of numerous civic and charitable organizations, which included the Cincinnati Summer Opera Association, Seven Hills School, the Cincinnati Zoo, the Cincinnati Nature Center and Shakertown in Pleasant Hill, Ky.

Through his membership in the Harvard clubs, he learned about Oxbow, Inc. from the late Edward M. Thayer, a member of Oxbow, Inc.'s Board of Trustees. He participated in a number of field trips into the Oxbow area.

A man of many interests, he grew prize winning roses, collected unusual toys, was an opera fan, held a world fly-fishing record, and made home movies.

Oxbow, Inc., is most grateful for the exceedingly generous gift Mr. Chase gave and will find good use for it in achieving its goal to protect as much of the Oxbow area as possible.

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## **President Flannery Honored In Dearborn County Register's "Millennium Moment" Series**

In a series of articles entitled the "Millennium Moment", *The Dearborn County Register* featured important developments in the history of the Indiana county. Number 20 in the series had as its subject "The Oxbow." After recounting what occurred when the early settlers came to the Oxbow area, the authors, Vera Benning and Alan Cornelius, devoted the remainder of the article to the founding of Oxbow, Inc., and its subsequent activities. The *Register* then named President Norma Flannery for its weekly Millennium 2000 Award "for the non-profit group's continued efforts to protect this vital wetland for wild transients."

## **CINDY STARR DOES IT AGAIN.....**

This old "folksy black-and-white newsletter" and Oxbow, Inc., "a lean and effective non-profit entity", as Cindy Starr describes them, wish to thank Ms. Starr and *The Cincinnati Post* for her August 11 feature on our favorite project. Complete with five pictures, the account credits Oxbow, Inc., with "an environmental victory" provided the remaining acreage can be brought under its wing.

This is a distinct possibility now that the bequest of the late William Rowell Chase has amounted to nearly \$1 million dollars.

"Fifteen years after a small group of bird-lovers got together and voiced their desire to protect the Oxbow flood plain from development, their goals are close to being fulfilled," Ms. Starr writes. How soon the mission will be accomplished may depend on Lawrenceburg attorney William Pfister who owns the largest remaining expanse of unprotected land, Ms. Starr reports.

She quotes Norma Flannery, Oxbow, Inc., president, "We don't have any paid employees and we don't rent office space. We're just all volunteers who go along ... doing what we said we'd do: purchase property when it comes available."

She quotes Oxbow, Inc., attorney, Tim Mara, "Clearly we have the most important pieces in our ownership right now. The critical environmental habitats have been preserved. Land acquisition has been a slow, steady process. Norma is a great negotiator. Whereas other people would be push, push, push, her slow steady way of accomplishing things is effective. The landowners get to know us and we get to know them. They see we share the same values they have."

She quotes Steve Pelikan, Oxbow, Inc., board member, claiming that Morris Mercer, ("a grandfatherly gentleman with a gift of bringing images to life with words," so says Starr) is our most popular speaker, that wherever he speaks he doesn't ask for money but the money comes in nevertheless because Morris describes "how nice the Oxbow is."

She quotes Paul Keller, Argosy-Indiana Gaming Co.'s corporate vice president of design and construction, explaining "In 1996 the Oxbow became one of Argosy's first big winners when Argosy exceeded four-fold the standard requirement that developers create one new acre of wetlands for every acre of wetlands destroyed. Argosy spent \$2.5 million to \$3 million salvaging prehistoric artifacts and creating a 24-acre wetland, including Jack Pot Pond. Keller said, 'The wetland duplicated a drainage area that existed at the site 10,000 years ago. Argosy also established a conservation easement on 103 acres, so that no future development would happen there and there would forever be a buffer zone between our development and the wetlands.'"

## 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.

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

Mail to: **Oxbow, Inc.**  
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Recording Secretary, Dennis Mason	(513) 385-3607
Corresponding Secretary, Suzanne Skidmore	(513) 561-5718
Treasurer, Mark Westrich	(513) 637-2175
Ohio Agent, Dave Styer	(513) 772-1287
Indiana Agent, John Getzendanner	(812) 537-5728

## Committee Chairpersons

Conservation, Bill Bocklage	(513) 922-2445
Easement Inspection, Michael Kluesener	(513) 574-1220
Richard Pope	(513) 637-1365
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