



# WETLAND *matters*

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

## Winter Activities Schedule

### Programs

**Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2001, 7:30 p.m. at the Cincinnati Zoo Educational Building.** 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." Tom has some great pictures. You don't want to miss this program.

**Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2001, 7:30 p.m. at the Lawrenceburg Library.** Video: The Wild Side of Alaska as Described by a Young Boy.

### Field Trips

**Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2001, 7:30 p.m.** Meet John Klein and Morris Mercer at the Golf Club House at Shawnee Lookout Park. It's time for our winter night walk again. And once again, John will do the walk and Morris will do the talk. (941- 2534).

**Sunday, Feb. 25, 2001, 8:00 a.m.** Meet Paul Wharton at Gardens Alive for a look at the Oxbow. Migration should be great at this time of year, and Paul knows where to find the birds. (353-3403)

## Oxbow, Inc., Elections of Officers Set for January 9

Two groups of candidates are running for election to Oxbow, Inc., offices January 9 , 7:30 p.m., at the Cincinnati Zoo membership meeting. In the election to three-year terms on the Board of Trustees are:

Denis Conover  
Jerry Lippert  
Dennis Mason  
Richard Pope  
Dr. Meg Riestenberg  
Dr. David Styer

In the election as officers for one-year terms are:

Norma L. Flannery, Pres.  
Morris Mercer, Vice-Pres.  
Dennis Mason, Rec. Secy.  
Suzanne Skidmore, Corr. Secy.  
Mark Westrich, Treas.  
David Styer, Ohio Agent  
John Gezendanner, Indiana Agent

Nominations for all offices will be accepted from the floor. To run, persons must be Oxbow, Inc., members in good standing.

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# Field Notes

By Morris Mercer

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Another season is coming to the Oxbow. I've just arrived home after a trip down near the mouth of the Great Miami. It has been one of those cloudy, dark, chilly days with a cold west wind. For a while large snow flakes were coming down, then came a drizzle, and then a cold rain. Not much wild life moving so I turned toward home for a little time in front of the fire.

I've thought of the changes that have come to the Oxbow area, and to my life. When I think back to my early trips into the area of the three rivers, I can see the many changes. I've been going to the area for a half century. Where has all the time gone?

I came home from WWII, and a year later I talked the best looking girl in Illinois into becoming my wife. Frances had spent the last couple of years as a student at the University of Cincinnati studying aeronautical engineering so we located in Cincinnati. We picked the west side of town as that made it easy to go back home in Illinois. U.S. 50 took us back to Illinois and also took us across the Great Miami and the White Water rivers. In spring the rivers would flood many times. I saw so many gulls and migrating water fowl, I just had to check it out. After a few trips into the area, I was hooked.

When the kids were tall enough to wade the mud, they were off to the bottoms with me. We also found the hills and high ground that is now Shawnee Lookout, a Hamilton County Park. We enjoyed many hours there. Many snowy winter nights found us in those hills. Winter days we stood on the hills and watched great flights of water fowl drop into the flood-covered fields below us. Marilyn and Dave soon could identify the water fowl.

It was a great move when Hamilton county took over the hills as a park. But the next big change wasn't nearly as nice. They built a bridge across the Ohio, and then came the expressway (I-275) right through the heart of the flood plain. I thought something should be done to save the flood plain for the wild life. I didn't have much of an idea where to start and was working mostly alone. I didn't get very far, but found several things that didn't work.

Although things were changing around the Oxbow, fortunately the wild life still came. Next came the threat of a barge port being built in the Miami and all the other things that would go along with that. I received a call from my friend, David Styer, and he thought we should try something. So Dave, Judy Bramstedt of the Sierra Club and I met to talk it over. We each agreed to call people we thought might be interested. There were about 20 people who showed up for our next meeting. Karl Maslowski passed his hat, and we came up with a couple hundred dollars, and Oxbow, Inc., was born.

We made many trips into the Oxbow area for many years before we saw or heard of anyone seeing a deer. I

remember well our son, Dave, one day saying, "Dad, there are some white-tailed deer!" We saw the deer but could hardly believe our eyes. In the last several years you would have to keep your eyes closed not to see a deer. In the last several years, I've seen from one to more than a hundred in one day. I'm sure their numbers cause some trouble, but the deer add a real beauty. I've seen the deer in the Miami on a summer evening, a large buck among the trees of autumn. I remember them in the snow of winter and the beauty of a fawn in early summer.

Much like the deer were the beaver. After being in the area for many years, I saw the first signs of beaver. It was in a water hole over near the Oxbow lake that I saw the first beaver. I've called the water hole "Beaver Pond" ever since. For more than 20 years our son-in-law, Jim Simpson, and I have made many trips into the area. A couple of years ago, we saw a family of four beaver on Oxbow lake. There are several beaver around today.

Another species of wildlife we have seen in the last several years is the coyote. We had a good look at a coyote one spring evening, and our granddaughter, Sarah, was along. We were taking her to see some baby barred owls in a hollow tree. We saw the owls, but I think she enjoyed seeing the coyote the most. Even more than both of these, she enjoyed the evenings we stopped to watch the den of red fox as they came out to play. Sarah's little dog, Katie, was the most excited of all. She was sure she could catch a little fox if we would only let her out of the car.

As I think of my memories of the Oxbow, they seem endless. The sighting of a bald eagle has been a highlight. We used to see more shore birds but I think some more mud flats will bring them back. The last few years there have been so many more double-crested cormorants, great egrets, and black vultures. There's so much to see.

I remember the beauty of the ice storms and the snow of winter, the flooded valley and great flights of migrating water fowl. In late spring and summer the happy hours in the canoe on the Great Miami. And there is the beauty of autumn. But what has made it so great is the people I have met along the way. I hope to see many of you around the Oxbow in 2001.

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## Memorials

### Donor

Kenneth and Shirley Durbin  
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Oak Crest Animal Hospital  
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Wendy, Bob, and B.J. Fuersich  
Oak Crest Animal Hospital,  
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### In Memory of

Dale Durbin  
Dale Durbin  
Gordon Finck  
Duffy Gilbert  
Floy Johnson  
Pepper  
Helen Rigdon

## Tribute

### Donor

Shirley and Don Wittekiend

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### Recognizing

Rick Chukas in  
Honor of Birthday

# Birds of the Oxbow

## Watching Wildlife: The Green-Winged Teal

By David Styer

As I watched green-winged teal at the Oxbow on 10 November I thought that they had been more common there the past couple of years. However, like global warming, this may be a hard thing to tell. According to what I can find on the Internet the ducks that primarily breed in the prairie pothole country of North Dakota and Canada have done very well in 1999 and 2000. I didn't realize until I started reading the literature that the green-winged teal has a much broader breeding range than most of our ducks. In fact it breeds over most of northern Canada where human disturbance is minimal. It also breeds in much of the northern and western United States. This range is so large that the droughts of the prairie pothole country do not strongly affect its breeding success. Regardless of their North American breeding stability, green-winged teal are definitely more common at the Oxbow some years, less common others.

In *Ducks, Geese & Swans of North America*, Bellrose writes that "the green-winged teal more than any other duck prefers to seek food on mud flats." In that case, we should keep seeing these teal at the Oxbow for a long time. Like many ducks, they don't breed around here, and they mostly overwinter south of here, but they spend a lot of time here in spring and fall.

On the 10th of November the green-winged teal were in the very shallow water at the ends of the Oxbow. Most of them had their heads under water, feeding, but their bodies floated normally. That is, they didn't have to 'tip up' in order to feed. Forbush, in *Birds of Massachusetts*, writes of flocks taking flight instantaneously when disturbed, even though most of the birds had their heads submerged. It would be interesting to study some motion pictures taken in those circumstances. The lead-time of the birds that could see the disturbances must be minute. I would guess that birds have much faster reflexes than people do. I have read (but I don't know where) that birds that fly in tight formation and seem to change direction simultaneously actually follow some lead, but they are so quick that we can't see it. Teal and shorebirds are famous for this kind of flight.

Records indicate that there are more male than female green-winged teal. They also indicate that this is largely determined by records of what hunters have shot, and that hunters likely favor males. In this case a bias is introduced, and we can't

be sure that there really are more males than females. This suggests a good project: go to the Oxbow and count males and females. On 1 December I went there to start a count, but I was too late in the season, and I didn't see any at all. (OK, so we start with an unbiased count: 0 males and 0 females.) Failing to find the teal, I looked at 10 years of records, picking out numbers when I explicitly mentioned how many males and females I identified. The grand total came out 25 males and 12 females. Does this show that males are twice as abundant as females? No! This does remind me of a small book by Darrell Huff titled *How to Lie with Statistics*. For one thing, the brightly colored males stand out in the distance and get counted. The distant females, in their cryptic plumage, may not be identified; they may not even be noticed. For another, when I did see larger groups of green-winged teal, I never bothered to determine how many were males/females. This is a good example of why you often need to have in mind what you want before you collect data.

If you wish information on many interesting things that are known, I recommend the account on green-winged teal by Kevin Johnson in *The Birds of North America*. Here are a couple of interesting tidbits from this document. In some circumstances green-winged teal are mainly nocturnal, in others they are mainly diurnal. Or how about this? "The only species of duck known to scratch in flight." Presumably, they are not so much scratching in thought as trying to remove parasites from their nasal passages. Now you don't have to use up any more time wondering if ducks scratch while they fly, and you can move on to other things.

## Oxbow, Inc., Expands Hunting Area by Additional 40 Acres

With the purchase of the Mullins Property, Oxbow of Indiana, Inc., has been able to increase its designated hunting area acreage. This 40-acre tract runs from the island at the mouth of the Great Miami River west to the east side of the I-275 Bridge and from the Bank of the Ohio River north to the CSX Railroad tracks. Hunters must be members in good standing in Oxbow, Inc., have a current Indiana license, and signed hunting authorization from Oxbow, Inc. There is no hunting permitted on the west side of the I-275 Bridge on Oxbow of Indiana, Inc., property.

## Oxbow, Inc., Gifts Acknowledged

A very big thanks to Charles Noe for his donation of Provident Financial Group, Inc., stock, and to Mrs. Marguerite Nassauer for her donation of P&G stock.

## 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		

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