



WETLAND *matters*

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

Birdathon Set for May 10, 11 *Get Those Pledges In Now*

Oxbow, Inc. Activities Schedule

Programs

Tuesday, May 14, 2002, 7:30 p.m.
Clifford Room, Mt. St. Joseph College

Dr. Mark Fischer, a nature and music lover, will have our program: *Mother Nature Sings the Blues*, featuring color and light in nature.

Tuesday, June 11, 2002, 7:30 p.m.
Public Library, Lawrenceburg, Ind.

Gary Denzler, a long time employee of the Cincinnati Zoo who works with the popular *Wings of Wonder* bird show, will share some of his experiences with us. Gary is also a wildlife artist and will bring some of his wood carvings.

Field Trips

Saturday, May 4, 2002, 8:30 a.m.

Meet Steve Wagner at the upper parking lot boat ramp at Shawnee Lookout Park. Bird migration should be underway and Steve will help you find the visitors. 513-831-7606.

Thursday, June 20, 2002, 6:30 p.m.

Meet Greg Mendell and Connie McNamee at Gardens Alive for a summer evening look at the wildlife around the Oxbow. 812-926-2522.

Birdathon 2002 promises to be more fun than ever! Oxbow, Inc. has five official teams for your pleasure. Our birders are scouting out every species on the wing, perch, shore, wetlands and waters and as far away as California and Massachusetts. Pick your favorite team and pledge whatever amount you wish. Pledge amounts are per species seen or heard by your team.

The big contest runs from Friday, May 10, 5:00 p.m. to Saturday, May 11, 5:00 p.m. This is Oxbow, Inc.'s annual fund-raiser.

Oxbow, Inc. teams include:

#1-- Geriatric Gents and a Junior: George Laycock, Jerry Meyer and Karl Maslowski. This team has taken part in every Birdathon since its beginnings in 1989. A bit bone weary, the men now depend on the Good Health Fairy, first cousin of the Tooth Fairy. But, go for it - pick our historical team and perhaps an alternate. Their spirit is willing...

#2-- Fire and Brimstone Birders: Jay Stenger, Joe Bens and Paul Warton. It's rumored these veterans will do it again! They have won the most Golden Starling Awards (for having the highest score).

#3-- Miami Whitewater Peregrinators: Charlie Saunders and Mike Busam. You guessed it--these regulars will cover only Miami Whitewater Park. Lots of birdies there!

#4--No See 'Ums: David Styer and Steve Pelikan. Dave will be spotting in Monterey, California, and Steve at Martha's Vineyard. Will that give them an edge?

#5--Finneytown's Fabulous Flying Fortune Seekers: Jerry Lippert, Wayne Wauligman and Erich Baumgardner. Back as a competitive Oxbow, Inc. team, these fellows have the drive and desire to win. Want a winner? Back the FFFF Seekers!

The pledge form is on the following page. Backers will receive their team's results by mail. Our official teams usually tally between 100 and 150 species. Individual Oxbow, Inc. members also take to the field.



by



Mercer

Saturday, February 23, 2002, we had two field trips into the Oxbow area. Darlena Graham was meeting the group from Oxbow, Inc. at 8:00 a.m. at Gardens Alive. Jim Simpson was meeting a group from Dayton Audubon at Gardens Alive at 9:00 a.m. I had told Jim I would go with his group. The early morning fog made the earlier trip a trip into the unknown as you could see very little. After a short check of the bottoms, Darlena took her group over to Shawnee Lookout in hopes of getting above the fog. By 9:00 a.m., the fog was lifting in some areas. We were able to get the Dayton Audubon group into three vans and we drove to the Oxbow.

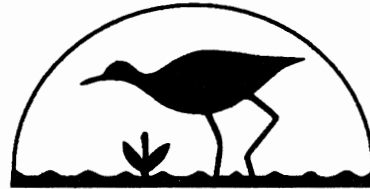
I saw the Sheriff's patrol and stopped to tell of the two field trips into the area. The patrolman said he had seen 70 cranes around the Oxbow. I thought this would be a strange time of year to see sandhill cranes around the Oxbow. On the other

hand, this has been a strange winter. Later in the morning we saw 13 sandhill cranes, so you never know.

We drove in by the gambling boat and the mud was frozen hard enough to hold the vans. We were able to check the wildlife around and on Jack Pot Pond. Now the fog had lifted and the sun was out warm and bright. I called to Jim and asked if he had noticed the ground under foot. We loaded into the vans and started for higher ground. As we climbed the grade at the big bend, I could see Jim's van was fishtailing. I crossed my fingers and hit the gas. We did some fishtailing, too. The heat from the bright sun had caused the surface of the dirt road to thaw and become very slick. We were happy to get off the mud road and reach solid ground.

We parked the vans and Jim took the group on a walk through the mud for a better look at the Oxbow Lake. I stayed in the van. I haven't gotten used to sitting in the van but it was great to be at the water hole. Jim and his group came back with a good report. There weren't any large flocks of ducks but there was a nice flock of mallards and blacks. There were several gadwall, wood ducks and hooded mergansers. Jim said the male mergansers were showing off for the girls. They do put on a good show. I always enjoy them.

BIRDATHON 2002 Pledge Form



Name: _____

Address: _____

Mail to:

OXBOW, INC.
4137 Jamestown Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45205-2007

My pledge is per species found:

__\$1 __50¢ __25¢ __20¢ __10¢ other: _____

or for this amount: _____

My pledge is for:

-----Oxbow Team #1 --Geriatric Gents

-----Oxbow Team #2 --Fire and Brimstone

-----Oxbow Team #3 --M.W. Peregrinators

-----Oxbow Team #4 --No See 'Ums

-----Oxbow Team #5 --Flying Fortune Seekers

-----Highest Scoring Oxbow, Inc. Team

Friday, March 15, Steve and Karl Maslowski called to ask if I knew any place at the Oxbow where they could get some pictures of muskrats. I told them I knew where we could see muskrat houses but I didn't know if we could find anyone at home.

I met the Maslowskis about 2:00 p.m. at the Oxbow. It was a very warm late winter afternoon with temperatures in the 70's. Steve drove and our first stop was overlooking the beaver lodge and some muskrat houses. A Canada goose had her nest on top of a muskrat house. There were several coots in the brushy water plus a few gadwall.

Our next stop was at the big bend where we set up the scope. Before us was a nice flock of ring-necked ducks. Several wood ducks were working the water down toward Wood Duck Slough. Over on the inside bend a couple of large dead limbs extended out from the bank just above the water. The limb closer to the water was crowded with turtles. The slightly higher limb was just as crowded but with ducks. Mostly mallards. It was quite a scene.

We drove on around the Oxbow. The road wasn't good but was passable. We saw a few muskrats but no place to get good pictures. It was nice to be afield with good friends.

We picked March 18 for our annual St. Patrick Day trip to the Oxbow in search of the green-winged teal. I met George Laycock, Karl Maslowski and Jim Simpson about 10.00 a.m. Karl had the box of Lorna Doones but we would get no cookies until we found the green-winged teal. We could not drive around the Oxbow because of the mud. We drove down by the gambling boat but again were stopped by the mud. From the top of the levee we saw a dozen or more black vultures near the Ohio River. We stopped at the end of the new levee and from there we could see the end of Jack Pot Pond. We could see mallards and many wood ducks.

I then drove back as close as I could get to the Oxbow. Jim, Karl and George walked the muddy road back along the Oxbow. When they came back they reported seeing several species of ducks and their first shoveler and blue-winged teal of the season. Karl took pity on us and agreed the green heads of the shoveler and mallards were reason enough to open the Lorna Doones. The cookies were so good. We checked Cemetery Lake, State Line Pond, Hidden Valley Lake and we added hooded mergansers, bufflehead and scaup to

our day's list.

We enjoyed lunch together. With Jim's help the old WWII vets had made it again. We agreed to meet next St. Patrick's Day and again search for the green-winged teal. Jim gave us even more encouragement. He stopped at the Miami Whitewater Wetland on his way home and saw several green-winged teal.

Spring has come to the Oxbow. The rains came and left the Oxbow flooded. The ducks are there. The willows are greening up. On the high ground the wild flowers are blooming. This is a great time of the year to visit the Valley of the Three Rivers.

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Oxbow, Inc. Heartily Thanks

The Following

For Their Generous Grants:

**The Third Protestant Memorial Church
Endowment Fund**

The William P. Anderson Foundation

**The Allan and Dorothy Campbell Fund
of The Greater Cincinnati Foundation**



"I once had a sparrow alight on my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn."

Henry David Thoreau



by Dave Styer

Sandhill Cranes

Although cranes are widely distributed over the world, there are few species, only two in the Americas and only one to be expected in the Greater Cincinnati area. Sandhill cranes certainly can be seen locally, during migration, and I have seen them in the Oxbow area several times. They seem to be getting more common but they are uncommon enough so that any day I see one is special.

We often hear their loud, rattling call before we see them. These calls are amplified by a long, coiled trachea and can be heard two miles away. In *The Birds of North America*, T. C. Tacha, S. A. Neshbitt and P. A. Woos write that adjectives such as rattling or bugling “do not fully convey the volume or quality of the sound produced by a mature sandhill crane”.

Most songbirds migrate by night. The air is said to be much calmer at night. On the other hand sandhill cranes migrate by day. They are much larger than any songbird and minor air turbulence may not be much of a problem. In fact, we see cranes flying over, migrating, and that gives us a strong sense that they are temporary visitors with us. They may settle in a field to spend the night and to feed and we will see them shortly after they have taken off again.

Truly High-Flying Birds

I often wonder how many sandhill cranes we miss because they are flying high overhead. They are reported in *The Birds of North America* to fly at altitudes “up to 3600 m” but “75% between 150 and 760 m”. Even the low altitude cranes may be half a mile up. The high-flying birds may be over two miles up, well over ten thousand feet. One of the questions asked about birds is how they can fly at such high altitudes. On the few times that I’ve been high in the Rocky Mountains I have been dragging rather than flying. Part of the answer may involve the highly efficient way birds breathe, something that was only figured out around 1970.

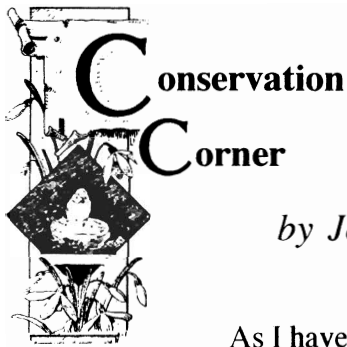
Our breathing is simple: when we breathe in we pull fresh air into our lungs; when we breathe out we push used air back out. Of course we grab in some oxygen and expel carbon dioxide in the process. Birds have air sacs behind their lungs and in front of their lungs. When a bird breathes in it pulls fresh air into the air sac behind its lungs. When it breathes out it pushes this air right through the lungs into the air sac in front of the lungs. The next time the bird breathes out it pushes this air (with less oxygen and more carbon dioxide) outside. There is no dead space in the lungs; the air goes clean through.

Even before scientists learned the way birds breathe, it was clear that something was very different between birds and mammals. This was clear when Joel Carl Welty first wrote *The Life of Birds* (1962). He wrote “If man had a trachea proportionately as long as that of the whooping crane, normal breathing would not suffice to keep him alive; the trachea would merely become filled with stale air shuttling back and forth”.

“The Birds of Heaven”

Peter Matthiessen has recently written *The Birds of Heaven*, a book about all the cranes of the world and his personal experiences with them. To him, “the cranes are the greatest of the flying birds.” Among other things I have learned in Matthiessen’s book is that the sandhill crane is by far the most common crane species in the world and also the most distant traveler. Some sandhill cranes that winter in Mexico and southwestern U.S.A. fly up to 1500 miles “along Siberia’s Arctic coast” to nest. Birds might not be able to perform migratory feats such as this without their special breathing adaptations.





Conservation

Corner

by Jon Seymour

As I have mentioned before, there are many different and varied conservation organizations at work in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. These organizations all vie for the time of volunteers and donation dollars. Often, I feel that this lack of focus is detrimental to the overall effort to conserve and preserve the environment.

Recently, the Ohio League of Conservation voters published its legislative agenda for the 124th session of the Ohio General Assembly. This group tries to focus legislative effort for Ohio by representing a large number of conservation minded groups ranging from local garden clubs to the Sierra Club and from conservation trusts to government owned park organizations. In general it is good to bring all these varied groups together to focus lobbying on specific legislation.

Another group that links many of the conservation organizations together is the OKI Regional Conservation Council (RCC). They recently held their annual meeting at OKI headquarters in downtown Cincinnati. Presentations were made by such varied groups as the Campbell Co. Environmental Education Center, Greenfields and the Clean Ohio Fund, the Hamilton County Parks District, Campbell and Kenton Co. Conservation Districts, ORSANCO-Friends of the Ohio and the OKI Regional Council of Governments --Mill Creek Wetland Project.

I attended for Oxbow and I met several members of the Dearborn Co. SWCD attending representing the Tanner's Creek Watershed Project. It is in connecting with these other groups that represent similar interests that the political and grass routes backing for conservation programs takes place. I encourage each of you to increase your participation in conservation groups.

Call us at Oxbow, Inc. to learn how you can help the Oxbow or volunteer for some other conservation organization. The important thing is to act. Nothing gets accomplished if we do not act. It was such fun to listen to the success stories presented to the OKI-RCC about people who had acted and had realized a dream.

Oxbow, Inc. Memorials

Donor

Helen H. Barbara
 Therese J. Bocklage
 Deborah H. Wissman
 Norma L. Flannery
 Michael J. Nolan
 Deborah H. Wissman

Norma L. Flannery
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Gloria Goetz
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 Judy Jones
 Pat Schoch
 Doreen Warther

Lynn Wehner
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In Memory of

Bill Bocklage
 Bill Bocklage
 Ivan Chambers
 Julie Godsey
 Thomas E. Heine
 George Lucas

Bob Myers

Bob Myers
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 Clare Schuermann
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Clare Schuermann
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 Clare Schuermann

Clare Schuermann
 Clare Schuermann

Oxbow, Inc. has established memorials in honor of those who have passed on. Each memorial established in the name of a loved one 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.

Contributions should be sent to Oxbow, Inc., P.O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, Ohio 45243-0391. Please be sure to enclose the names and addresses of those to receive the acknowledgement.

Small Land Parcel Acquired

By Oxbow, Inc.

The eighth and last individual owner of the six lots totaling approximately 1 1/2 Oxbow acres has sold his share to Oxbow, Inc. and this means Oxbow, Inc. now owns the entire six lots of this Hayes property.

In the last issue of *Wetland Matters*, the purchase of the property owned by the other seven persons was reported. Oxbow, Inc. is pleased to now have the entire six lots in its possession.

The Oxbow Is the Stage, The Wildlife Are the Players, So Now....

Meet the Final Six Directors

Oxbow, Inc.'s Board of Directors endeavors to keep the stars -- the wildlife -- including songbirds, ducks, geese, raptors, eagles, cranes, beaver, shrimp, rabbits, coyote, the entire cast, happy, giving them a place to play, sing, swim, feed, mate and rest. Maybe they are not Spielburgs, Altmans or Howards but our Board Members are creative in their own way, enthusiastic and dedicated to the art of conservation. In this, the third and last article on the Oxbow, Inc. Board, meet the final six of the seventeen Directors.

Patti Niehoff.... A relatively new Recording Secretary and a whiz at the laptop, taking notes at the monthly board meetings. Home has always been eastern Cincinnati. B.A. in English, Vanderbilt. Family includes husband Buck, 16-year-old son, Peter, four cats and one dog, the latter part Huskie, part Basenji.

Patti possesses an effervescent personality--it's apparent even in her voice. Once owned her own computer company but then enrolled at U. C. for further studies where her teachers Drs. David Styer and Steve Pelikan discussed birds and Patti became a bird watcher. At present, she is helping a friend edit a book.

Patti and Buck recently deeded the conservation rights to a portion of their Hyde Park property to The Hillside Trust, which means that the Niehoffs retain ownership of the land but the land will never be developed. This half acre conservation easement could support one more residence in an area that needs greenspace.

Interests: "Bird watching and my animals." Patti admits the family pets "like me best."

Biggest Frustration: "Nothing worth mentioning."

Dream Job: "Writing novels, maybe murder mysteries like Agatha Christie."

Steve Pelikan..."He's the quintessential absent-minded professor," quips wife Anita Buck. He's also a birder, par excellence. The twosome met when Anita was helping organize the first Birdathon in 1989.

Steve grew up near Boston, Mass with "a swamp in our back yard. I played there." Perhaps that's one reason he likes the Oxbow wetlands so much. With a B.A. and Ph.D. in mathematics from Boston University, Steve began his teaching career at the University of Maryland, continued at the University of Minnesota and then the University of Cincinnati where he met fellow math professor Dave Styer. "Dave was the first birder I met here and he took me on my first trip to the Oxbow," Steve explains. Steve has held many positions over many years with Oxbow, Inc., including editor of *Wetland Matters*. At present, he is Research Chairman. (See his article on flies at the Oxbow in this issue.)

Interests: "Plants and birds and of late, flies."

Biggest Frustration: Steve's a happy, laid-back fellow. No frustrations, he claims.

Dream Job: "I have it."

Dr. Aaron Perlman....retired physician born in New Haven, Connecticut. B.S., Yale and M.D., Laval University, Montreal, Canada. Emeritus Professor of Pediatric Orthopedics at Children's Hospital, Emeritus Professor, University of Cincinnati. He established a special clinic at Children's Hospital for children suffering from cerebral palsy.

Wife Betty, one son deceased and two daughters -- Sally a physician in Louisville, Kentucky, and Amy, a computer engineer in Silicon Valley. Betty got Aaron interested in birding, then he met Art and Ginny Wiseman through Audubon who got him interested in Oxbow, Inc. "At the time," Dr. Perlman recalls, "the Oxbow was being considered for use as a barge terminal and marina and legislation was needed from the Port Authority to get Oxbow, Inc. approved by the IRS as a non-profit organization to stop the barge terminal movement." Aaron knew Tom Luken in Washington, D.C., who moved the business along. "I got credit and really I had nothing to do with it," he says, true to his usual gentlemanly form, "and I was asked to join the Oxbow, Inc. Board of Directors. This has been very rewarding for me."

Interests: Nature. Aaron is an Honorary Life Trustee of the State Chapter of the Nature Conservancy and a member of the Bonsai Society of Cincinnati.

Biggest Frustration: "Lack of progress on pollution, conservation and urban sprawl."

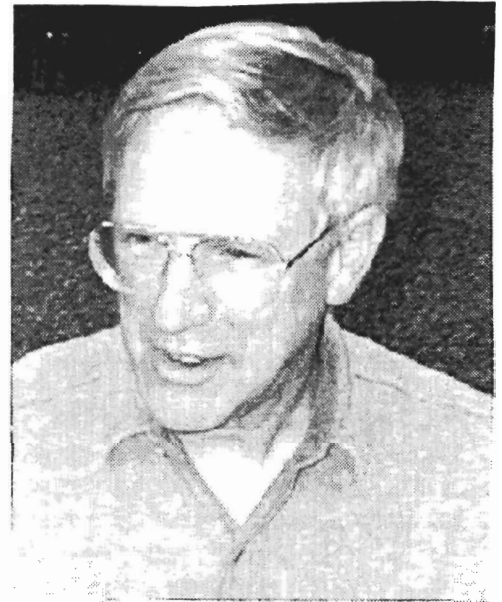
Dream Job: "To continue as director of Pediatric Orthopedics at Children's Hospital."



Mark Westrich



Patti Niehoff



David Styer

David Styer.....One of the founders of Oxbow, Inc., author of *Birds of the Oxbow* and *Wetland Matters* columnist. David says he was “raised on an orchard in southeastern Pennsylvania, observed nature since preschool and became an avid bird watcher, not birder, on the farm when eleven.” A superb birder today, he is mentor to many young birding enthusiasts. Professionally, a math professor (beginning in 1970 and now retired) at the University of Cincinnati. B.A. and M.A. from Penn State , Ph. D. in math, University of Maryland. Professor Emeritus, U. C.

“My first trip to the Oxbow was during the Cincinnati Bird Club’s spring bird count in May, 1971,” Dave relates. “Don Wright and I went in by the concrete plant and found the area flooded. We didn’t see many water birds because we didn’t know how to get to them. After that I went as a helper with Barry Wakeman’s Junior Zoologist Club. Before long I was going there by myself. I would run across Morris Mercer and he would show me places to go.

“ After a while I found myself leading trips to the Oxbow. Before the inside edge of the Oxbow grew up in willows and maples, I used to lead trips on that side of the lake. It was especially good for shorebirds. There were always a few people who wanted to know if the Oxbow mud is really as sticky as I claimed. I let them find out for themselves. Good old Oxbow mud!”

Dave continues, “ A year ago I expressed to my friend, Jeff Davis, my sincere wish that community planners would plan for all species, not just humans. He responded that he actually suggested that once at a Cincinnati City Council meeting and the result was embarrassing: the Council could only stare in disbelief and then move on to other business.”

Interests: “Observing, then studying nature, protecting natural areas, enjoying married life with Jane, my wife of two months. That’s all in chronological order.”

Biggest Frustration: “The sun is going to burn out in the next so many billion years, a prospect I’m not looking forward to, and I can’t think of one worthwhile thing to do about it.”

Dream Job: “As a former colleague, Al Lazer, used to say: ‘Just make me God for one day.’ “

Mark Westrich.....Financial analyst, CFA, by profession, Busy, dependable treasurer for Oxbow, Inc. by special choice. Native Cincinnati. B.A., University of Cincinnati; MBA, Fairleigh Dickinson University. Married to Mary Anne. Two daughters, Hope and Joy.

Mark is definitely the outdoorsman. When he can’t be camping, he’s zipping around on his motorcycle. He stalked and shot a deer at about eight paces at the Oxbow. (It’s legal during hunting season to take a deer on Oxbow, Inc. property provided you are a member in good standing, have an Oxbow, Inc. hunting permit as well as Indiana and Ohio hunting licenses.)

Mark finds the Oxbow remarkable. “ Despite the busy highway, the Oxbow is still a wild area,” he muses. “A wild area that doesn’t take days to get there. It’s just down the street. Love the view of Kentucky from the Oxbow, too.”

MORE.... Meet the Final Six Directors

Interests: Hunting, camping and skiing.

Biggest Frustrations: "A poor wing shot. Skis that come off on jumps."

Dream Job: To be an investment manager somewhere in snowy Colorado.

Jeanne Bocklage...Editors rarely write about themselves but this one will, briefly, because she is a member of the Board. Kentucky native. B.A., Mt. St. Joseph College. Married to the late Bill Bocklage, the kindest of men and a past editor of *Wetland Matters*. Three daughters: business exec Cam, artist /video creator Paula, physician Therese. Two sons-in-law. Four grandchildren.

Retired. Former radio newswriter during World War II, advertising copywriter, teacher. Became intrigued with nature through Girl Scouting, with birding through Bill. "Our planet is using up its resources so quickly (some experts say that humans will be unable to survive on earth in about 150 years at today's rate of destruction) that every acre saved, especially wetlands, will become a future miracle. I am proud to be part of the Oxbow, Inc. team."

Interests: "Christology, my family, my corgi, editing 'Mattie', bridge and a book club now in its 29th year."

Biggest Frustrations: Declining energy. The trashing of the earth.

Dream Job: "Reading books for taping, but only books I like. That should be fun."

The Initial Article about the First Insect Survey at the Oxbow....

Flies at the Oxbow?

by Dr. Steve Pelikan

Mathematical Sciences, University of Cincinnati

Last fall, Oxbow's Board approved a study of the flies of the Oxbow. In this, the first of several reports, the general purpose and goals of the study are presented.

When I'm conversing with someone and it's mentioned that I'm working on a study of the flies of the Oxbow, the typical response is "Ewww! why?" I think of this as tremendous progress from a decade ago when the question would be "What's the Oxbow?" It's a reasonable question although I don't know whether the questioner means "Why a study?" or "Why flies?"

The first question is easy to answer. The more we know about the area we're trying to protect, the better we can protect it and the better will be our choices of management strategies. Because of David Styer's work on the birds in the area (partly summarized in his book, *The Birds of the Oxbow*), we know what birds depend on the area for resting places during migration and which use the area as wintering and as breeding habitat. The importance of open mudflats for migrant shorebirds, of riparian forest for breeding birds and fertile low-lying crop land for migrating water fowl is now clear to us; we know what habitats we must protect. Sometimes we need to make difficult decisions — standing dead trees are good for breeding Red-headed Woodpeckers but also attract nesting Starlings — but at least many of the potential consequences of the choices we must make are known to us.

Similarly, because of Denis Conover's careful vascular plant survey, we recognize special parts of the Oxbow area (and the land Oxbow owns) as deserving special consideration in our management decisions. For instance, we now know that certain "river-running plants" --- rare plants that depend on sandy, wet, river-side soils for their survival -- depend on the Oxbow area. We know the locations they use and can plan to protect their habitat as we plan for the use of the land around the Oxbow.

For the same reason, a careful study of how any group of plants or animals uses Oxbow's land will tell us how to better care for it. We want to maintain the diversity of plants and animals that live on the land because diversity — species richness — is a sign of a healthy ecosystem. To manage land for just a few species creates tremendous problems, as is evident from the result of the management of much of our public lands primarily for white-tailed deer. Overpopulation, imbalance, damage to surrounding property, damage to the habitat of other species, loss of diversity, elimination of other species and eventual sickness and starvation of the deer themselves results from such simplistic, some would say short-sighted, management strategies.

Oxbow aims to care for our land and its inhabitants in a better way. We try to understand the functioning of the ecosystems, to preserve the diversity of life on the land, and at the same time, maintain the traditional uses of the land. Understanding how flies (or any other group of organisms) use the region will help us do a better job. This commitment to diversity is one of the reasons Oxbow has requested, and gratefully accepted, the advice of one of our region's premier land management experts --- John Klein of the Hamilton County Park District. We will be able to report in the near future on the land management committee's plans for the Oxbow area.

Second Question Calls for Details

The second form of the question my friends ask — "Why flies?" — needs a more detailed answer and is dependent on the biology of flies, insects in the order Diptera; insects with just two (di-) wings (ptera) instead of the more typical four. Flies are advanced insects that undergo complete metamorphosis (like butterflies, beetles, and wasps) allowing their immature stages (larvae, aka maggots) to live entirely different life styles from the adults. In terms of total diversity among groups of animals, flies are third only to beetles and wasps. There are some 600 to 800 bird and butterfly species in the US; the number of known fly species in the US is approximately 16,000.

While we know exactly how many species of birds (or plants) can be found in the Oxbow area, or indeed in all for North America, the situation with insects is quite different. There are many groups of insects that are incompletely known; for some families of flies the experts suggest that only about half of the species living in North America are named and known to science. So we are much more likely to discover a new species of fly in the Oxbow than a new species of bird or plant, and much more likely to find species that only a *specialist* can name.

The lives of many flies are closely associated with water and wetlands. Mosquitoes, gnats, and their relatives have aquatic larvae. Many crane-flies and horse-flies have larvae that must live in damp soils near ponds and streams. And still other groups of flies have adults that must live in humid areas near pond and stream banks and foliage overhanging water. So flies are a natural group of insects to study if one is interested in understanding a wetland.

Why Flies Are Important

Flies are also an important group to study because of their potential effects on our health and the health of our domestic animals. In the midwest, if you die from an animal bite, it is almost certain that the bite was from a fly — probably a mosquito spreading a viral disease such as an encephalitis. Snakes, bats, cougar, spiders, wolves and all the rest of the natural world hold much less a threat for us than flies do. If, as many people suspect, our climate is warming, we may find that different kinds of disease-spreading flies will move into our area from the south. Without baseline studies of the flies now present, we will be hard pressed to recognize the change in our fly fauna, and perhaps unprepared for the effects of the change. If we didn't have a volunteer, Oxbow would probably want to hire a fly expert to study the flies of the region in the near future.



Dr. Steve Pelikan

MORE....Flies at the Oxbow?

A more detailed answer to another version of second question -- how come *I* (usually known for an interest in birds, butterflies and plants) am willing to study flies?--is simpler. For me, a major feature that distinguishes the natural world from the man-made one is that it rewards close inspection. If one looks closely at a bit of nature -- even just a fly -- a huge variety of fascinating questions immediately arise. How and where does it live? What does it eat? How does it find food? How does it provide for its young? How does it find its mate? Does it defend a territory? When one puts a fly under a microscope, it becomes amazingly beautiful. Flies show a bewildering variety in the array of their hairs and spines, and the structure of their mouths, wings, legs, eyes and genitalia. The certainty that such huge variety of structures have evolved to facilitate lives that we can only imagine is awe-inspiring. In contrast, looking closely at a man-made object (a DVD of a movie for example) produces in the end a meaningless collection of colored pixels and muddied, meaningless sounds. I find it more rewarding to contemplate nature -- if only the nature of flies -- than most man-made structures and entertainments.

So: I got interested because I just happened to look closely at a few flies. This came about when the ecological balance of our kitchen composting system -- a worm bin -- went slightly awry and produced batches of flies that occupied the house. We called them "fruit flies" until I caught a couple and put them under a microscope. After consulting several references it turned out they weren't fruit flies at all, but several other completely different organisms that were about as related to fruit flies as oak trees are to roses. I found flies from 4 different families before I finally found flies from the fruit fly (or vinegar fly) family the Drosophilidae. By then I was carrying a small vial in my pocket when we ate at ethnic restaurants on the off chance that a new fly typically associated with less common vegetables would appear at our table. I started trying to catch mosquitoes rather than slapping them with the hope that one of them would be a species I hadn't found before.

If they're willing to bite me, I'm willing to collect them. That was my original justification for collecting flies, although now it's the desire to know more about them makes me willing to collect samples of flies that are common in an area. The fact is that if you want to put a name to a fly (even a family or genus name) you need to put it under a microscope, and that means collecting it.

Study Plan Outlined

The plan for my study at the Oxbow is to sample the flies at 5 locations throughout the season (roughly from March to November) and try to identify them as well as possible. Having made preliminary IDs, significant specimens will be forwarded to experts for more detailed identification. With flies, you have to partly identify them before you can even find out who in the world can tell you what they are. The locations I've selected to sample concentrate on the wet habitats of Oxbow's land: lake-side, river-side, wet woods, and wet fields. Since much of Oxbow's land is farmed, I've also selected one sampling station adjacent to an agricultural field. By making regular visits, putting out bait (dung and rotting fruit) as well as passive fly traps and actively sweeping the foliage, I hope to obtain fairly representative samples of the flies that are important at the Oxbow.

With a few years' work I hope to understand the yearly cycles governing when certain kinds of flies appear

and the habitats that are important to them. At the same time, I expect to learn many useful things about the Oxbow by finding particular species of flies. For example, last fall I found an adult fly of a species (in the family Sarcophagidae) whose larvae live as a parasite on the young of ground-nesting wasps that frequent dry, sandy banks. Without even having located a dry, sandy bank, we know now that such a habitat is important for at least two species in the Oxbow area: the wasp and the fly. Early this spring I found a fly (in the family Sciomyzidae) whose larvae are predators or obligate parasitoids of aquatic snails that live near the land-water interface of still or slowly moving water. I can't tell you more until I get the specimen to a Sciomyzid expert, but already we know something new about the Oxbow — that snails at the land-water interface are significant. And how many of us have even *seen* snails out there?

While many birders are broadening their interests using such wonderful guides as *Butterflies through Binoculars* and *Dragonflies through Binoculars*, I'll be pursuing my interests best described as "Maggots through Microscopes" with the aim of better understanding the way life works at the Oxbow. Perhaps I'll meet you out there someday!



NWRS Will Soon Celebrate Century of Conservation

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's most unique network of lands and waters set aside specifically for conservation of fish, wildlife and plants.

President Theodore Roosevelt established the first refuge, 3-acre Pelican Island Bird Reservation in Florida's Indian River Lagoon, in 1903. Roosevelt went on to create 55 more refuges before he left office in 1900.

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From *Duck Tales*, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge

I Am the Ill Earth

I am the ill Earth.
People have cut down the trees
which are my lungs.
They have polluted the air
which is my brain.
They have polluted the streams
which are my blood vessels.
They have polluted the oceans
which are the chambers of
my heart.

My wrath has gotten gigantic.
My wrath is hurricanes and
tornadoes.

I am the ill Earth.
If people trash me
I will die ---
and so will they.

Misha Mayr, age 9, El Paso, Texas

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.

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

Non-Profit
Organization
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Permit No. 7271



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