



# Oxley Nature Center Newsletter

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## The Tale of Two Turtles by Eddie Reese

When I was a boy of 11, my little brothers and I would ride our bicycles out to Otter Creek and go fishing. The best fishing hole was hard to get to because half the trip was down railroad tracks and then down a trail through the woods. We would tie our fishing poles and canteens to our bikes, tell Mom where we were going and pedal the three miles out of town. On one of these fishing trips I met the most infamous of all turtles. Well, almost. My red and white bobber didn't do anything unusual. It just bobbed once, swirled a little, and went under. I yanked back hard on the line and knew I had a big one. We almost never got it to the surface and discovered it was a large turtle. But not just any turtle, an alligator snapping turtle. I'd heard about these. If they bite you they won't let go until it thunders. It was July, there might not be another thunderstorm until September. I wanted to get my hook out of his mouth. It was the only one I had left. I was in trouble. How do you get a fish hook out of the mouth of a very upset snapping turtle without getting bitten, and it might not thunder until school starts. Lucky for me Willie Adams was there. He drove his old car down the railroad right of way and across the pasture to the fishing hole. He was too old to get there any other way. He had white hair and skin as dark as night from sitting on the creek bank all summer. He became very excited about my catch. Said he would get my hook out if he could have the turtle. "They make great soup" he said. To get the hook out all he needed to do was get his "turtle tools" out of his car. I didn't know what turtle tools were but I figured it was bad news for the turtle. I got my hook back and Willie had turtle soup that night.

For many years I thought I had caught an alligator snapping turtle. It turns out that in Southwest Kiowa county there aren't any alligator snapping turtles. We were four counties away from their native range. I had caught a common snapping turtle which are found throughout the state. I thought I'd caught an alligator snapping turtle because I suffered from a common disease I call WMS (Water Moccasin Syndrome). We see it all the time at the nature center. Every snake in the water is a water moccasin and every turtle in the water is an alligator snapping turtle. In truth there are alligator snapping turtles at the nature center and if you are lucky you might see one. Most likely you will see its cousin the common snapping turtle. There are differences. The common snapping turtle has a saw-toothed upper edge on the tail, the alligator snapper does not. The alligator snapper has three large ridges running lengthwise on the carapace that end up looking like large, pointed bumps. The common snapper lacks these as an adult but has saw-tooth projections on the back edge of the carapace. They both like any body of water with a muddy bottom and aquatic vegetation. Both open their mouths and wiggle their little worm-like tongue hoping some unfortunate fish will mistake it for food and get too close. At night they forage along the bottom eating whatever they catch. Common snappers eat some plants, about a third of their diet. Usually it's only the snout of the turtle sticking out of the water as it comes up for a rare breath of air. They rarely bask on the bank like other turtles do and normally only the females come out of the water. I hope you see one of these fascinating animals some day.

# Nature Center Happenings

**Redbud Valley and Oxley  
Nature Center will be  
closed for the following holiday:  
Friday, April 9, 2004.**




## **OXLEY AND REDBUD HOURS:**

The gates at Oxley Nature Center are open daily, with the exception of most City holidays, from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. At Oxley, you may park outside the gates from 6:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. to walk the trails even when the gates are closed.


At Redbud Valley Nature Preserve, the gates are open Wednesdays through Sundays, from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. You may ~~not~~ hop the fence when the Nature Preserve is closed: on Mondays or Tuesdays, on City holidays, before 8:00 a.m., or after 5:00 p.m.

## **PROGRAM INFORMATION:**

**Call: 689-8644** to register or for more information about programs. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult, unless otherwise stated. Programs that are wheelchair accessible are designated with the  symbol.

Visit our Website at "<http://www.oxleynaturecenter.org>"

## **Kid's Saturday Programs**

\$5 for general public, \$3 for members, all 

### **Discovery Club (Ages 3-5 years)**

Each child accompanied by an adult, please

March 20, 10:00-11:30 "Let's Find Spring"  
Come help us search for signs of spring.  
Sign-up begins Sunday, March 7.

April 17 10:00-11:30 "Chickens Aren't the  
Only Ones"  
Come learn about other animals that lay eggs.  
You may be surprised! Sign-up begins April 4.

### **Adventure Club (Grades K-2nd)**

Kid's only, please

March 20 10:00-11:30 "When the Wind Blows"  
What is the mysterious force that makes the  
trees sing? Come find out about wind.  
Sign-up begins Sunday, March 7.

April 17 10:00-11:30 "April Showers"  
Wind, clouds, thunder & lightning bring rain, then all  
is calm as a rainbow arcs across the sky. We'll  
make it all happen. Sign-up begins Sunday, April 4.

### **"Finding Mercury" Monday, March 22, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**

Never far from the sun, Mercury can be an elusive target. If we find it tonight, we will have five planets to view. Bring binoculars if you have them. Sunset: 6:37 p.m. and moonset: 8:22 p.m. Meet at Lake Yahola. Sign-up begins March 14.

### **Star Programs "Farewell to Five Planets" Saturday, April 3, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**

**\$2 to general public  
free to members**

**All ages welcome**

** with advance  
notice**

Mercury will still be visible the first week of April, but after that it will be a long time before we get to view the 5 planets together in the evening sky. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at Lake Yahola. Sunset 6:47 p.m. and moonrise: 4:47 p.m. Sign-up begins March 21.

# Programs and special events

## March

### 6 "Saturday Morning Birding" Ages: All ■

Saturday 8:00-9:45 a.m.  
Free registration not required



Meet in the Oxley parking lot promptly at 8:00 a.m.  
Bring binoculars if you have them.

### 6 "Wildlife Rescue" Ages: 12 & up ■

Saturday 10:00-11:00 a.m.  
\$2 for general public free for members

The spring baby boom is coming up. Some people find abandoned or injured wildlife. What's the right thing to do? What's legal? What's safe? Bring your questions. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins February 22.

### 15 "Skins and Skulls" Ages: All ■

Saturday 1:00-2:00 p.m.  
\$2 for general public free for members



Naturalists use all sorts of "tools" to interpret nature. Come find out what a skin or skull can tell us. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins February 29.

### 17 "Letterboxing" Ages: All ■

Wednesday 9:00-12:00 noon  
\$30 for general public \$25 for members

You will need to make your own rubber stamps to hunt the nature center's new letterboxes. We will provide all the materials for this as well as a pocket notebook. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins March 7.

### 17 "Geocaching for Beginners" Ages: 12 & up ■

Wednesday 1:30-4:30 p.m.  
\$30 for general public \$25 for members



Maybe you just got a GPS receiver, or perhaps you were thinking of buying one. Learn a fun new hobby. Oxley is a good place to learn this modern treasure hunt game. All equipment will be provided. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins March 7.

### 27 "Nature Bingo" Ages: All ■

Saturday 2:00-3:30 p.m.  
\$3 for general public \$1 for members

Bingo! Was it the flying squirrel or the American Toad that helped you bingo? Join us on a March day to learn more about nature. Win a prize! Meet at Oxley. Sign-up anytime.

## April

### 5 "Saturday Morning Birding" Ages: All ■

Saturday 8:00-9:45 a.m.  
Free registration not required



Meet in the Oxley parking lot promptly at 8:00 a.m.  
Bring binoculars if you have them.

### 5 "Butterfly Gardening" Ages: 18 & up ■

Saturday 1:00-3:00 p.m.  
\$3 for general public \$2 for members

Join Carol Eames to learn what kind of plants and other features you can use in your yard to attract butterflies. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins anytime.

### 10 "Butterfly Walk" Ages: All ■

Saturday 1:30-3:00 p.m.  
Free registration not required



Meet in the Oxley parking lot for our first butterfly walk of the season. Bring binoculars if you have them.

### 18 "Father-Daughter Pioneer Cookout" Ages: All ■

Sunday 1:00-3:00 p.m.  
\$5 for general public \$3 for members

Learn hands on how food was prepared in days before cook stoves. We'll cook sourdough biscuits in a dutch oven, and bacon and eggs in a paper sack. Bring your appetite! Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins April 4.

### 24 "Wildflower Walk" Ages: All

Saturday 1:30-3:00 p.m.  
Free registration not required



Meet at Redbud Valley for the first wildflower walk of the season. Bring binoculars if you have them.

### 24 "Stash the Trash" Ages: All

Saturday 10:00-12:00 noon.  
Free registration not required

Let's celebrate Earth Day by cleaning up our little piece of earth, the Nature Center. Dress comfortably, bring gloves, and we'll clean up an area. Meet at Oxley.

### 25 "Wildflower Walk" Ages: All ■

Sunday 1:30-3:00 p.m.  
Free registration not required

Join us as we search for the first wildflowers of spring. Meet in the Oxley parking lot.

## Full Moon Walks

Walking in the moonlight can be a magical experience. Bring your family and friends and start a new tradition.

- **Saturday, March 6, 6:00-8:00 p.m.**  
Come learn the folklore associated with the "Worm Moon". It's the time of year when the soil warms enough for worms to become active again. Maybe we'll find night crawlers!
- **Saturday, April 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**  
Come walk under the "Pink Moon". Early spring flowers hint at colors to come, but will the moon really be pink?

**Program Fee: \$2, free to members**  
**Sign-up any time.**

## Spring Nightwalks

Spring nights come alive with a chorus of "love songs" from some of the inhabitants of the nature center. Come join us for a walk after dark to explore Spring's awakening.

- **Friday, April 16, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**  
Families and individuals only, please.  
Sign-up begins April 4.
- **Tuesday, April 27, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**  
For groups of six or more.  
Sign-up begins March 1.

**Program Fee: \$2, free to members**