



Oxley Nature Center

March/April, 2008

Volume 174

Oxley Nature Center:

The Oxley Nature Center Interpretive building will be closed for renovations until further notice.

-Gate and parking lot open daily, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. except most City holidays.

-Hiking trails are accessible during Mohawk Park hours 7:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

Redbud Valley Nature Preserve:

-Open Wednesday through Sunday, from 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. only. Hiking after these hours is not allowed.

-Interpretive building open Wednesday through Sunday 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

-Closed most City holidays.



Program information 918-669-6644

-Oxley@ci.tulsa.ok.us

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

-Please register 48 hours in advance unless otherwise stated. Some classes require special supplies and allow limited enrollment.

-Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult unless otherwise stated.

-Wheelchair accessible programs designated by ♿.

Black Birds Fly

by Amy Morris

Early morning, bobbing black figures in the pale straw-colored grass emit a series of whistles, churs, phees, and soft bubbly gurgles. So many different voices, languages. I watch as others fly in, then glide down, wings silent, joining in the feast that lay before them.

Midmorning, it's cold, but I step outside, drawn by loud, raucous calls. A huge flock of black birds hip-hopping through a forest of barren trees. Limb to limb, arguing in guttural cries, harsh rattles, squeaky whistles, wheezy, creaky, rusty shouts! No melodious songsters here.

Then they drop, fluttering to water swollen ground like so many inky handkerchiefs. A banquet lay at the feet of trees rising from impermanent wetland. Utterances muffled as bills fill. A rapt concentration of gluttony.

This is a flock of many tribes. Among them are our year round residents: common grackles, red-winged blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds. They are joined by their brethren, our winter visitors, rusty and brewer's blackbirds, soon to wing their way north.

It is early evening now, rising softly along the horizon. A wild flurry of wings, a burst of miraculous feather song. A large black mass rises in the air as one. My ears hear their vociferous utterances as they pass, thousands in number, overhead.

My heart hears differently. Their receding cries sound like shouts of joy, laughter. As if an unfathomable secret delights them. They keep coming, coming, in staggering numbers. Now whirling away into the fading light.

I watch them go, filled with an uneasy longing. Thrilled with their loud, resplendent voices, their gleaming iridescent blackness, tiny heartbeats, gleaming yellow eyes. I wish these beings to fly these skies forever. For my great grandchildren to hear them, and roll their eyes, because the voices are not musical and lilting, but harsh.

For they are not our stately sandhill cranes, nor our darting, aerialist swallows, that thrill us with their very presence. They are loud and, well, just "blackbirds". Just as passenger pigeons were, well, just pigeons. But when I look, with heart receptive, rainbow colors in a deep, complex sheen reflect a vision of hope.

Nature Center Happenings

Volunteer Naturalist Training Begins

Spring is “in the air”. Splashes of color appear, relieving the winter grays and browns with a quiet flourish. Everything is in flux. Change steals over the landscape, as bird and frog song fills the air. Sap rises in the trees as blood rises in our veins. It is time to get outside.

Morning is a good time to be out and about. Sharing this adventure with children can increase your pleasure many times over. Explore forests where purple violets nod and wild onions demand to be tasted.

Tall prairie grasses and sculpted mud crayfish chimneys bespeak a mysterious world of enchantment for child and adult alike. Here the prairie vole follows his hidden trail only so far, to the open area around the pond’s edge. Danger lurks here; the soaring hawk is watchful. Come explore.



We need YOU
to help us share these stories with children.

Volunteer Naturalist training takes place **March 4-March 28**. Training emphasizes interpretation methods and leadership skills. No previous experience is necessary, but you must be 18 or older. Enthusiasm for nature and children is a must.

Upon completing the free six-part training, volunteer naturalists work one morning each week during April and May, guiding small groups of students on adventures of discovery along Oxley’s varied trail system. For some children this may be their first exposure to nature’s wonders. It’s an amazing opportunity!

Contact us for more information about joining our dynamic team.

\$2 for general public, free for members. **Kid's Saturday Programs** Please register in advance, all &

March 8, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Discovery Club (Ages 3-5) Each child accompanied by an adult, please

“Is it Spring Yet?” What are some of the different signs that indicate spring is here? We will make a wind sock to take home.

Adventure Club (Ages 6-8) Kids only, please

“Feathers and Beaks” What animal has both of these things? Do all feathers and beaks look alike and do they serve the same purpose?

Junior Naturalist (Ages 9-11) Kids only, please

“Secrets of Spring” Find instant soap leaves, root beer floats, flannel plants, wild rope, natural paint, and much more! Learn spring legends: stories about everything from giant groundhogs to plants that grow from lightning.

April 12, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Discovery Club (Ages 3-5) Each child accompanied by an adult, please

“Where Does the Rain Come From?” We will talk about the importance of the water cycle. Then we’ll create a rain chain bracelet to wear home.

Adventure Club (Ages 6-8) Kids only, please

“Still Trees in Action” Although trees are firmly rooted in the ground, we will discover they lead very active and busy lives.

Junior Naturalist (Ages 9-11) Kids only, please

“Sundials” Do they actually work? We will explore nature’s time clock. We will make a simple sundial and never need a watch again!

Astronomy Programs

\$2 for general public, free to members, registration required, open to all ages, & Bring binoculars if you have them, dress warmly.

Monday March 17, “Saturn” 8:00-9:30 p.m. Sunset: 7:42 p.m. Moonrise: 3:27 p.m.

Come see the first steps of Saturn’s dance with the moon. Meet at Terrace Park, just west of 26th and Memorial Drive

Friday, April 25, “Spring Stars” 7:00-8:00 p.m. Sunset: 8:08 p.m. No moon

We will look at the stars, and also observe the planets Mercury, Mars, and Saturn if the clouds permit. Meeting site will be chosen at a later date. Please call for information.



Programs and Special Events

March

1 "Saturday Morning Birding" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **8:00-9:45 a.m.**
Free **registration not required**

Spring migration is in the air! Warmer weather and longer days have birds singing their courtship songs. Now is the time to prepare your Purple Martin houses. It's a busy time of year for birds. Join us at Oxley and bring binoculars if you have them.

9 "Exploring the New Forest" **Ages: All, &**
Sunday **2:00-4:00 p.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**

Mother Nature made some changes. Let's see what she's been up to. Meet at Oxley's teaching shelter.

15 "Living on Gnomon Time" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **1:00-2:30 p.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**

Living on gnomon time is telling time without a clock. How can we do that? Come find out. Meet at Oxley's picnic shelter.

20 "Sap Full Moon Walk" **Ages: All, &**
Thursday **7:00-8:30 p.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**

We never know what March weather will bring. We do know the full moon will rise just as the sap will rise in the heretofore sleepy trees. Join us to see what is awakening with this full moon. Meet at Oxley.

22 "Wildflower Walk" **Ages: All**
Saturday **10:30-12:00 noon**
Free **no registration required**

The wildflower season begins with a walk at Redbud Valley in search of the early Dutchman's Breeches, ragwort, and False Rue Anemone.

29 "Brunch Anyone?" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **10:30-12:00 p.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**

Have you ever wanted to invite some really unusual guests to dinner? Come learn a few simple tricks you can try at home to attract six-legged beasts for a feast. Will anyone come? How will they be dressed? What's their favorite dish? Meet at the picnic shelter at Oxley.

April

5 "Saturday Morning Birding" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **8:00-9:45 a.m.**
Free **registration not required**

The Ruby-throated Hummingbirds arrive from the south. We will also listen for the elusive catbird and the Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Meet at Oxley and bring binoculars if you have them.

13 "Pathfinder" **Ages: All, &**
Sunday **10:00-11:30 a.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**



The pathfinder tour is a special tour often arranged by groups wishing to earn a badge. Following a guided hike participants should be able to answer specific questions pertaining to plants and animals living at Oxley. Meet at Oxley. Badges cost \$.75.

19 "Butterflies" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **10:30-12:00 noon**
Free **registration not required**

They're back! A true harbinger of spring are the delicate, fluttering, blue spring azures and the lovely, orangey pearl crescents that actively guard their territories. Bring binoculars if you have them and meet us at Oxley.

19 "Seed Full Moon Walk" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **7:00-8:30 p.m.**
\$2 for general public **Free for members**

The time of year is right for getting seeds planted in the ground. Does the *Farmers Almanac* suggest the full moon is the best time? Many plants are dispersing their seeds now. Join us at Oxley to explore the trails.

26 "Wildflower Walk" **Ages: All, &**
Saturday **10:30-12:00 noon**
Free **no registration required**

Wildflowers brighten the woodland floor, blooming while the sun's rays can still pass through the trees. Yellow violets and ragwort, blue violets and phlox, purples of lamiums and whites of alliums. Join us at Oxley to watch the flowers come alive.

Please register two days in advance of classes
*** unless stated otherwise. ***

3rd Annual Early Spring Butterfly Count

Calling all citizen scientists!

Join us on **Tuesday, April 15** for a spring day in the great outdoors in pursuit of butterflies. No experience is necessary. You will be placed in a group with an experienced guide to spot, count, tally, and/or identify butterflies in a specific count area.



Information gathered on the spring count is used to supplement the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) Summer Butterfly count held annually in July.

We will be meeting from **9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.** and you are welcome to participate in all or part of the count. Bring a lunch, water and binoculars if you have them. Meet at the picnic shelter at Oxley Nature Center.

Please call and register in advance so groups can be assembled!

Looking for Opportunities by Amy Morris

There they are; under our noses, over our heads, and between the sidewalk cracks under our feet! Nature's treasures are everywhere, just waiting to be noticed.

Nature is as close as your own backyard, roadside, school playground, or downtown urban site. It is where a tree grows, a bird flies, or a bit of soil forms in a sidewalk crack. It is the clouds and the rain that falls.

This is where you can challenge children to open themselves up to a world so mysterious, so marvelous, so enchanting, that they just may set down the remote control. Together you can begin a new adventure.

Take that tree for instance. It may be the only one for a block around. That only makes it more special. There is more there than meets the casual eye. Look at the tree as a home for a multitude of tenants: lichens, mosses, galls, beetles, caterpillars, and birds are only a few.

Does it flower, and if it does, what color are they? Are the flowers fragrant, who visits them, and why? What about the leaves? What shape are they? Can you press some or do a leaf rubbing? Why do the leaves change color in autumn and then fall off? Is the tree dead?

Answers are an important element of learning. But questions! Questions and curiosity, that is what makes the wheels begin to turn, the earth to spin in the universe of a child's inner mind. You don't need to know all the answers. Take the opportunity to guide someone's gaze toward stars in the night sky. You can send sparks flying chewing wintergreen lifesavers in the dark! Have fun and break open that world of wonder.

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