

Oklahoma's Important Bird Areas



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A Great Success: The Boots, Buckets, and Chickens Weekend at the Selman Ranch in Harper County Oklahoma

John Kennington, OAC Chair

Thank you to all the participants for making the Oklahoma Audubon Council's **Boots, Buckets and Chickens!** weekend at the Selman Ranch a wonderful success! We also thank Sue Selman for her hospitality, and congratulate her on having her ranch designated as Oklahoma's first Important Bird Area (IBA). We had great views of the Lesser Prairie Chickens displaying on the lek, and Saturday morning had a variety of raptor activity. A Harrier flew over the lek, temporarily scattering the birds, and later a circling Prairie Falcon caused all lek activity to cease. To top off the eventful morning on a Cooper's Hawk struck a chicken right in front of the blind, though it failed to capture it.



(Continued on page 2)

Sue Selman being presented with a plaque designating her ranch as Oklahoma's first Important Bird Area, presented by members of the Oklahoma Audubon Council (Left to Right: Martin Brown IBA steering committee chairman, Eric Beck, IBA Coordinator; Molly, the happy Labrador; Sue Selman award recipient and ranch proprietor; John Kennington, OK Audubon Council Chairman). Photo by Sharon Kennington



Happy volunteers placing fence markers on a barbed-wire fence at the Selman Ranch. Providing fence collision protection for Lesser Prairie Chickens. Photo by: Eric Beck

The Great Salt Plains Important Bird Area

The second addition to the Oklahoma's growing list of Important Bird Areas. Plans are being worked out for a public announcement and ceremony, so stay tuned for more. Dr. Michael Patten, technical committee member and Director of Research at the Sutton Avian Research Center provided a short summary about the Salt Plains and some of the important bird species that are present there.

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge was established by executive order of President Herbert Hoover on 26 March 1930 as a refuge and breeding ground for birds. The nearly 13,000-ha refuge is

(Continued on page 2)

Salt Plains

(Continued from page 1)

divided into almost equal parts of salt flats, open water and impoundment, and vegetated upland. This last category consists predominately of native grasslands, but there is a substantial amount of freshwater marsh and pond, bottomland hardwood forest, cropland (chiefly wheat and cowpeas), and brush. The refuge has been placed on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

The refuge provides habitat for over 300 species of birds and is a key stopover site for vast numbers of migratory waterbirds, including up to 40,000 American White Pelicans, 100,000 geese, 70,000 ducks, thousands of Sandhill Cranes, and hundreds of thousands of shorebirds. Heron and ibis rookeries on islets in Great Salt Plains Lake are among the largest in Oklahoma.

Among the Sandhills each fall are a small number of the critically endangered Whooping Crane: summary counts each late October and early November exceed double digits. The area is a major nesting site for the federally endangered Interior Least Tern (30-100 pairs) and the rare Western Snowy Plover (200-300 pairs). The refuge also provides habitat for the declining Bell's Vireo and Prothonotary Warbler



One of the 500+ Western Snowy Plovers present at the Salt Plains NWR.
Photo by: Eric Beck

Boots, Buckets & Chickens Weekend

(Continued from page 1)

After viewing the chickens Saturday morning, Martin Brown, Eric Beck and John Kennington presented Sue Selman a plaque designating the Selman Ranch as Oklahoma's first IBA.

Eric Beck then explained the procedure for fence marking. The Sutton Center has worked out a technique to use vinyl siding starter strips, readily available at any home improvement store. The strips are cut into about 2 inch pieces which easily snap on the barbed wire. While the most economical technique they have found, the cost is still \$200 per mile of fence. Everyone then dispersed throughout Sue's ranch and marked over 1 mile of fence! Thank you to the Sutton Center for providing the fence marking materials we used that weekend.



Birding on the salt flats area of the Selman Ranch. Snowy Plovers were the highlight here. photo by Sue Selman

We also put up IBA signs at strategic locations along roads, advertising the Selman Ranch as an Important Bird Area.

Saturday evening we enjoyed home cooked dinner by Sue Selman at her ranch house. Dr. Dwayne Elmore wrapped up the evening with a very informative talk on the ecology of the Lesser Prairie Chicken, and its presence in northwest Oklahoma. His presentation was followed by a lively discussion on wind energy.

Sunday we birded on the salt flats area of the Selman Ranch, where the Snowy Plovers were the highlight.

Dr. Michael Patten

A bit about the author of the Salt Plains NWR summary. Dr. Michael Patten is Director of Research for the George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center, he is also a staff member at the Oklahoma Biological Survey. He received his Phd from the University of Southern California. He is author- and co-author of two recently published books, Birds of the Salton Sea, and Rare Birds of California. He has published prolifically in countless scientific journals. and just recently accepted the offer to be Editor of The Condor: The Journal of the Cooper Ornithological Society. We are proud and privileged to have Dr. Patten serving as a member of our Technical Committee.



Enjoying a wonderful dinner prepared by Sue Selman photo by John Kennington

OK IBA Technical Committee

Fortunately Oklahoma's IBA project is in good hands, its Technical Committee is composed of a who's who in Oklahoma Ornithology.

Dr. Mia Revels– Northeastern OK State University

Berlin Heck– Past Director of the Little River NWR

Dr. Michael Patten– Univ. of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Biological Survey and Research Director of the Sutton Avian Research Center (GMSARC)

Dan Reinking– Senior Biologist at GMSARC

Jay Pruett– The Nature Conservancy, Director of Conservation

Chris Wilson– The Nature Conservancy, Nickel Preserve

Dr. Michael Husak– Cameron University

Dr. Doug Wood– Southeastern OK State

Dr. Donald Winslow– St. Gregory's University

Jona Tucker– The Nature Conservancy, Pontotoc Ridge Preserve

Steve Hodge– Biologist, Wichita Mtns. NWR

Mark Howery– Biologist, OK Department of Wildlife Conservation

Martin Brown– IBA Steering Committee Chair

John Kennington– Oklahoma Audubon Council Chair

Eric Beck– Oklahoma IBA Coordinator

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If you would like to support the Oklahoma Important Bird Areas Program please visit the Oklahoma Audubon Council Website at

www.okaudubon.org/support.htm



Some of the activity on the lek at the Selman Ranch
Photos by John Kennington

Coordinator's Statement

I could barely contain myself the afternoon a number of kind hearted volunteers started marking fences. It was Oklahoma IBA's very first opportunity to get some real on the ground work done for the sake of preserving a species (in this case the Lesser Prairie Chicken). Let me tell you, it went off very well, and neither I nor the rest of the Audubon Council team could have asked for a better weekend. This is what the Oklahoma IBA program is all about, helping private property owners, as well as refuge and preserve managers preserve their species of concern through public relation events and hard working volunteer days. During the Boots, Buckets, and Chickens weekend I was treated to happy, hard working faces, who relished in the opportunity to do some volunteer work (as well as the highly popular opportunity to view prairie chickens in the early morning!). There were nothing but comments of praise for the IBA program from everyone, and that's the way we like it. All that I can say is stay tuned, because more opportunities just like the one covered in this issue are around the corner, opportunities that benefit the places and the birds that so many of us love. So next time there's an opportunity get yourself out there and join us for some fun, for the good of everyone involved!

Steering Committee Report

You just couldn't help but be pleased with the success of our first IBA event at the Selman Ranch. I love to see new places, birds and people. I especially value meeting new friends with a common passion. At our evening get together, there were a lot of good ideas tossed about. Now we just have to make them happen. As with a lot of projects, a necessary ingredient is money. I am happy with the progress we have made with a strictly volunteer force. But, just imagine what we could accomplish with a paid coordinator and maybe a staff person. The IBA Steering Committee has started the grant application process so we can make this happen. The first grant we are applying for is from the newly formed partnership between National Audubon and Toyota called Together Green. I think we have a serious shot at this. Even if we don't get this grant, the experience of completing the first application will make the next ones much easier. We are looking for other possible sources of funding, so if you have any ideas, please contact me.

Martin Brown
Chair - OK IBA Steering Committee



Photos from the *Boots, Buckets & Chickens Weekend* Selman Ranch, April 5-6, 2008



The view from the blinds. Note the looming threat of wind towers on the horizon. *Photo by John Kennington*



Jean and Sarah Brown put up IBA signs at strategic locations along roads. It was very windy, making for a bad hair day! *Photo by John Kennington*

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