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Lake Sherry | Karen Harris

What's so special about the photo of Lake Sherry (above)? Thanks to the City of Tulsa, ONCA and the generosity of Tulsans, there is once more water filling the lake! The breach in the dam has been repaired, a bountiful rain occurred, and water is steadily increasing in the lake, and downstream – filling Coal Creek and its tributaries. Our wetland has begun to be restored. And with that, the ecosystem prized by so many species of birds and mammals is becoming welcoming again.

Tubby Birds or Clever Birds?

You've noticed birds fluffing their feathers in colder months. Like we do, they need more insulation in the winter. And by fluffing their feathers, they can create their own puffer jackets! They do this by lifting their little feather barbs which creates spaces between the layers of feathers. Once warm air fills those gaps the bird is able to trap heat, just like your down jacket does.

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

Wetlands Are Wet (Mostly) by Karen Harris

February 2, 2026 is World Wetlands Day. The theme for this year's celebration of one of our most important ecosystems is "…the timeless role of traditional knowledge in sustaining wetland ecosystems." When I read that, I turned to works of my favorite Native American writer, Robin Wall Kimmerer. Her advice? Go outside, pay attention, and let the land itself be your teacher. With that advice, I turned to my own field notes to discover what Oxley's wetlands have taught me in the past months.

Oxley has a rich diversity of wetlands, including Lake Sherry, Blackbird Marsh, Blue Heron Swamp, Bird and Coal Creeks, and the temporary pools in the old fish hatchery that appear after spring rains and support amphibian reproduction. When a breach formed in the Lake Sherry Dam in April 2024, I learned just how

becoming shallow and muddy. Beaver activity seemed to shift to the Bird Creek area and there were fewer sightings of river otters and muskrats. After rains, shorebirds like Wilson's Snipe and Killdeer could be seen in shallow water and on mudflats, but ducks were relegated to the east end of Lake Sherry as Sesbania, a tall, opportunistic legume took over the west end of the lake. Several times, I saw deer walking through it on the dry lake bed. I did not see them eat it, but it looked like a great place to bed down and hide. After a heavy rain, gar could be seen in Blue Heron Swamp only to be trapped there as the water receded. I never saw them lying in the mud though and am guessing they became meals for predators and scavengers.

Because of your support, Maggie's perseverance and follow-through, the work of various City of Tulsa agencies led by Tulsa Parks, Earth Smart Construction began work in mid-December and completed the repair of the dam, placing white boulders (riprap) on January 17. By the Audubon Christmas Bird Count on December 20, the lake was already a little higher. There were over one thousand waterfowl, including ducks like Shovelers, Greenwing Teal, and Pintails, Canada geese, herons and pelicans located mostly in the east portion of Lake Sherry, but some were swimming near the west island. We saw Wilson's Snipe and Killdeer in the mudflats where Coal Creek enters the lake. By December 31, water was west of the island and covering mudflats where shorebirds had been seen only ten days before. On the morning of January 8, Tulsa received 0.7 inches of rain and boy did things pick up from there. By that afternoon water was flowing into Blue Heron Swamp. The next day it began running through the pipe from Lake Sherry to Blackbird Marsh. Two days after that water was rushing through the pipe and had reached the west bank of the marsh near Warren Bridge. Our wetlands all had water again. Near Coal Creek and Blue Heron Swamp, otter tracks have been seen in the recent snow. So what has the land taught me? Dams, whether built by beavers or humans are temporary structures and when they are breached, some plants and animals will take advantage of the changes while others will have to move on. If dams are replaced, it doesn't take long for wetlands to refill and for plants and animals to readjust again. In short, change is a part of life. Wetlands aren't always wet. As long as habitats are diverse and refugia are available, Nature is resilient.

I still have a lot of questions. Where did that water come from that began to fill the lake before the rain? What will happen to water levels when we get the first big rain of the spring? How will the beavers, muskrats, and otters respond to the increased water levels and where will they build their lodges or dig their dens? Will the Limpkins return? I still don't know how Native Americans managed wetlands, but I have learned that as changes occur, if we manage Oxley's wetlands to provide as much diversity as possible, Nature will adjust and persevere. Wetlands are Oxley's crown jewels, and as members of ONCA and citizens of Tulsa, they are yours. Come walk the trails and watch as they change and sparkle.

Mary K. Oxley Nature Center - February Programs

Call 918-596-9054 to register for any program that requires pre-registration.

***Full Snow Moon Walk**
February 2, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Join us as we head out in small, guided groups to experience the nocturnal sights and sounds of Oxley.

***Nature Story Time**
Select Thursdays, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
In partnership with Early Learning Works Talking is Teaching program, Oxley Nature Center invites families with children 8 and under to join us for a free, fun, nature-themed opportunity to TALK, READ, and SING. This event includes time to enjoy a book with your child, a free book to take home, a fun activity, and an optional short walk. *February is sold out but registration for March opens February 1*

Saturday Morning Birding
February 7, 8:00 – 9:45 a.m.
All ages and skill levels are welcome for this free drop-in Birding Walk, guided by a staff naturalist. Bring binoculars if you have them!

***Nature Journaling Group**
Meets on Thursdays, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Led by Mary Seabourn, this program offers the opportunity to dive in deep with your observations of the more-than-human world. Each session will include time out on the trails, time to reflect, write, and sketch about what you notice, and time for optional sharing and group discussion. Participants can join the group at any time; There is a one-time materials fee of $20. *Special guest artist Kayla Anley will lead the February 12 session*

***Little Seedlings, February's theme: "Beavers Love their Neighbor"**
February 10 and 13, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
This program for curious little nature-lovers (ages 1-5) and their caregivers includes a craft and a guided trail walk to explore the theme of the month; (The Tuesday and Friday sessions are the same).

***Drawing Nature Around Us**
February 21 and 28, 12:00 – 4:00 p.m.
This two-session workshop introduces you to the pleasures and the skills gained by starting a nature drawing practice. Students learn several illustration techniques including careful observation of a subject, measurement, representing

supply list is provided to each enrolled student. No previous experience is necessary. The first session, February 21, is held at Oxley Nature Center; the second session, February 28, is held at WaterWorks Art Center. There are only two spots left!

Plant Identification Walk

February 21, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Oxley Naturalists guide this free drop-in event, where we explore the lives of plants in the forest, prairie, and wetlands.

Project FeederWatch

Every Thursday and Friday, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
Stay warm inside while helping collect community science data to submit to Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Winter Discovery Walks

Fridays at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., and Sunday at 2:00 p.m.
These informal walks will be facilitated by Oxley staff naturalists. Meet by the message board in the parking lot and we'll walk together to see what the trails have to show us. These are free, drop-in events for all ages and abilities.

All About Nature Book Club

Friday, February 27, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
February's selection: "The Living Mountain: A Celebration of the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland" by Nan Shepard

Warblers, Waterfowl, and Sparrows

February 28, March 7 and 14, 2:00
Join Oxley Natural Resources Coordinator, Josh Smith, for an in-depth look at Waterfowl, Warblers, and Sparrows. This class is for people with some basic knowledge of and birding experience. Participants will learn key identifiers, what to look for, listen for, along with information on behaviors and tips for effective location scouting. Each of the three sessions will include time in the classroom followed by time on the trails.

*Track Chairs

We are taking reservations for folks interested in taking the Track Chairs out onto the trails. These all-terrain motorized chairs are available any time the building is open and can be reserved by anyone who has any type of mobility issues. Call us for more information or to reserve!

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UPCOMING IN MARCH

- **Full Moon Walk** – March 3

learn about the ecosystems and wildlife at Oxley and efforts to protect them. There will be a Tuesday group and a Saturday group.

- **Instrument Petting Zoo** – March 28

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*indicates that pre-registration is required. To register for programs or to find out more please visit https://tulsaparks.recdesk.com/Community/Program?category=14

Orange Crowned Warbler | Greg Silva

Interpretive Center hours are 10-4:30PM Tuesday through Saturday, and Noon - 4:30PM on Sunday.

After Interpretive Center hours, trails are open for hiking until 9:00 PM.

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