

Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society

April 2005

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Note from Rich Richardson: Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian every second Monday of the month at 7:00. Trinity is located at 4223 Poplar Springs Drive. Please use the SOUTH driveway on the church property (the one nearer downtown Meridian) and proceed around through the parking lot to the back, where you may enter the building through the double doors. Next meeting:
April 11.

Sightings

Submitted by our members and others

By **Debra King**: 3/15/05 Ruby-throated Hummingbird, sipping the first flowers of "Pink Lemonade" honeysuckle.

By **Van McWhorter**: 3/04/05 Female Hooded Merganser sitting on 13 eggs in my Wood Duck nestbox. Suqualena backyard pond.

3/05/05 10 Cedar Waxwings. Okatibbee Dam.

3/08/05 4 Lesser Scaup. Okatibbee Lake.

3/09/05 1 Mature Bald Eagle. Okatibbee Dam.

4/03/05 Greater Yellowlegs feeding along the flooded grass areas in Twitley Branch Campground.

One Common Loon swimming 400 + ft. out from the East end of the dam.

Four Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers East Bank Park.

One Yellow-throated Vireo singing in the trees at East Bank Park.

By **Nancy Donald**: 3/22/05 65 Cedar Waxwings in the maple tree.

3/25/05 First Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

By **Lomax Rosamond**: week of 3/14/05 Half a dozen Pine Siskins together at the thistle feeder.

By **Lauren Thead**: 3/12/05 Six Blue-winged Teal, 12 Pectoral Sandpipers, adult Bald Eagle flying over Visitors' Center. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

3/18/05 American Bittern, Common Moorhens, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat. Pipeline Road, Ross Barnett Reservoir, Jackson, MS.

3/19/05 About 8 Lesser Yellowlegs, 3 Greater Yellowlegs, several Pectoral Sandpipers, about 50 Least Sandpipers, 1 Northern Harrier. Prairie Waters Subdivision, Columbus, MS.

3/24/05 Singing Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

3/25/05 One subadult Bald Eagle, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Barn Swallows, Northern Parula, two Black-throated Green Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers. NWWR.

3/26/05 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Black-and-white Warbler, two Yellow-throated Vireos. Tombigbee National Forest.

3/27/05 Three Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, White-eyed Vireo. Four miles north of Meridian, MS.

3/28/05 About 25 Blue-winged Teal, five Northern Shovelers, one Northern Harrier, one calling King Rail. Pipeline Road, Ross Barnett Reservoir.

4/02/05 Cattle Egrets, two Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, one Pileated Woodpecker, one Prothonotary Warbler. NWWR.



REFRESHMENTS LIST

April—Mary Hollis, Pat Ezell, Johnnie Stutts

May—Margaret Anderson

June—Joe and Robin Johnson

Remember, articles, bird sightings and items of interest are requested for the newsletter!
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April Program

Welcome Margaret Copeland of Oktibbeha Audubon! Margaret is a naturalist whose devotion to the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker is widely known. She is also involved with restoration of native plants at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge and many other projects. Plan to attend, as she will discuss how to attract flying jewels to your yard!

HOWARD'S PERSONAL MEMORIES OF TOHY

I first knew of Tohy in the early fifties, watching him as a member of the Ponta High School basketball team. Although I went to school at Meridian High, I followed the Ponta games because I had relatives playing there. This was before the consolidation of the Lauderdale County school system, when a graduating class might consist of less than a dozen boys. Tohy looked out of place, where most the other players of both sides were at least a head taller. I noticed that he compensated for his lack of stature by being faster and more maneuverable than his opponent of the moment. Of course, he was not noted as a rebounder, which required some rough and tumble under the basket with one who was a foot taller and fifty pounds heavier. I became personally acquainted with him on Sunday afternoons after church when the boys from the surrounding area gathered to play pick-up games in the newly constructed gymnasium. As we played, sometimes together, sometimes against each other, I realized that Tohy was a dead-eye from the outside. He had no need to get into the thick of the fight because he could hit from outside with regularity. Too bad there was no three point line then.

I went on to Mississippi State and into the Army, so lost track of Tohy for over twenty-five years.

I attended my first OCAS meeting as guest speaker on Bluebirds. Nell Covington had heard that I had a Bluebird trail around the county and asked me to tell about the creatures. To my surprise, I found that most attendees knew far more than I about the species. Tohy was there. I found out that he still lived at Ponta, returning home after a career teaching English around the state and was a charter member of the local chapter. He was seeking to learn more about birds, to add to his already exhaustive knowledge about flowering plants. Thus began a show-and-tell for both of us. He lived just up the road from me, so it was convenient for him to stop by as we swapped knowledge about the "flora and fauna." He was especially excited and effusive during blooming season as we toured the trails and streams of my place. I showed him my local BB trail and how to set up a feeding station. We established a standing engagement for me to pick him up for the OCAS meeting, as driving at night was difficult for him. I remember him getting into the truck with a handful of flowers or rare plants, apologizing that they were not as beautiful as when he had picked them just an hour ago. As I

tried to identify each specimen by common name, he would, with great pride, state the scientific name. Not to rest on his laurels, Tohy told me his next project was to learn all the grasses, a huge undertaking.

As most of us know, Tohy had continuing health problems, including diabetes, loss of an eye and orthopedic problems. After a successful second hip replacement, he started therapy at the Marion swing-bed facility. On my second visit he was looking forward to being released in time to be at home for Easter. Unfortunately, his already weakened body could not recover from a sudden, massive infection which resulted in his death.

I will miss him. On the weekend before the scheduled OCAS meeting, one of us would call the other to confirm the pick-up time, which was always a bit early when he was involved in providing refreshments that day.

Tohy was a faithful member and Sunday School Teacher at Andrews Chapel United Methodist Church, so I am not concerned about his present status. See you later, Tohy.

Sightings—Ongoing

By Howard Malone

Some may remember a couple of years ago my describing a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks first coming to feed on deer offal and then to chicken parts I placed on a raised platform nearby in a hay field. I tied each piece to the platform with a loose string to keep any visitors from “stealing” the prize while I was not watching.

Well, the hawks have continued to come. Last summer I thought they had deserted me, for it seemed the crows were always hanging around waiting for me to bring breakfast. No hawks in sight. Then, last fall I noted that a large drumstick bone had been picked clean, including a portion of the interior marrow to a depth of almost an inch. Now, a hawk has a beak with the capability to reach into such restricted space, while a crow does not. My Sherlock Holmes reasoning led to “HAWK is back!”

I have continued to keep the platform stocked. So far this winter/spring I have placed thirty pounds of Wal-Mart leg quarters.

For each quarter, I separate it into three pieces: drumstick, thigh and back portion with some thigh meat attached.

For the past three weeks, the hawk(s) (sometimes two) come frequently, usually early in the morning. They continue to be very shy. Just opening the back door, which is about two hundred yards away, will spook them away, sometimes with a cry. Once it tried to carry the meat away and almost did a flip when the string held the meat in place.

Joe McGee told me there may be babies soon, so I will start leaving a portion of the meat free from restraint as baby food. Hope the crows don't get there first.

OCAS OFFICERS

R.L. Richardson....President

Howard Malone....Treasurer

Ed Brown....Field Trip Chairman

Nancy Donald....CBC Coordinator

Ruth Ann Rosamond..Refreshments
Coordinator

Lauren & Sheila Thead.....Newsletter

The Natural...ist

By Joe McGee

All of us in Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society have been deeply saddened by the unexpected death in late March of member Tohy Tisdale. From our very first meeting on May 22, 1995, Tohy was one of our most faithful members. He rarely missed a regular meeting or field trip.

Tohy loved wild plants. To most meetings he brought a sprig or two of whatever was in bloom to share with other nature-loving kindred spirits he found at Audubon. It might have been a tiny specimen of pennywort (overlooked by most of us) or a kudzu or muscadine look-alike. His finds might have been in the cracks of a sidewalk or from the hills and hollows he loved and roamed near his home in Lauderdale County.

Tohy was a storehouse of information about just when and where to find almost any species of plant locally. He was one of the few people in our state to locate (in Lauderdale County) allegheny spurge which is rare in Mississippi. He showed a group in search of an arboretum site at Bonita Lakes Hepatica, also uncommon in Mississippi. Who but Tohy would have known where to find crested coralroot in bloom near Marion?

At Guardian Angel Nursing Home where he was recuperating after hip surgery, he noted that the window of opportunity for finding bloodroot in bloom this year was upon us. He mentioned that he wanted to return to a location in Newton County to see spicebush in bloom and, later, to the prairie near Lawrence to look for prairie parsley.

Tohy, an English teacher by profession, was a naturalist in the tradition of English clergymen (like Gilbert White) who pursued botany or ornithology or natural history in general as a hobby on the side. He knew the local plants. He loved the English language, Shakespeare and wildflowers.

He'll be missed.

Lilies of the Field

Tohy Tisdale, OCAS' resident master botanist and all-around naturalist, passed away on March 29, 2005. To say that we will miss him is a gross understatement. His wisdom and knowledge enlivened and enlightened our OCAS meetings for all the years my family has been members and many before that, I am sure.

My personal fondest memory of him is from spring, 2002, when my daughters were studying wildflowers. Many OCAS members are aware that our family owns a small piece of property just north of Macon, Mississippi, on which there is an 1892-era house. The area around this building has apparently never been graded and tilled, and so every spring an assortment of flowers pop up to delight our hearts. Some are quite common—wild

garlic, the ubiquitous non-native henbit, shepherd's purse, blue-eyed grass—but we found one that spring which we weren't able to identify at all. It wasn't in our regular field guides.

This little flower looked something like a daisy—a sparsely-petaled one, but nevertheless, a daisy, with a plain center. It was much smaller and on a much shorter stem, and we might never have noticed it at all had we been at the Macon house on a cloudy day, for the sun's bright rays make the heads open, but on overcast days the pretty little things close up their faces.

We brought it to our next meeting and showed it around to several members, none of whom could ID it any more than we and who decisively suggested we let Tohy look—*he* would know. So we did. Tohy studied it with great attention. Then he told us he believed it to be a sort of anemone, or windflower, and he hadn't seen one like it in a while. We noted all his comments and did a little research in another, more scientific textbook and found of course that he was right.

Since that time a couple more naturalists have confirmed that it is indeed a Carolina Windflower (or Anemone), and typical of the small remnant prairies that remain here and there in the state...a description that fits, as the Macon property is within the Black Belt Prairie area and, as mentioned above, had no major tilling or excavation done on it through about 115 years. Every spring now I try to let that area of the grounds grow as long as possible to see what other prairie plants might appear, and in the meantime we've gotten a very healthy population of the windflowers...so much so that this year I collected some of the seed heads for sowing at the demonstration prairie at the Noxubee Refuge. And there are still hundreds and hundreds of flowers and seed heads out in the yard.

So, thank you, Tohy...your spirit and wisdom live on, thriving as the small plants you loved so much.

We decided to repeat a column Tohy wrote in December 2002. We hope you enjoy it as you recall the man who produced it. --*Sheila*

Tohy's Trivia

By
Tohy Tisdale

Name the bird in question. Answers in small print on last page. Don't look!

1. Thoreau described this bird as carrying part of the heavens on its back.
2. This bird's cry mimics that of a feline.
3. This bird is a master mimicker.
4. This bird is a symbol of peace.
5. This greedy sea bird has a pouch under the beak for holding captured fish.
6. This bird reminds one of the Holy See in Rome.
7. Emily Dickinson describes this bird as "a route of evanescence/ with a revolving wheel."
8. This bird's song reminds one of repeating a first name plus a surname.
9. In Bryant's "Robert of Lincoln" this rice bird or Java Sparrow repeats its name over and over.
10. This fish-eating diving bird reminds one of a stupid person.
11. This bird Benjamin Franklin placed on a high pedestal and thought it was worthy of being our State bird.
12. This bird is a small kind of heron that lives in marshes and has a peculiar booming cry.
13. This song bird shares its name with an island and a kind of wine.

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Answers to Tohy's Trivia

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|----------------|-------------|
| 1. Bluebird | 2. Catbird |
| 3. Mockingbird | 4. Dove |
| 5. Cormorant | 6. Cardinal |
| 7. Hummingbird | 8. Bobwhite |
| 9. Bobolink | 10. Loon |
| 11. Turkey | 12. Bittern |
| | 13. Canary |