

George  
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Sutton

AVIAN RESEARCH CENTER



*The*

***SUTTON***

***NEWSLETTER***

**Bald Eagle  
Populations  
Continue to Rise!**



VOLUME 52 | SUMMER 2019

*"finding cooperative  
conservation  
solutions for birds and  
the natural world through  
science and education"*



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## ON THE COVER:

*Photo by Jim Arterburn*

# A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Sutton Center friends,

Spring and summer are extremely exciting and busy times! The prairie-chickens are displaying, and the masked bobwhites are calling, and both are laying eggs. The eggs and then the chicks need a lot of attention, so our aviculturists shifted into overdrive. We have been shuttling Attwater's prairie-chicken eggs from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Houston Zoo, and Caldwell Zoo in Texas to our breeding facility here in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. When the masked bobwhite eggs hatch, we are looking at even more shuttling all the way out to Arizona. These programs are huge collaborative efforts that would not be possible if it were not for some very committed individuals and organizations.

The bald eagle chick that we followed since the egg was first seen on the webcam at Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuge, left the nest at the general fledging age of 11-12 weeks as April crept into May. Dan Reinking shares information regarding the life of the eaglet in this newsletter, and there is more to learn from the data we have been collecting from tracking young eagles after they leave the nest. However, another pressing need is to coordinate a second breeding bird atlas, since it is now over 20 years since the field surveys were started for the first Oklahoma atlas. It is a huge undertaking, and we are working hard to raise the necessary funds.

There has been some very disconcerting conservation news published recently. From easing restrictions on water pollution, to providing less protection for migratory birds, to an astonishingly large number of forecasted extinctions anticipated. So how do we keep our chins up? Well, by keeping a positive spirit and working together to find solutions. Your support is crucial!

Thank you for being a part of our collective wildlife mission!

Lena Larsson, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



Dr. Lena Larsson is holding an incubator with Attwater's prairie-chicken eggs, while transferring them from Texas to Oklahoma in May 2019. We'll tell you more about the chicks in the photo on the right in the next issue!



# The BEST Are Getting Even Better!

by Lena C. Larsson

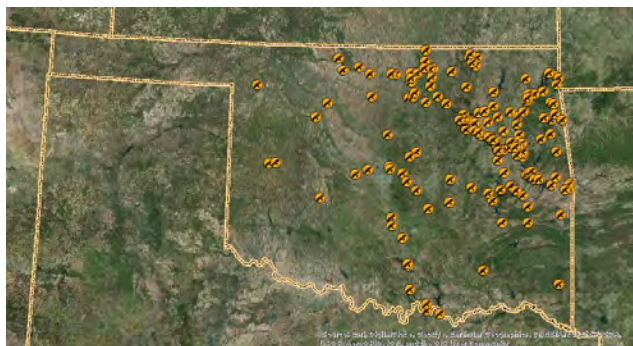


**Bald Eagle Survey Team members at Sutton Center's workshop December 2018.**

*Photo by Dan Reinking.*

The Bald Eagle Survey Team (the "BEST") volunteers who help us monitor the number of eagles nesting in Oklahoma did an outstanding job last season. They monitored 185 bald eagle nests! That is a record number. When the Sutton Center began the recovery efforts in 1984, the goal was to have at least 10 nesting bald eagle pairs in Oklahoma. There were none at that time. The BEST confirmed that 167 of the pairs attempted to raise

young in 2019, and at least 128 of them succeeded. That means between 197 and 256 eagle chicks fledged, and a good portion of them should now be learning the ways of being an eagle. The map shows the approximate locations of eagle nests around the state, concentrating along the Arkansas River and in northeastern Oklahoma. But there are more and more nests established farther west and south.



**Locations of bald eagle nests checked in 2018.**

We had good attendance at the annual workshop December 15, 2018. Shortly after, Tulsa World's article about the BEST, which included our "mostest" Cheryl Cavert (who monitored a BEST record of 30 nests last year) and our youngest, Seinna Leach, spurred even more eagle enthusiasts to join as citizen scientists. New nest territories are also being added during the 2019 nest season. If you are interested in helping with the monitoring, contact us and plan to attend the next workshop that will be held in late fall. We are so grateful for all your help to protect and monitor Oklahoma's bald eagles!



# Sequoyah Bald Eagle Nest Camera 2019

## The nest life of bald eagles on display

by Dan Reinking



**The pair of adults at our Sequoyah NWR nest camera spent more time at the nest as the breeding season approached.**



**An adult returns to the nest after a brief break from incubation.**



**One adult eagle incubates the eggs at night while the other roosts on a nearby branch.**

The Sutton Center's bald eagle nest camera project has gone well this season, after recurring technical problems due largely to severe weather had shortened the two previous viewing seasons. We replaced the camera and other associated equipment at Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuge last fall, and then waited to see if the eagles would once again choose to use that nest. Eagle pairs often have more than one nest within their territory and select one to use each season, so all we can do is install our equipment in advance and hope that the eagles cooperate.

Not long after our September camera installation, we began seeing the eagles visit the nest. They became more regular at the nest as fall advanced and the breeding season neared, and it seemed likely that they would use this nest once again. The adults spent time on the nest each day, and could occasionally be seen adding or rearranging sticks in the nest. The most regular and dedicated camera viewers knew that the wait was on for the arrival of the first egg of the season!

Somewhat late in the day on January 2 the first egg was laid, with most viewers seeing it for the first time

in a soggy nest on a cold and rainy January 3 morning. Unlike many songbirds, quail and waterfowl which delay incubation until their clutch is complete, bald eagles begin incubating with the arrival of the first egg. Clutch sizes can range from 1 to 4, although 4-egg clutches are rare. Viewers spotted a second egg on the evening of January 6, thanks to the night vision capability of this season's camera. As subsequent days went by and no more eggs appeared, viewers settled into watching the incubation routine. Both males and females incubate, and switch places from time to time. The eggs must also be turned regularly, providing occasional diversions for both the incubating eagle and for the human observers.

Incubation takes about 33.5 days, but hatching can take up to another two days. As the February calendar began to advance, it became clear that the first egg would not hatch. This is not rare, as some eggs are infertile or experience other problems that prevent successful development of the embryo. By the 8th of February, right on schedule, the second egg had pipped. By February 10, a gray, fluffy eagle chick was joined in the nest by more fish than it could eat before they spoiled. Hatching stimulates the

provisioning response in the adults, and our nest cameras often show a prodigious buffet of food items being deposited in the nest by the adults soon after chicks begin hatching.

By three to four weeks of age, or mid-March for the Sequoyah chick this year, substantial growth had occurred, and many of the first dark feathers begin poking out through the thick coat of gray down that had insulated the chick since hatching. The larger size of the chick at this age, together with the typically warmer days as spring progresses, enable the adults to spend more time off the nest instead of brooding, and gives viewers more opportunities to watch the chick.

After sunset when the camera had automatically switched to night vision mode, an interesting event was spotted by at least one alert viewer on the evening of March 27. A subadult eagle flew in, landed on the nest and began to eat some of the food remains that were littering the nest. Soon, one of the adults aggressively flew in to protect the nest and drive off the intruder. Could this young adult have been one of the eagles that was raised in this nest in a previous season? Maybe, but there are several



eagle nests on the refuge, and we have no way of knowing one way or the other.

**B**y April, the chick could be seen frequently stretching and flapping its wings as it reached a comparable size to the adults. Surprisingly, the unhatched egg was still present in the nest until mid-April, when it finally broke. At one nest several years ago, half of a recently broken shell became stuck to the feathers of an adult and was lifted out of the nest only to fall away as the bird took flight. By late April, the Sequoyah eaglet had made its first flight and was well on the way to its next stage of life.

**B**ald eagles typically leave the nest at age 11 or 12 weeks, although they continue to associate with the adults for about another month, and may occasionally return to the nest for brief periods. Satellite tracking of young eagles hatched from Oklahoma nests conducted by the Sutton Center has shown that most migrate north after becoming independent in early summer. The Dakotas, Minnesota and Ontario have all been regular summer destinations for young Oklahoma eagles. By early fall, they migrate south back to Oklahoma or neighboring states for the winter. A similar annual pattern takes place for three or four more years, at which time eagles become mature and most then settle into a territory within the region where they themselves were hatched. This behavior of ultimately nesting near where they were raised and fledged is known as philopatry, and was utilized by the Sutton Center's bald eagle program from 1985 through 1992 as we worked to establish nesting eagles in Oklahoma by rearing them in captivity and releasing them in areas of good habitat for future nesting. The successful outcome of that project is evident by the continued increase in the number of nesting eagles in Oklahoma. Our nest camera project allows you to get a glimpse of what happens at one of the now more than 180 eagle nests in Oklahoma! *Find the camera at [suttoncenter.org](http://suttoncenter.org) using the Watch link at the top of the page.*



**One adult leaves the nest while the other takes over incubation of the two eggs.**



**One egg is pipped and starting to hatch as the adult flies away for a short break from incubation.**



**One egg failed to hatch, so the single chick gets an abundance of food.**



**A subadult eagle landed in the nest briefly one evening before being chased away by an adult.**



**The chick has replaced its down with a first set of feathers, and the unhatched egg surprisingly remains intact.**



# Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Eggs Have Arrived!

by Jessica Colvin, Bonnie Gibson, Brandon Gibson, Tayler Harlow, Lena Larsson, Steve Sherrod, Gary Tweedy



Since our last newsletter, there have been several exciting changes here at our Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC) breeding facility. One was hiring three new staff members! Tayler Harlow and Jessica Colvin are our two new aviculturists that began work in November 2018 and are introduced elsewhere in this newsletter. Last October, we also hired a new conservation technician, Gary Tweedy.

Gary spent almost 20 years as a supervisor for the Buildings and Grounds Department at Wesleyan Christian School in Bartlesville. He also has 11 years of horticulture experience between working at Green Thumb Nursery and Hains Wholesale Greenhouses. All of these experiences come in handy now that he works for Sutton. Gary is not only responsible for property maintenance and upkeep, but he is also in charge of growing some highly nutritious natural foods (dandelions and clover) to feed our captive prairie-chicken flock.

Our new staff arrived just in time for a truly momentous occasion. In February, we hosted a meeting with the APC recovery team, where it was

decided that this spring we would receive Attwater's prairie-chicken eggs! Our staff kicked into high gear to ensure everything was prepared for their arrival. We received the first eggs towards the end of April, and they have been transferred from Fossil Rim, Houston Zoo, and Caldwell Zoo. These eggs have been selected by the APC studbook keeper, Hannah Bailey, Curator of Birds and Animal Records at the Houston Zoo, in conjunction with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums population management team. These experts determined which eggs we should receive based on genetics of the entire APC population. We are transporting these eggs intermittently throughout the spring, and expect to collect around 60 APC eggs to establish a captive flock. This of course means lots of hard work and planning for us.

We use special insulated incubators that can be powered by a 12 volt outlet converter to transport the eggs. These incubators have been fitted with a foam insert, a sponge/water tray for added humidity, and lots of thermometer probes. It is of utmost importance that we not only keep a steady temperature and humidity for these developing eggs, but also keep them from jostling around. Their developing microcapillaries are especially fragile. For this reason, during transport, one staff member holds the incubator in



their lap on top of a pillow for extra cushioning. Once the eggs made it back to our facility, the real fun began!

Four incubators and two hatchers were freshly sterilized, to be ready to receive eggs. We also prepared the brand new second breeder barn with netted enclosures that will eventually hold our adult APC flock. On top of the new breeder barn installation, several weeks were spent working to remove and replace all used sand substrate from our existing chick buildings, and to sterilize the buildings for this year's chicks. This is no easy task, as it requires us to haul sand in and out of the enclosures with five-gallon buckets. Needless to say, our APC team has developed some really strong arms!

Although we plan to begin breeding Attwater's prairie-chickens next year, we also intend to keep some greater prairie-chickens (GPC). The surrogate GPC flock gives us a unique opportunity to test new methods to increase chick survival and health, as well as egg production and fertility, without disrupting the tried and true methods currently used for Attwater's propagation.

Field technician Brandon Gibson is using radio-telemetry to track the prairie-chickens that were released in Nebraska 2017 and 2018. It has not been easy! There have been some really big snowstorms, and then the bomb cyclone hit on March 13. Brandon was stranded on an "island" with both ways out of his house to highways being flooded. More recently, he is asking pilot Randy Rubbert to help him relocate birds that have moved and been difficult to find since then. We hope to report some good news from the field in the next newsletter!



# Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas II

by Dan Reinking

It was 1996, and the Sutton Center's intensive, five-year study of tallgrass prairie nesting songbirds was coming to a close. This created an opportunity to start another meaningful project, and a breeding bird atlas project for Oklahoma rose to the top of our list. About 40 states had either started or completed breeding bird atlas projects at the time, and a statewide, standardized, repeatable survey of nesting bird distributions in Oklahoma was a project that didn't seem likely to get off the ground unless the Sutton Center made it happen. A flurry of fundraising followed, enabling us to start the project in 1997. Sending skilled volunteers and staff out to survey 583 blocks of land spanning every Oklahoma county was a major undertaking that required five years of field work to accomplish. By 2004, Oklahoma's first breeding bird atlas was published, providing a benchmark of breeding bird distributions for the state.

Following the successful completion of the first breeding bird atlas for Oklahoma, we went on to complete and publish a first-in-the-nation winter bird atlas for Oklahoma, based on another five years of bird surveys that took place during the winter months. These intensive atlas project surveys are designed to be repeatable, with 20 years often suggested as a useful interval. Many states have now completed or are working on second breeding bird atlas projects. It has been 22 years since the first year of surveys on the Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas, and it is time to repeat the project. The resulting data will enable us to compare current breeding bird distributions of over 200 species in Oklahoma with their distributions from two decades ago. Monitoring of bird populations is so important because it can provide an early warning about species in decline, allowing conservation actions to be implemented before a species becomes endangered and is much harder to recover. We are currently working hard to secure the significant funding needed for this project with the hope of starting surveys in 2020.





# Masked Bobwhite Recovery: The Power of Collaboration!

by Sarah Harren, Brittney Tayrien, Don Wolfe

"I have been a very active quail chaser with pointing dogs for many years 40+ and when we flushed that covey last week, I will tell you they flushed, flew and acted like wild birds! I am thinking this speaks very well for your team and the progress that you are making happen. If you would have asked me my feelings on the chances of birds that have only been raised in captivity for all these generations to still have any wild instincts in their genes, I would not believed it possible. I could also see the true excitement in John when this covey was pointed and as he was making his estimate count of the birds we flushed, a real sense of satisfaction in this unique species project. You and your team should be proud to have made this possible! That one flush that John and I experienced speaks volumes for your project."

- Jeff Hintz, Southern Arizona Quail Forever



When people are united with a common goal, things really happen. Our masked bobwhite recovery project is on FIRE! Not literally, but thanks to a Lyon Foundation grant to help with fire prevention and facility expansion, we have been working hard this spring at the Sutton Center to remove trees and underbrush, to decrease our vulnerability to wildfire danger. (Our buildings still bear some pink smudges of fire retardant from our March 2017 close call.)

Our partners at the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) southwest of Tucson, Arizona are closely monitoring and tracking the birds we released there in 2018. According to a recent report from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, survivorship to date of masked bobwhite produced at the Sutton Center and released on BANWR in 2018 is in excess of 20%, far better than most captive-reared quail, and comparable to natural annual survivorship of wild quail populations. This kind of success has not been seen in over 30 years with this species!

This success led to a partnership with the Lyon Foundation to expand our facilities and double our production of birds for release in 2019. They funded renovation of a building that was originally built for raising eagle chicks. We began demolition work in December and received much appreciated help from the Phillip 66 "Wild Bunch" volunteers: Linda Maholland, Brian Fennern, John Hays, Mike Corbett, Kathy and Wade Williams, and Howard Wilson. They hauled out pea gravel, tore down old walls and trim, and removed old pen structures to help reduce our construction expenses. Construction started in January and was completed in early April. Our renovated facility now has 30 additional enclosures to pair masked bobwhites for breeding.

With this new program, we've had a few surprises. Last year, we experimented with using trios (2 sibling females to 1 male) in an effort to increase production. With our group of eight trios and 29 pairs last year, interestingly and unexpectedly, the females in trios laid an average of 10.25 eggs per hen, while the paired females averaged 28.1 eggs each. Fertility rates were also higher in pairs (80.7% compared to 62.8%). Because our primary focus is on productivity, breeding pairs will be used exclusively for 2019. With such an unexpected outcome from trios, we may repeat this experiment in the future to see if the results remain consistent.





The power of collaboration is evident in the development of the fostering release method. We learned from monitoring of 2018 released birds at BANWR that survival for chicks paired with wild-caught male northern bobwhite foster parents is estimated at 28%, while survival of chicks paired with a captive-bred male masked bobwhite foster parents is 15%. So...the Buffalo Lake and Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge staff have stepped in to help capture northern bobwhites in west Texas. Thanks to their efforts, we have 43 males to be foster dads to this year's chicks! We plan to use some captive-raised masked bobwhite adults as fosters as well, since they contribute to the breeding population (if they survive to the next breeding season), and we will likely need more foster parents than will be available from our partners in Texas.

With the arrival of spring and summer, kale donated from the Under the Sun Garden Center is flourishing and blooming. Kale is an important food enrichment for our birds. This treat provides them with protein, fiber, potassium, and vitamins A and C. We also planted green beans and Malabar spinach for added enrichment. Okies for Monarchs donated seeds so in addition to food for the bobwhites we keep, we have started gardens for wild pollinators.

We paired our breeding birds in mid-April, and due to our increased facilities capacity, we are expecting around 2000 eggs this season, so we will be busy indeed. Our internship program is working out very well and we are happy to welcome back former Bartlesville High School intern Meghan Gilliland, who will be a sophomore at Oklahoma State University. Bartlesville native and University of Chicago student, Zack Woods, will join our staff for the first time this summer. Our most recent Bartlesville High School intern Olivia Galvez graduated in May and she plans to pursue her interest in paleontology. Olivia has done an excellent job and we are happy to help deepen her professional connections with a graduation gift of membership to the Paleontology Society. Because birds are the dinosaurs of today, she remains an honorary ornithologist to us!

## Birding with Bruce Beehler

On May 9, the Sutton Center hosted Dr. Bruce Beehler, who gave a wonderful presentation to an audience especially interested in birds. Dr. Beehler is a noted expert on the birds of New Guinea, a research associate with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, and a prolific author. In 2015, he spent 100 days following the spring migration of warblers from the Texas coast north to Ontario, and chronicled his travels and observations in his recently published book, *North on the Wing*. His program was based on this book, and was presented at The Reserve dining room at Grogg's Green Barn in Tulsa following delicious appetizers sourced from their on-site chef's garden. The morning following his talk, we took him out for some spring warbler migration watching along Pathfinder Parkway in Bartlesville. At the time of his visit to the Sutton Center, Bruce was in the early days of another trip, this time following the spring migration of Hudsonian godwits from Texas to Manitoba. There may be another book ahead for Dr. Beehler!



**Dr. Bruce Beehler enjoys some local warbler watching at Bartlesville's Pathfinder Parkway.**

*Photo by Dan Reinking*



**Dr. Bruce Beehler presenting on his most recent book at Grogg's Green Barn in Tulsa.**

*Photo by Lena Larsson*

# Sutton Board Welcomes New Members

The Sutton Center has work to do and with the strength of leadership from three additional board members in 2018 we're on a roll! Please join us in sharing our appreciation to Sutton Center's newest members.



**H**arvey Payne has a passion for the prairie and the wildlife that lives in it. Raised in Shidler, OK and currently residing in Pawhuska, Mr. Payne was instrumental in the vision and success of the establishment of the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve and has won awards from Chevron, the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, and NatureWorks for his significant contributions. He served as the Director of the Preserve for almost 20 years and continues to serve as the Community Relations Coordinator to this day. As a former municipal judge and assistant District Attorney, Harvey's attention to detail has extended to his skill with photography. His work has been featured in some of the largest newspapers (*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*) and magazines (*Oklahoma Today*, *The New Yorker*, *Southern Living*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Sierra Magazine*, *Outside*, *Natural History*, *Nature Conservancy*) as well as several books about the tallgrass prairie. His photos have also appeared in many Audubon and Nature Conservancy calendars. 104 of his photos are included in a permanent prairie exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.



**A** native of Louisiana, Roger Box moved to Bartlesville, Oklahoma in 1967 to become the Director of Pharmacy at Jane Phillips Episcopal Hospital. After five years he left the hospital and started MedSource Corporation, a company providing management, education, medical products, linen supply, and other services to hospitals and clinics. With the early support of the hospitals in Oklahoma and Kansas, MedSource grew exponentially and established a model for shared services, centralized packaging and purchasing, warehouse, distribution and linen supply in the health care industry. Depending on the service, MedSource clients were scattered throughout the United States, concentrated in the four states surrounding Oklahoma. In 2001, MedSource sold its various business operations and Roger began providing contract management expertise for turnaround projects in the hospital field. He was also active in logistics and supply chain management for large hospital systems. He has been active in many community, state and national organizations, volunteering at the Director/Trustee level. Much of his time is spent reading history, family research, and working on their small farm. He also skis and plays tennis. He and his wife, Angela live in Bartlesville and travel frequently to Austin to visit the families of their two daughters and to enjoy their four granddaughters.



**S**tephen Clayman, a native Tulsan and a 2008 graduate of the University of Oklahoma, is an organized and efficient leader. He currently serves as a petroleum landman for Citizen Energy, an independent operator in Tulsa. Prior to his entry into the oil and gas industry, he served in the United States Marine Corps. He left the service as a Captain after two deployments in support of the Afghan War. He founded Berlin Resources, an independent buyer of oil and gas mineral rights, and OP Left, a manufacturer of precision measurement tools for the military. OP Left was awarded in Tulsa's Startup Cup Competition by the Lobeck-Taylor Foundation. He is also a contributor to several oil and gas online publications. Stephen and his wife reside in Tulsa. They enjoy spending time in the outdoors, gardening, and reading.



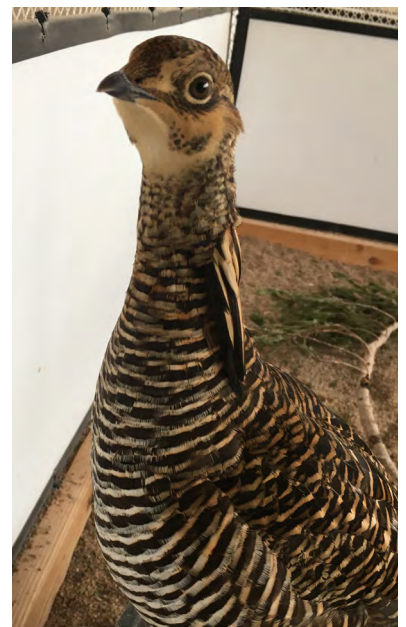
# Antics of Carl the Prairie-Chicken

By Tayler Harlow

As winter subsided, we prairie-chicken aviculturists prepared the flock for the beginning of breeding season. During this time, birds were separated into their breeding pairs, and their diet was transitioned to a more calcium and protein rich formula that supports hormonal changes and egg production. Many birds are hesitant about trying a different type of food, but one of our prairie-chickens took things to a level that may not have been documented before.

Male prairie-chicken 1590, nicknamed “Carl,” hatched in 2018 and was kind of a “troublemaker” from the start. Early in life, Carl’s health became unstable, and he was separated from the other chicks so we could give him special attention and administer medication. After regaining strength, he was re-integrated with the others, but he then began to bully his pen-mates. We had to isolate him again because of his aggression, and most of his interactions were with humans rather than other prairie-chickens. Over time, his acclimation to humans allowed his demeanor and personality to shine.

We began to transition all the birds onto their breeding season diet in January. This is done by mixing their current diet with the new breeder diet in a 50-50 ratio. Carl seemed notably unhappy, and he immediately began to painstakingly separate the two food types by color, grain by grain, neatly, on opposite sides of his bowl. Thinking it must have been an accident, staff mixed his food more thoroughly, but to no avail. Carl continued to separate his food on a daily basis until he apparently realized his keepers were far too interested in this odd behavior. Although no further sorting has been seen, Carl continues to keep staff on their toes, and we are excited to uncover more interesting characteristics of this special — and what we consider somewhat “ornery” prairie-chicken.





# John's Final Visit to a Booming Ground

by Don Wolfe



**Gary Huschle telling some of his memories of John prior to spreading his ashes.** *Photo by Dan Svedarsky.*

On 27 May, 2019, the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) held their annual meeting in Callaway, MN. Prior to joining the staff at the Sutton Center, John Toepfer had worked in Minnesota for many years, and had developed strong friendships and working relationships with many grouse folks in that beautiful state. Thus, the MPCS wanted to memorialize John at this meeting. At 7am, on a cold and windy morning, 25 of John's friends and former colleagues met to accompany John for his final booming ground visit. John had trapped and studied prairie-chickens at this booming ground extensively over the years. Paul Toepfer, John's brother, provided John's ashes appropriately in a Diet Mountain Dew bottle (those of you that knew John probably also knew that Diet Mountain Dew was virtually the only thing he drank). After sharing some memories and somewhat humorous tales and experiences, all 25 of us took turns spreading John's ashes. He had never said that this would be his wish for memorializing him, but we believe that he would have been pleased to have his remains intermingled with the feathers of his favorite creatures and the focus of his life's work. The Sutton Center was represented at this solemn event by Don Wolfe, Steve Sherrod, and board member Greg Septon, because to all of us, John was more than a fellow coworker, but also a very dear friend.

In the afternoon of the MPCS meeting, Native American dancers from the Anishinaabe Dance Troupe performed both a prairie-chicken dance and a courtship dance in John's honor. Although none of the dancers had known John personally, prairie-chickens are held in the highest esteem by plains-dwelling Native Americans, and while their performance was a tribute to John, they were likewise honored to pay respects to someone who had done so much for these birds.

The Sutton Center is administering a scholarship fund in John's honor for graduate students working with prairie grouse. The first recipient will be named at the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting in November. If you want to help students to expand their knowledge and receive



**Anishinaabe Dance Troupe along with Sutton staff and other close friends of John.**

encouragement and advice from grouse researchers across North America, please contribute generously to this scholarship fund. Checks are to be written to Sutton Avian Research Center, but be sure to denote in the memo or with accompanying information that the funds are for the *John Toepfer Prairie Grouse Research Scholarship*.

Another tribute to John that the Sutton Center is supporting financially is a memorial at the Buena Vista Wildlife Area in Wisconsin. John spent many years conducting prairie-chicken research at Buena Vista, where there is a kiosk that informs visitors of its natural history significance and also honors the Hamerstoms' classic prairie-chicken work on the marsh. Former Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus board chair, Peter Ziegler, has secured approval to erect a memorial boulder by the Wisconsin Historical Society as well as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources that owns the land. The site is still managed for prairie-chickens, and several rare and uncommon grassland species thrive there. If you choose to contribute to this memorial including a plaque with John's image and a description, please inform us to direct the funds towards the "John Toepfer plaque."



**Greg Septon spreading John's ashes.**

*Photo by Dan Svedarsky.*



# Partnerships Expand the Reach of the Sutton Award

by Audra Fogle

**B**ecause people cannot care about the things they are not even aware of, EDUCATION is crucial to all our conservation efforts. As an added challenge, we know that many young people have few opportunities to interact directly with nature and continue to be more and more disconnected from our natural world.

**C**elebrating its 15th year, the Sutton Center along with NatureWorks forges new enthusiasm for wildlife conservation by hosting a statewide art competition inviting high school students to tell the conservation story through art and essay. At the reception in February, with 151 entries from 31 different high schools, it was exciting to watch students come alive as they eagerly shared their newfound enthusiasm for a wide array of conservation issues. From passionate essays about ocean pollution to heartfelt observations about our pollinators, through life-sized sculptures to striking pastels, these students have intriguing stories to tell. The Sutton Award is free to enter and open to all Oklahoma high school students.

**T**oday, as schools struggle to afford enrichment programs like the arts, it is exciting to be able to connect our conservation mission with schools to provide significant scholarships for students and the teachers who work so hard to run their programs on shoestring budgets. Congratulations for the outstanding art of participants and our 2019 first place winners and their teachers: Madeline Fossett for 2D, Rachel Atherton for 3D, and Lexi Petka for Photography.

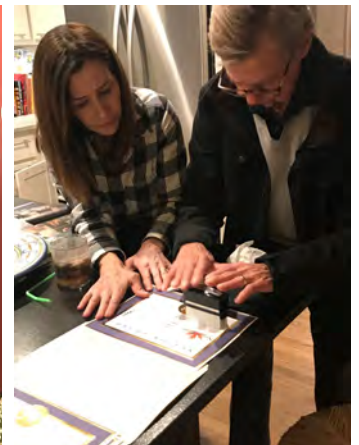
**W**e are thankful for the support of: the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for their partnership and the new addition of a special conservation award; the Oklahoma Sculptor's Society, whose members showed up in force to share their enthusiasm with students; the ongoing support of the University of Central Oklahoma who not only help us reach more art programs across Oklahoma but also provide vital practical support; the Jenks Chamber of Commerce; Nothing Bundt Cakes;

Nouveau Chocolates; and for the dedicated financial support of Sutton board member, Barbara Bates. It takes a village to organize all the moving parts to make this an exceptional show. We express our deep appreciation for the many volunteers who helped make this year outstanding!

**E**ducating young people to appreciate the beauty of diversity and learn to tell a story that will inspire others to preserve it aids Sutton Center in our central mission of protecting the natural world for the next generation. The Sutton Award and education programs like these are much needed and have a proven long-term impact. If education and the arts are important to you, please consider financially supporting the education programs at the Sutton Center — your gift will be used to help programs like the Sutton Award continue to develop artistic creativity and conservation awareness in Oklahoma students.



**ODWC Special Award Winner, Brooke Navarro.** The Texas horned lizard remains common in parts of western Oklahoma, but since the 1960s has shown a dramatic decline in both range and population size in the eastern and central parts of our state.



**NatureWorks Board Member, Judge Pete Messler, goes to great lengths after hours to make sure all our Sutton Award Winners receive a personalized award.** NatureWorks' dedication has helped to impact more than 2,500 students for wildlife conservation.



**Roseanne McKee/Examiner-Enterprise**

## 2019 Conservation Hero Award

**T**he Sutton Center had the honor to present a \$1000 Conservation Hero scholarship to Liza Williams, daughter of John and Stevie Williams, of Bartlesville High School at the 2019 Night of Scholars and Champions Banquet. Ms. Williams was the natural choice for the Conservation Hero scholarship. As the founder of the Environmental Club at the high school, she has been working with private companies and non-profit groups to re-establish a recycling program. The broader goal of the club is to educate students and faculty about sustainability. As a sophomore, Liza was the Oklahoma winner of the Stockholm Junior Water Prize. We wish her the best in her academic endeavors and in championing protection of our natural resources.

# Shared Experiences Among our Prairie-Chicken Aviculturists

by Bonnie Gibson

**"T**he International Crane Foundation works worldwide to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend." This is the mission statement of the International Crane Foundation (ICF), and I can assure you, they do every bit of this and more! If you haven't heard of ICF before, I can recommend their website ([www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)). They have an incredible facility, based in Baraboo, Wisconsin that houses all 15 species of the world's cranes. I don't think anyone can deny that cranes are incredibly stoic, graceful, and majestic birds. They are also birds to which we at the Attwater's prairie-chicken breeding facility are quite partial. You might be wondering why I have so much to say about cranes, when in fact I work with prairie-chickens. Interestingly, ICF is where our entire aviculturist staff (myself included) interned!

**"B**oth are very similar organizations with similar goals. ICF's focus is on cranes and their habitats, while Sutton Center's focus is broader to include many birds of Oklahoma and the surrounding states and regions. Both organizations do wonderful work and I'm happy to work and have worked for both," says Jessica Colvin, one of our two new aviculturists that began working for the Sutton Center November 2018. Our two new staff members actually interned together at ICF for almost a year, and unknowingly interviewed/accepted their positions here before realizing they would have the opportunity to continue working together in Oklahoma.

**A**lthough my time at ICF ended long ago in 2010, there are still similarities in our experiences. For one thing, cranes are incredibly long lived birds, so the majority of the individuals that I took care of nine years ago at ICF are still around today. We've spent a lot of time together relaying stories about those quirky, stubborn and often cantankerous animals, as well as the many adventures ICF supplied for us all. While bonding over our shared experiences at ICF, I asked Jessica and Tayler how they ended up in this field to begin with.

**F**or Jessica, working with animals was always part of the plan. "My first interest was veterinary care, which shifted in college to wildlife rehab. Wanting more experience in animal care after college, I interned with a captive breeding facility on Maui whose focus was breeding endangered Hawaiian honeycreepers and the 'Alala (Hawaiian crow), which has been extinct in the wild since early 2000s. After that experience, I discovered that I



wanted to stay in aviculture and conservation more so than continuing in the field of wildlife rehab, which I did and do still love." While Jessica and I have always had a passion for birds, Tayler Harlow, our other new aviculturist, started her college career with the intention of studying something completely different.

**T**ayler was initially intending to focus her studies on sports medicine. "I originally was not interested in working with avian species, but my love for birds quickly grew after working with eleven endangered crane species. After







college, I quickly discovered that wildlife conservation was where my heart belonged. I knew that I wanted to be a part of a facility that not only focused on one pathway to conservation, but was driven to pursue many avenues. Upon learning about the SARC and its goals to work with two captive breeding programs while continuing research and outreach, it seemed like a natural fit, and I was ecstatic about the available position working with Attwater's prairie-chickens."

**W**hen I asked them what they remembered the most about their time together at ICF, I had to laugh at the response I received. "Although we accomplished many things together, what still sticks out in our memories are the never-ending hours of zip ties. . . MANY enclosure preparations and repairs that we still do together often here at SARC!" I know that cranes will always have a huge place in their hearts, and in mine. However, the spunk and tenacity displayed by our prairie-chickens have certainly won me over. As time passes, I suspect that Jessica and Tayler will grow to love these birds with a similar fervor, and that as a team we can continue to bond over the many hours of zip ties/pen repairs that lay before us— along with the many other struggles and joys of this challenging, yet extremely rewarding career!



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