

Birds

Importance

Hundreds of species of birds occur in the American Southwest, as do some of the best birdwatching opportunities. Birds are a highly visible component of many ecosystems. Because they can respond quickly to changes in resource conditions, birds are considered good indicators of ecosystem health. Monitoring changes in bird population and community parameters can be an important component of any comprehensive, long-term monitoring program. Monitoring birds is especially critical given population declines for some species in recent decades, especially neotropical migratory birds.

Status and Trends

The Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CHIC), nearly 10,000 acres in size, is dominated by forest, herbaceous, and woodland vegetation types and about 16% of the area is covered by the Lake of the Arbuckles. Prior to 2003, no formal or comprehensive inventory had been conducted for birds at CHIC. However, the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory (ONHI; Kelly et al. 2004) conducted such an inventory in May-August 2003. This work provides baseline information for future inventory and monitoring efforts.

Of the 152 bird species that may occur in south-central Oklahoma between May and August, 84 species (or 55%) were detected during the 2003 inventory (Figure 1). Species re-

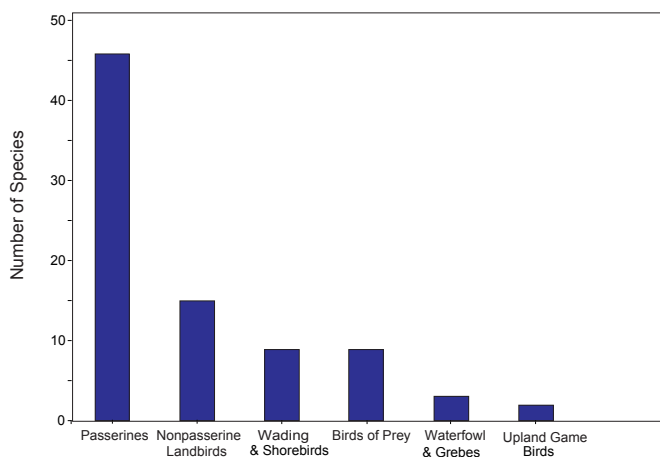


Figure 1. The number of species in each group recorded during the 2003 inventory.



Northern cardinal

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corded that are tracked by the ONHI include: the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*), spotted sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*), and yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia*). Species recorded in the largest numbers include: the Northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), painted bunting (*Passerina ciris*), tufted titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*), Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), and blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila nigriceps*).

Discussion

Many of the 152 species that have been recorded in this general region of Oklahoma in May-August may not be expected to occur at CHIC because they breed in habitats that are not found at CHIC, or they are migrant waterbirds that would not be expected to use Lake of the Arbuckles. However, additional species would likely be observed by using a multi-season sampling scheme. Any additional sampling should include a focus on non-breeding birds. Also, a feral cat control, or research, program would benefit birds which may fall prey to cats.



Yellow warbler

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