

Birds

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RESOURCE BRIEF

Importance

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site (WABA) was established in 1996 in order to “protect and interpret the site of the Southern Cheyenne village of Peace Chief Black Kettle that was attacked by the 7th U.S. To date, extensive botanical surveys have been conducted at the site, but information on animal species potentially using the site has been lacking. Birds are a conspicuous component of many ecosystems that can respond quickly to changes in resource conditions. Thus, birds are considered good indicators of ecosystem health. In addition, birds are highly detectable compared to other vertebrates, and they can be efficiently surveyed with the use of several standardized methods.

Status

We are unable to estimate trends in bird populations at WABA since monitoring has not yet been initiated. However, an assessment of the status can be determined from bird surveys that were conducted as part of an inventory in 2001 and 2002 within eight habitat types found within the park boundaries and during five distinct survey periods. Although coverage was not perfect, each habitat type was represented by at least two point count stations, all but one of them (sandy prairie) by at least three. Surveys were conducted using 10-minute timed



Photo Credit: Charles H. Warren

point counts. In all, 65 avian species were detected over all surveys. The greatest number of species were observed riparian habitat types (Figure 1). Typical of these communities, the avifauna was dominated by a small number of species, with additional species represented by a small number of individuals.

Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*) have been reported nesting north of WABA at the border of Roger Mills and Ellis Counties, but appropriate nesting habitat along the Washita River (broad, flat, sandy banks and bars) does not occur within Park boundaries. No Least Terns were observed as part of this inventory. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (1997) lists Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) as occurring in Roger Mills County. None of these species were recorded during our surveys.

Discussion

Approximately 30% of the bird species known to regularly occur in the northwest portion of the state were observed, despite that WABA covers only 0.04% of the land area of the county. Several species dominated in sheer numbers, but all taxa were well represented. There were no threatened or endangered species observed. A long-term monitoring effort of birds throughout the prairie restoration process will be important for future habitat restoration projects as well as aiding in the preparation of plans for management of biological resources on public lands.

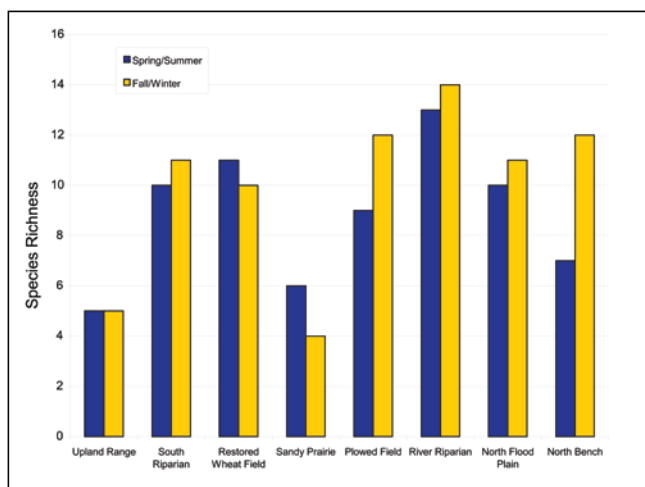


Figure 1. Number of species detected within each habitat type and season at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, 2001-2002.

