



Mary K. Oxley Nature Center

November - December 2018 Newsletter

Learning about nature doesn't stop at Oxley Nature Center. We recently completed teaching our Naturalist training program for our brand new volunteers as well as holding our Advance Naturalist training for our experienced volunteers. These generous folk will contribute to Oxley's mission of "Inspire the Wonder" by leading school children and others on tours of the park, hosting guests at our visitor center and ensuring that the paths and forests are free of trash and paths are safe to enjoy.

Species in Focus: Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)





The Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* is the appropriate symbol chosen to represent Oxley Nature Center. It is common for visitors to see the flash of red black and white or hear the drumming as the birds make their presence known. A resident of open woodlands, this bird prefers Oxley's bottomland forest. According to recent winter bird counts it has made a local comeback of sorts after ice storms and the tornado damaged some of our big trees providing dead trees for these cavity nesters to hollow out and build their homes and raise their young.

After the male selects a site and the female approves, he does most of the excavation, they both build the nest, and she lays anywhere from 3-10 eggs. Unlike many other woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers will often reuse their cavity home several years in a row. Red-headed woodpeckers are fiercely territorial but can also be nomadic. Oxley's population is probably year round but may be joined by migrants from the north during the winter.

A true omnivore, this woodpecker eats a surprising variety of food. They find insects in dead and decaying trees, but can also catch them in the air or collect them on the ground; they are known to eat eggs, nestlings, mice, and occasionally adult birds; they eat mulberries, poison ivy berries and other fruits, and they prefer acorns and pecans in the winter. They are one of a handful of woodpeckers known to store food, wedging insects in crevices (some still alive!) and are unique in covering food with wood or bark.

The Red-headed Woodpecker population overall is decreasing and is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List. The main cause for their decline is probably loss of habitat. So when you come to Oxley appreciate the dead trees left standing and know that they are part of the conservation plan so we can all continue to enjoy the sights and sounds of our symbol, the Red-headed Woodpecker.



Wonder comes Naturally

by Amy Morris, staff naturalist

The geese fly over in formation, heralding the changing season. Their voices echo as if from another time, another place. Do you remember? This is a timeless passage, a touchstone. This is a moment of grace.

The sun rises slowly over the horizon, easing the chill in the air. The children are bundled in their coats and mittens, their breath like dragon fire as they run through the tall grasses. The eight foot bluestem bows before them, marking their passage, then springs back in place. The tops dance in the cold air. Voices are muffled. What world is this? Where children and nature mingle in unbridled joy?

The gifts we receive are hidden in everyday things. They are in the small things that sustain our forest, prairie and wetlands. Everything has its place and its purpose: its position in the web, its minute intricacy, or its in-your-face grandeur. It is life.

There are days here when the voices of excited children can be heard, and

days when the quiet is a balm to the soul. Each day brings special gifts.

The ubiquitous roly-poly is often a child's connection to nature, even if that child lives in a concrete jungle. Somewhere, tucked deep beneath a rotting log in the warmth of leaf litter, this life form has survived and triumphed against the odds.

I am grateful for the familiar roly-poly, because in my world, when I am trying to introduce children to the wonder of nature, there is often fear: of wild animals, towering forests, insects, the unknown. If I can make one connection, break through that barrier of anxiety or indifference, there is a chance to inspire wonder.

It is that a flicker of interest, a glimmer of insight, which eases the way. One spark touches the heart and makes spirits soar. Trepidation is eased. Now, they gather round as we examine the deer tracks in the softest of snow. One child looks up, catching my gaze; "This is the best day of my life," she says.

History of the Mary K. Oxley Nature Center and the Mary K. Oxley Nature Center Association, Inc.

By Dick Sherry

Early diagrams and maps of Mohawk Park in the 1930's showed areas to be used for a Nature Preserve or Wildlife Study. It was not until 1972 that efforts were made by Philip Nelson to push for a nature center in the northern part of the park. Mr. Nelson put together plans for the nature center and made a presentation to the Park Board that led them to include \$5600 in the 1972 Park Bond issue for security allowing for the fencing of the "Mohawk Nature Center". Shortly after the passage of the bond issue Mr. Nelson moved away from Tulsa, and the project became dormant.

In January, 1974, Eddie Hueston, the Tulsa Parks Department Superintendent of Parks, presented a program on the Ft. Worth Nature Center & Refuge to the Tulsa Audubon Society. As a result, the Society decided to pursue the project with the City, and Dick Sherry, the TAS President, appeared at the March Park Board Meeting to express the interest of the Society in the project and requested that the bond issue funds be expended. The Park Board endorsed the project but did not know when the funds would become available. Through the summer and fall of 1974 Tulsa Audubon continued to push forward with efforts to get the nature center project moving. A workshop was conducted to teach what a nature center would mean for our community, and a member of the Nature Center Planning Division of the National Audubon Society visited Tulsa to see the Mohawk area and meet Park Board members and Park Department officials.

By late 1974 it became obvious that the City did not have any funding available

to move forward with the nature center project, so those who had been working with the City formed Mohawk Nature Center Development, Inc., a non-profit organization. It was comprised of interested Audubon members and community leaders. An agreement was drawn up with the City that would allow the organization to fund a master plan and develop the nature center with the City approving the Project development, but not assuming any financial obligation. In March, 1975, without a penny in the bank, MNCDI signed a contract with the Nature Center Planning Division of the National Audubon Society for the master plan with payment of the \$8700 cost due upon completion of the plan. Field work by the planners was conducted in April, 1975, with a rough draft to be provided in the fall. MNCDI began its fund raising, concentrating on the business community to provide the funds for the plan.

By January 1976, the completed master plan was delivered. Over the next two months the plan was presented to the Park Board, a public hearing was held, and both the Park Board and the City Commission approved it. In June 1976, the final payment for the master plan was made to the National Audubon Society and fund-raising efforts began for the implementation of the plan.

A key moment came in September, 1976, in a meeting with John and Mary Oxley. After highlighting what the nature center would mean to the Tulsa area, Mr. Oxley asked what we could do with \$200,000! We could do everything but the building. The facility would be named the Mary K. Oxley Nature Center in honor of Mrs. Oxley. The details of their donation and the timing were worked out over the next few months and the official announcement was made in March, 1977. The momentum really picked up. The Junior League of Tulsa offered to undertake a volunteer program in conjunction with the nature center, and provide partial funding of the naturalist/director's salary for the first few years with the City providing the balance.

The search for the naturalist/director began in May, 1977, and Robert G. (Bob) Jennings was hired in September. He was a blend of scientist, teacher, humorist and many other valuable traits. He felt the goal of the nature center would be "to help Tulsans become better citizens of this planet by reminding them how beautiful a place it is". With the director in place work soon began on the trail systems and other improvements and program development. In April, 1978, the groundbreaking for the teaching shelter took place, and the groundwork for the fund raising for the Interpretive Building began. Architect Steve Olsen donated his services for the design of the teaching shelter and the Interpretive Building, and he worked very closely with Bob Jennings to incorporate his ideas for both structures.

A challenge grant was provided by the Mabee Foundation. If we could raise the balance needed for the Interpretive Building, around \$200,000, the Foundation

would donate \$100,000. In the fall of 1979, as steps were finalized for a major fund raising effort, one more approach was made with John and Mary Oxley. In December, 1979, they agreed to provide the \$180,000 still needed, and requested that the building be named in honor of both their families, and so it was named the Oxley-Yetter Interpretive Building. Since most of Mohawk Park is in a flood plain, the building site had to be elevated. This was done by excavating a pond adjacent to the building site and using that soil to raise the elevation of building about ten feet. Concrete piers were then used to support the slab. The building was completed and turned over to the City in October, 1980. Bob Jennings and his staff were able to move in, build and install exhibits and start conducting programs from the building. There was a formal dedication ceremony in March, 1981.

The Nature Center was thriving. Schools were reserving tours for their student's months in advance, and the tour dates were usually booked solid within hours on the dates when the reservation period opened. In March, 1984, a new agreement was signed with the City that reflected the change in the nature and purpose of our organization. The Nature Center had been funded and constructed, and we were now a support/advisory organization that would have memberships. The new name would be the Mary K. Oxley Nature Center Association, Inc.

In the late 1980's, the Nature Conservancy turned the unique Redbud Valley Preserve over to the City of Tulsa to be maintained as a protected sanctuary managed by the Oxley Nature Center staff. In January, 1990, an adjacent 2.5 acres with a house on it was purchased through a donation by the Founders of Doctors Hospital and the MKONCA. This was donated to the City and became a small visitors center and residence for a naturalist. In the early 2000's, financial problems for the City resulted in staff reductions. Our organization helped by funding part time staff salaries.

Around 2005-2006, it became obvious that exhibits needed to be updated when visitors who came to the Nature Center as grade school children were now grown with children of their own, commented on how nothing had changed. At that time, the building needed some serious maintenance work, and was going to be closed for months while that was done. Through a challenge grant from the Oxley Foundation major improvements were made in the exhibits using the expertise of Taylor Studios of Illinois. In addition to the refurbishing of the building by the City, the Oxley Foundation funding provided for an expansion of the classroom space, the addition of a water feature and extensive landscaping. This was all finished in the spring of 2009, and there was a rededication ceremony in June, 2009.

So, from the early dreams of an educational nature center in Mohawk Park, the

reality of the Mary K. Oxley Nature Center has touched and nourished many lives. The Mary K. Oxley Nature Center Association and the predecessor Mohawk Nature Center Development, Inc. have now been in existence for over forty-three years, and the Nature Center has been in operation for forty years. In this time, it has exceeded our hopes and dreams, and provided enjoyment, education, and inspiration for thousands. We want it to continue to do so for thousands in the future.

Mary K. Oxley Nature Center - Programs in November

3 November "Saturday Morning Birding" Ages: All; Saturday, 8:00-9:45 a.m.; Free, Registration not required

Join us for birding at Oxley. All skill levels are welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them.

5 & 19 November "Natural Babies: Animal Homes" Ages: 1- 5 + caregiver; Monday, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Registration is required Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session.

We will look at some of Oxley's Bio-facts and discuss where the animals of Oxley live. We will have craft time and then take a walk to see if we can discover some animal homes along the trails near the building.

10 November "Junior Naturalists" Ages: 8-12 years; Saturday, 10:00-12:30 p.m.; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session. Meet at the Fawn Grove at Oxley.

Come join the Junior Naturalist at Oxley Nature Center for a morning of adventure and nature connection! Guided by the changing seasons and our own curiosity, we will hike, journal, tell stories, play games, craft, learn wilderness skills, and practice good park stewardship. Come to all our meetings or the one that fits your schedule.

17 November "Discovery Club: Raccoons" Ages: Pre-K through 2nd Grade; Saturday, 10:30- noon; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session

Raccoons learn a lot about their world by using their very dexterous hands, and their mask serves a purpose for these nocturnal animals too! Are your hands similar to raccoon paws?

19 November "Natural Babies: Natural Babies: Animal Homes" Ages: 1- 5 + caregiver; Monday, 10:30-11:30 a.m.; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session

This is the same class held on November 5th. We will look at some of Oxley's Bio-facts and discuss where the animals of Oxley live. We will have craft time and then take a walk to see if we can discover some animal homes along the trails near the building.

24 November “Botany Walk” Ages: All; Saturday, 10:30-noon; Free, Registration not required

What can one find in the way of plant life in late November? Plenty! Join us for our botany walk at Oxley to find out!

24 November “Drawing and Painting the Animals of Oxley” Ages: 8-12 years; Saturday, 1:00-2:30 p.m.; Registration is required; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

Join us for a new monthly drawing and painting class for children with Claire Harkness. Students will learn to draw and paint the animals commonly found at Oxley. We will use both live and preserved models. Art and animals lovers are welcome!

24 November “Full Beaver Moon Walk” Ages: All; Saturday, 7:00-8:30 p.m.; Registration is required; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

Beavers have been preparing for winter. Will they make themselves known tonight? Join us for nocturnal explorations of the trails.

Mary K. Oxley Nature Center - Programs in December

1 December “Saturday Morning Birding” Ages: All; Saturday, 8:00-9:45 a.m.; Free, Registration not required

Join us for birding at Oxley. All skill levels are welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them.

3 & 17 December “Natural Babies: Looking for Winter” Ages: 1-5 + caregiver; Monday, 10:30-11:30 a.m.; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session.

Winter is on its way, and tells us in so many ways. Our class will take a nature walk to find evidence that winter is near. What animals will migrate and who will hibernate? Our craft will be a Winter Memory Jar to take home.

8 December “Junior Naturalists” Ages: 8-12 years; Saturday, 10:00-12:30 p.m.; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session.; Meet at the Fawn Grove at Oxley.

Come join the Junior Naturalists at Oxley Nature Center for a morning of adventure and nature connection! Guided by the changing seasons and our own curiosity, we will hike, journal, tell stories, play games, craft, learn wilderness skills, and practice good park stewardship. Come to all our meetings or the one that fits your schedule.

15 December “Discovery Club: Feed the Birds” Ages: Pre-K through 2nd Grade; Saturday, 10:30- noon; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session

Let’s celebrate winter birds that bring such great beauty to this cold season! We will make special treats for the birds to eat, tell a story and take a short walk.

17 December “Natural Babies: Natural Babies: Looking for Winter” Ages: 1-5 + caregiver; Monday, 10:30-11:30 a.m.; Registration is required; Free for Members, Non-members \$5 per session

This is the same class held on December 3rd. Winter Solstice will be December

21st, the longest night of the year. Our class will take a nature walk to find evidence that winter is near. What animals will migrate and who will hibernate? Our craft will be a Winter Memory Jar to take home.

21 December “Winter Solstice Celebration” Ages: All; Friday, 1:30-3:30 p.m.; Registration is required; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

The winter solstice marks the shortest day of the year, and is followed by the day the sun begins to return to the Northern Hemisphere. Seasonal change is cause for great celebration! Let’s walk through winter woods and see who else may be out and about. Then we will warm up by the fire and watch birds at the feeders. Hot chocolate and cookies will be available.

22 December “Botany Walk” Ages: All; Saturday, 10:30-noon; Free, Registration not required

What mysteries will be revealed as we explore the winter landscape today? Join us for our botany walk at Oxley to find out!

22 December “Drawing and Painting the Animals of Oxley” Ages: 8-12 years; Saturday, 1:00-2:30 p.m.; Registration is required; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

Join us for a new monthly drawing and painting class for children with Claire Harkness. Students will learn to draw and paint the animals commonly found at Oxley. We will use both live and preserved models. Art and animal lovers are welcome!

22 December “Full Cold Moon Walk” Ages: All; Monday, 7:00-8:30 p.m.; Registration is required; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

Take a break from the holiday rush and join us at Oxley to explore the varied landscape of prairie, forest and wetland. What will the night’s darkness reveal?

31 December “New Year’s Eve Celebration” Ages: All; Monday, 5:30-8:00 p.m.; Registration is required by December 26; \$3 for members, \$5 for non-members

Begin a new tradition with family and friends or renew an old one. We will take an evening walk to welcome in the advent of the New Year! Following our hike, we will warm up in front of a bonfire or fireplace to share stories. Hot chocolate, apple cider, and the fixings for s’mores will be available. If you have children, register to come early (at 5:00 p.m.) to make a lantern to carry on your walk. Please ask for more information when you call to RSVP if you are interested in this program.

Mary K. Oxley Nature Center Hours

Oxley and Redbud Valley will be closed on the following days in November and December: November 12th, 22nd and 23rd; December 24th, 25th, and January 1st.

It costs \$2 per car from April through October to enter Mohawk Park on weekends unless you are a member of Oxley Nature Center or the Tulsa Zoo.

The Interpretive Building will be open Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and Sunday, noon - 4:30 p.m.

Gate and parking lot is open daily, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. except most City holidays.

Hiking trails are accessible during Mohawk Park hours, 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.



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