

Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area

Newsletter

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

Issue 84

January 2017

FALL 2016

The fall migration was something other than usual in 2016. The exceptionally mild temperatures all the way through November and the full ponds and reservoirs out west kept duck numbers at the Bottoms relatively low. Duck numbers hovered around 20,000 to 30,000 for the season. Goose numbers ranged as high as 100,000 in

late November. Most of the duck activity, as well as goose use, focused on the refuge Pools 1A, B and C. As a result, hunter success for both was low when compared to other years. Duck hunter success for the regular duck season was about 1.7 ducks per hunter. Waterfowl hunters averaged about 0.13 goose per hunt. That is

low since duck hunters and goose hunters are not separated out.

The second week of December, with the arrival of the seasons coldest temperatures to that point, we saw a good number of wintering bald eagles show up. Some observers spotted close to 70 sitting on the ice.

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Photo by Dan Witt



Cheyenne Bottoms is a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project funded by your purchase of hunting equipment. Some of the best wildlife hunting and viewing opportunities in the United States can be had on land purchased and maintained by these hunter generated dollars.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE

The black-billed magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) is a large bird in the crow family that occurs in the western half of North America from Alaska to Oklahoma. It is a large black and white bird with a long tail and black bill. The bill, head, breast and underparts are black, with lustrous green iridescence on the wings and tail. The belly and shoulders are white, as well as the primaries that show as white wing patches in flight.



This bird prefers semi-open country with some large bushes or trees, leaving the deep forests to their crow and raven cousins. They are mainly permanent residents, but some birds may move south or to lower elevations in winter, while others may wander east after the breeding season. Magpies usually nest as a single pair, but sometimes they will congregate in loose colonies. When not breeding they are very social, especially when feeding. It builds a bulky stick nest in a tree or bush. The nest is a fortress-like domed structure with one or two entrances. The nest cup is fortified with mud and soft materials. As few as two, or as many as nine eggs are in-

cubated for 14 to 23 days. The eggs are greenish, brown freckled and blotched with gray. The young are fledged in three to four weeks. Both parents build the nest and feed the young.

Like all corvids, the black-billed magpie is an opportunistic omnivore hunting or foraging for seeds, fruit, insects, carrion, eggs and occasionally the nestlings of other birds. They enjoy suet, peanuts and other treats at feeders, and are quick to exploit any pet food left outdoors. Since the most important items of their diet seem to be insects and small rodents, they are more beneficial than destructive to agriculture.

In captivity a magpie may be trained to imitate the human

voice. These birds flourished with, and then declined with the the great bison herds of earlier days. But these adaptable birds have returned in numbers and are frequently associated with cattle and sheep, perching on their backs and picking off ticks and maggots. Those living in western rangeland appear shy of humans, but their behavior in the Old World is very different, living in the middle of settlements.

While not common at Cheyenne Bottoms, they are a frequent resident. They are most commonly seen in the grassland areas north of the office and have been known to nest in the trees associated with the grasslands near the Wet Walnut Diversion Dam.

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One of the bright spots this fall was our ability to finally burn the north half of Pool 3B. We have also been able to disk about 280 acres of the burned portion of the pool once, another 100 acres twice and an additional 170 acres three times. While we still need to do some additional double disking, we are well on our way to setting the cattail back in that part of Pool 3B. We have also completed mowing about 490 acres in the south half of Pool 3B. This is in preparation for burning the mowed material and beginning the disking effort there. The mowing is an additional step that experience of the staff has shown makes for a much better burn. The plants burn off at ground level. If burned while still standing, the plants seldom burn completely and enough material remains that disking is much less effective.

If weather allows, we should be able to burn late winter and begin the disking effort right after that.

Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area Christmas Bird Count

The 2016 Cheyenne Bottoms Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday, December 19. A total of 13 volunteers gathered at the Kansas Wetland Education Center for assignments. A total of 76 different species were seen. Even with the Area frozen from a below zero weekend, the species total isn't too bad. Many of the duck species were gone once the cold weather hit.

Some of the more notable species was the 50 bald eagles and an American bittern. It was apparently a good day for Brewer's blackbirds and American

crows as both were high counts since at least 2001. There were a lot red winged blackbirds due in large part to the cattail expansion of the past two years.

While the Christmas Bird Count is not a highly scientific effort, it is a valuable tool. It provides data to compare species composition from year to year and, most importantly in my opinion, it gives everyone an excuse to get outside and enjoy the natural world around us and visit with folks that share your interests..



HUNTERS ENCOURAGED TO USE ISPORTSMAN

The Department is in its second year of implementing an electronic daily hunting permit system on Benedictine Bottoms, Buffalo Ranch, Bolton, Buck Creek, Cheyenne Bottoms, Clinton, Elwood, Hillsdale, Isabel, Jamestown, Kansas River, LaCygne, Lovewell, Lyon, Marais des Cygnes, McPherson, Melvern, Milford, Neosho, Noe, Perry, Slate Creek and Texas Lake.

To utilize the electronic daily hunt permit system, the first step, which can be done at any time, is to log on to: <https://kdwpt.isportsman.net> then click on Register to set up an account and obtain a General Access Permit. Once you have the General Access Permit and are ready to hunt, you can log in on a computer or smart phone or call in on a cell phone or landline (1-844-500-0825) and "check-in". After you've finished hunting for the day, you can "check-out" the same way.

If you're still using the cards, start playing around with iSportsman and get used to it. If you need help or have questions, call any of the properties listed above or call the Public Lands Division at 620-672-5911.

WILDLIFE, PARKS AND TOURISM WEB SITE

The Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism web site provides a host of valuable services. Examples include: weekly waterfowl reports; WIHA and FISH Atlas; Hunter Ed Class schedule; license and permit sales; hunting and fishing regulations; legislative updates; and the Outdoor Store with books and DVD's related to all outdoor interests. Don't forget that each Department property has it's own page. Check it out at:

www.ksoutdoors.com



Cheyenne Bottoms was designated as a 'Wetland of International Importance' by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1988. Only 38 sites in the U.S. are recog-



nized as such. In addition, it is recognized as an 'Important Bird Area' by the American Bird Conservancy and is listed as a 'Hemispheric Reserve' by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

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