Swan Spectacle Attracts Visitors From Afar

By LAWRENCE GRAVES
Arkansas Audubon Society member

Verlon Abram welcomes visitors from all over the United States who come to see a huge flock of magnificent Trumpeter Swans on his private ponds near Wilburn in Cleburne County. He only asks for two things:

“I want them to respect the birds and respect the property,” Abram said during a recent visit. Abram feeds the flock of about 200-300 Trumpeter Swans over 4,000 pounds of whole kernel corn a month at a cost of about $300.

“Well they [visitors] could bring some corn too I guess,” stated the retired U.S. Army officer, laughing.

Abram doesn’t mind spending the money; he gets a lot of enjoyment from feeding and caring for the white birds that overwinter in The Natural State.

One of Abram’s favorite guests is a rescue bird with a silver band on his right ankle and a green one on his left.

“My grandkids named this one Ohio, and he is so tame he will let you pet him,” Abram said.

Abram got worried about Ohio when he didn’t see him for a few days, but the bird showed up on a Monday and walked right up to Abram for some corn.

The birds have been making a winter home in Arkansas since three of them came to Magness Lake, located about five miles from Abram’s ponds, in the 1990s. Abram built a smaller 22-acre pond six years ago, and now many of the bottom-feeding birds prefer the shallower pond to a deeper nearby one he also owns.

Abram said the birds start arriving in Arkansas around Thanksgiving and depart for Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, and other northern states around Valentine’s Day.

“We have carloads of visitors and lots of children, and sometimes there isn’t a place to park,” Abram said.

The swans recognize Abram’s red pickup truck, and when he drives up, they paddle to the shoreline in anticipation of food.

Birder and AAS member Terry Butler of Pangburn said, “I feel the nature lovers and birders are grateful for what Mr. Abram is doing for the swans and allowing all to view them.”

The ponds are located off the east end of Hiram Road off Highway 110 between Heber Springs and Pangburn.
May 1 - 3 is our 2015 spring convention in Fort Smith, AR, and it’s packed with great activities! This is the much-anticipated joint conference with our neighboring birders from the Oklahoma Ornithological Society. The OOS anticipates 40-50 members may participate! With close to 90 AAS members expected, it will be an exciting and busy three days. Adam Schaffer, AAS vice president, has added additional field trips to accommodate the crowd. With spring migration at its peak, you’ll have a wonderful assortment of sites to choose from. The lineup of afternoon student presentations and evening guest speakers is top-notch. Use the convention insert in this newsletter to send in your registration. Book your hotel room as soon as possible to guarantee a room at the reduced rate and the half-price breakfast discount. Fort Smith has other events scheduled that weekend, so hotel rooms are at a premium. All our meetings and meals will be in the hotel. Come join us for a terrific weekend and a chance to meet our Oklahoma neighbors!

- KAREN HOLLIDAY
President, Arkansas Audubon Society

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Newsletter and Membership Information

The Arkansas Audubon Society Newsletter is a quarterly publication of Arkansas Audubon Society, Inc., a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121. Issue dates are March, June, September, and December.

PLEASE NOTE: Announcements, articles, information, and/or photographs to be considered for an upcoming edition of Arkansas Birds should be submitted to the editor no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication.

The newsletter is provided to those who pay membership dues to AAS.

Send newsletter submissions to samantha.scheiman@gmail.com.

Membership renewals are due Jan. 1 of each calendar year.

Please enter my membership in the Arkansas Audubon Society as a:

(AAS Dues Prorated for New Members) | Jan-Jun 100% | Jul-Sept. 50% | Oct. - Dec. 100%
---|---|---|---
Regular Member | $15.00 | $ 7.50 | $15.00
Regular Family | $20.00 | $10.00 | $20.00
Contributing Member | $30.00 | - | -
Contributing Family | $35.00 | - | -
Sustaining Member | $20.00 | - | -
Sustaining Family | $25.00 | - | -
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*New Memberships paid in the last quarter (Oct. - Dec.) will include full membership for the following calendar year.

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIPS

Life Member of Arkansas Audubon Society (may be paid over a two-year period) | $250.00
Patron of Arkansas Audubon Society | $500.00

Draw check to Arkansas Audubon Society and send to: Terry Butler, Treasurer, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121
News of Members: Birders Retreat to Panama and California, Spy Rarities in Texas and Illinois

By DOTTIE BOYLES
News of Members Editor

On November 21, 2014, Dr. Kimberly Smith and Mitchell Pruitt visited the Ozark Natural Science Center in rural Madison County. The property boasts the perfect combination of pine, deciduous, and cedar understory … perfect for saw-whet owls, that is. They set up four mist nets. At 11:30 p.m. they spotted something hanging motionless in the bottom tier of one of the nets. They soon realized it was a Northern Saw-whet Owl, a life bird for Mitchell and the first capture of the species in Arkansas. After the adult female was weighed, banded, and photographed, she was released.

Bill Burnham and Cindy Franklin joined Dr. Ragupathy Kannan’s trip to Canopy Tower in Panama in early December 2014. Cindy stated it was a wonderful trip in spite of a certain wet and slick mossy bridge. Their personal goal was 30 new life birds, but they ended the trip with 50. Before they left, Cindy researched five years of eBird data from the five sites around Canopy Tower listed on their itinerary and used the data to predict a list of birds they would see. How accurate was eBird? Bill and Cindy saw all of the top 20 species predicted, missed only one of the top 30, and missed four of the top 50. They also saw 15 species reported on less than 10 percent of the checklists, and of the 104 birds reported on at least 40 percent of all checklists, they missed 13.

Allan Mueller and Michael Linz chased birds in January 2015, first to Quincy, Illinois for the Ivory Gull—cooperatively flying around Quinsippi Island on the very frozen Mississippi River (10 degrees F is too cold for southern boys). Michael also picked up a lifer Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and Allan chased Ross’s Goose and Greater White-fronted Goose for his Illinois list. Central Texas near Austin was next, where they joined Kenny and LaDonna Nichols to jointly find the Striped Sparrow, thanks to LaDonna’s vigilance. Michael cashed in with additional lifers of Crested Caracara, McCown’s Longspur, Burrowing Owl, and Sprague’s Pipit.

While visiting family in Wisconsin, Dan and Samantha Scheiman had a reunion with Rob Weiss and saw FIVE Snowy Owls at Collins Marsh. Exactly one week later Dan and Samantha headed back in that direction, driving seven hours to Quincy, Illinois, to see the headline-making Ivory Gull. This bird of arctic sea ice rarely occurs in the lower 48 states, so when it does, birders from all over the country flock to see it. Dan and Sam left Little Rock at 1 p.m. Saturday, January 3, saw the bird on two occasions Sunday morning, and were home by 9 p.m.

Darrel and Carol Meyerdirk went to California in January to visit family in Modesto and joined a tour group at Pismo Beach to see four great migrations—birds, elephant seals, gray whales, and monarchs. They were able to see Anna’s Hummingbirds, the Dark-eyed Junco-Oregon race, Black Phoebe (a much-hated bird because of its destructive habit of killing monarchs), Pygmy Nuthatch, a really blue Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and a flock of Purple Finches, as well as many others. Lifers included Brant, Surf Scoter, California Thrasher, Marsh Wren, Sora, California Towhee, Western Gull, Western Bluebird, and Mountain Bluebird. It was a really fun retreat in the middle of winter.

Gail Miller often helps Rodney Paul of Raptor Rehab of Central Arkansas (RRCA) in El Paso, Arkansas with transports of injured raptors. She reported the Bald Eagle, believed to have had a collision with a power line, treated by Dr. Marilyn Baeynes and rehabbed by Rodney at RRCA for about a month. It was then released at Greers Ferry at the fish hatchery.

An Eastern Screech-Owl injured its right eye by hitting the front fender of a car driven by a girl from Pine Bluff. She contacted Rodney and brought the owl to Conway, as she was attending her grandfather’s funeral there. Gail thought it was so touching that, on a difficult day for her, she would take the time out to help the owl. Gail picked it up and took it to her house in Conway on January 24. Tina Miller then picked the owl up from Gail and delivered it to RRCA. It was released back into the wild on February 3.
From Gashawks to Goshawks: World’s Airports Offer Surprisingly Good Birding

By RAGUPATHY KANNAN
Arkansas Audubon Society Trust Member

My 16-year-old son, Amrit, and I are an odd pair: He spots planes, I, birds. Both of us are avid in our pursuits. We don’t miss a chance to stake out the world’s airports for ‘gashawks,’ goshawks, and everything in between. The plane-spotting coterie Amrit is embedded in can be as fanatical as some birders. They have their Internet groups, listservs, and websites. Like birders, they extend their hospitality to total strangers and are eager to share their passion.

Bernie Proctor, an amicable Aussie, took a photo of our massive Airbus A380’s touchdown and emailed it to us just as we were exiting customs, captioned, ‘Welcome to Sydney, Amrit!’ And we had not even met the guy! A red carpet welcome could not have made us feel better. Soon we were scouring the airport outskirts for vantage sites. Of course, I was off after birds. I saw my first fairy-wrens, fig birds, and honey-eaters in the scrub by runway 34L, just as my son was snapping photos of 777s and A340s. The fig bird was gorging on some yellow fruit from a small tree under the Air Traffic Control tower. I marveled at the pranks of the Willie Wagtail, a delightful fantail flycatcher, which was oblivious to the deafening roar of a DeHavilland Dash-8 powering for takeoff just yards away. Unlike Indian Rhipidura, this was prancing by a trashcan far from vegetation, catching midges.

Airports may be the last place a birder contemplates visiting. After all, with the risks birds pose for jet engines, airports are not exactly designed to be bird-friendly. However, for the avid birder, airports can be interesting because: 1) they are usually far from the city, amidst rural environs, 2) they offer good habitat for open-country and grassland birds, and 3) travelers are unlikely to be familiar with even common birds in exotic places, and airports offer their first introduction to native avifauna.

I have occasionally dashed outside an airport with my binoculars between connecting flights in quest of a new bird. My first Pied Water-Tyrant, a tyrant flycatcher with a penchant for wetlands, was just outside Trinidad’s Port of Spain airport. I got back just in time for my connecting flight to Tobago, and upon arrival in Tobago, I had my first encounter with Caribbean Martins under the eaves of the Arrivals building. In South Africa’s Johannesburg airport, I spotted a widowbird, with its freakishly long tail undulating over grasses, just before our bus whisked us away into the bush. Belize City (Central America) airport is a good postcard from airports place for Fork-tailed Flycatchers. Birders en route to the offshore islands must make a quick trip to the fences outside the airport to see these handsome birds, which do not occur in the islands.

Two much sought-after birds in Arkansas, the Short-eared Owl and Smith’s Longspur, are often seen near runways, especially old military landing strips like Arrowhead in Fort Chaffee. This slightly overgrown area offers perfect habitat for these winter birds. On cold windy mornings, the longspurs huddle in depressions left by wheels. The rut marks are spotted with their droppings.

One morning Amrit and I climbed St. Thomas Mount, Chennai (India), to catch early arrivals to nearby Meenambakkam airport. Local boys clustered around us in curiosity. As the early morning ‘heavies’ zeroed in on Runway 25, I reacquainted myself with prinias in the scrub by the iconic church. Singapore’s Changi airport area can be productive as well. It was a treat to sit by breezy Changi Beach Park and hone my weak gull-identification skills, while virtually every few seconds a jumbo jet flew low overhead toward Runway 20R behind us. I am often amused when Amrit says he got a “life plane.” When he yelled out, ‘Garuda!’ I thought he meant the Brahminy Kite, which frequents Changi’s marshes. He was referring to the handsome-liveried Garuda Indonesia 737 that had just arrived from Jakarta.

New York’s bustling JFK airport area can also be good for birders. The wetlands by Jamaica Bay at the end of Runway 13R seasonally teem with waders.
One summer I photographed Semipalmated Plovers in handsome breeding dress when Amrit had a field day with jumbos thundering overhead immediately after takeoff. The jets bank sharply to port after getting airborne, probably to avoid booming over neighborhoods, giving plane spotters at nearby Charles Memorial Park great profiles.

Of course, we get euphoric seeing planes with bird logos, like Air Jamaica with its Doctor Bird or TACA with its Scarlet Macaw. We pursue our quarries while airborne, too. I saw my first Scarlet Ibis from 915 m (my only life bird from a flying plane) as we circled above Caroni Swamp, Trinidad. The myriads of brilliant scarlet crosses wheeling above green mangroves were unmistakable. We once tracked a Delta 767 flying alongside at cruising altitude above the Atlantic. Like a little toy, the jet kept pace with us for nearly an hour before we lost it amongst the clouds.

In this post 9/11 era, people watching airports can arouse suspicions, especially when they are crouched by runways for hours. Our local Fort Smith, Arkansas, airport has an Army Air National Guard base with a squadron of A10 Thunderbolts. I once drove Amrit to the check post to photograph the warplanes parked on the other side. Within seconds, we were accosted by polite but stern military guards and turned away. That was not the end. Hours later, police were looking for me at my work place. The guards had noted my car number and alerted the police for ‘suspicious activity.’ The Dean of our college was baffled when uniformed cops showed up asking for me. I had some explaining to do. They were all in good humor after that. A cop even offered to take us right up to the warplanes next time.

So if you get stuck in a boring airport, remember, there may be interesting birds nearby. And once in a while, pay attention to those other flying marvels, the great big airplanes.
Perhaps you have had the experience of walking down a shaded path through a Central or South American rainforest and had a dazzlingly blue butterfly suddenly appear before you, fly down the path ahead of you, then just as instantly vanish. If so, this may have been followed on your part by a lengthy but fruitless search to see the beautiful Morpho butterfly sitting still.

You were experiencing the Morpho’s famous “startle” effect. The sudden appearance of a bright color and its equally sudden disappearance made it impossible to track the butterfly or form a search image for it. The trick was accomplished by the color being on the upper surface of the wings and thus only visible in flight. When the butterfly landed, it held it wings pressed together high over its head so only the undersides—which are the color and pattern of the dead brown leaves of the ground—were in view.

You don’t need to go to the jungle to witness this exotic behavior. You can see this same “startle” effect in a common Arkansas butterfly, the Goatweed Leafwing. Very likely you have walked down a wooded trail, and a bright orange butterfly has flashed up in front of you, then just as quickly vanished. The same principle was in action: the bright upperside capturing your attention and blocking you from seeing the dull dead-leaf underside.

This first picture shows one of the rare occasions when a Goatweed has its wings open while on the ground (you will probably need to view this in the full-color online version of the newsletter at arbirds.org). Notice how hard it is to see at least four other Goatweeds around it with their wings closed (fig. 1).

Here is a picture of a Goatweed among the dead leaves with its wings closed (fig. 2), but in case you can’t find it, here is one out in the open so you can see it with its wings closed (fig. 3). You can see how much it resembles a dried oak leaf.
Even while the Goatweed is still a caterpillar, it is already expert at hiding in plain sight. To begin with, its skin is the texture and color of the rough thick goatweed plant it feeds on. That’s not remarkable; many caterpillars do that. But the Goatweed caterpillar is more ingenious. When it is small it sits along the midvein of the leaf and feeds on the succulent leaf on either side of the vein. The caterpillar itself looks astonishingly like a scrap of leaf left over from a now-departed caterpillar (fig. 4).

Because this ruse is most effective if the bare midvein continues out beyond the caterpillar, it saves its droppings and sews them into a pretending vein that continues out beyond it. You might look at the picture and still not believe me.

When the caterpillar gets too big to look like a scrap of leaf, it rolls a leaf into a tube and crawls inside it. The thick leaf is good protection (fig. 5).

But what happens if some predator gets curious and peeks inside the opening of the tube? Thanks to pretend eyes and a clever facial design, the predator will be startled by the apparition of a bleary-eyed monster with huge fangs (fig. 6)!

There really is no such thing as a “common” insect.
Distribution and Abundance of Arkansas Birds
The Summer Season: June 1 – July 31, 2014

By KENNY NICHOLS
Member, Bird Records Committee

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is a rare and local breeder. Therefore, broods of 15 and 7 with attending adults at the Alma sewer ponds, Crawford 10 July (Joe Neal, NWAAS) and a pair with 7 young, 19 June, just west of the same location (Sandy Berger, Jean McConnell), were considered noteworthy.

Two Egyptian Geese were observed on Lake Atalanta, Benton 22 June (Michael Linz, David Oakley, Kyle Hess). This species was recently added to the American Birding Association checklist due to the Florida population meeting the criteria as an established exotic. Though not accepted by the American Ornithological Union or the Arkansas Bird Records Committee, the expanding population in the state (most notably Washington and Benton counties) makes this species a good candidate for future acceptance.

A lone Wood Stork spotted along the Red River near Garland, Lafayette 22 June (Ryan Risher) was slightly early for this uncommon summer/fall visitor.

Rare but annual at this location since 2011, a single Neotropic Cormorant was observed at SWEPCO Lake, Benton 21 July (Joe Neal, Terry Stanfill).

From an area not often reported, 20 immature White Ibis were counted near Arkadelphia, Clark 18 June (Pat Downey).

Very rare in summer, an adult White-faced Ibis was recorded at the south end of Grand Lake, Chicot 19 July (Kenny & LaDonna Nichols).

Osprey is a rare and local breeder. Nesting was confirmed with 2 adults and one young on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 28 June (K&LN), while breeding was suspected of birds observed at Harris Brake, Perry 15 June and near Horse Head Lake Use Area on the Arkansas River, Johnson 4 July (both Ed Laster).

Very rare in summer away from the White River NWR, a Swallow-tailed Kite was a nice find near Sulphur Springs WMA, Miller 7 July (Clint Harris).

Though common in much of the state, Mississippi Kite is uncommon to rare in the extreme northwest counties. Singles were noted in Mountain Home, Baxter 9 July (Becky Steele) and Fayetteville, Washington 4 July (Mike & Christy Slay), while 3 adults and a “well grown” chick were seen at a nest site in Fayetteville, Washington 31 July (JN, Mike Mlodinow).

Rare and extremely local during the breeding season, a pair of Swainson’s Hawks near Gentry, Benton 23 July (JN) were most likely nesting nearby.

Rare anytime, an immature Laughing Gull was a nice find at Treadway’s Minnow Farms, Prairie 19 July (Terry Butler).

A very early Ring-billed Gull was seen on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 23 July (K&LN).

About the ninth state record and a truly remarkable find, a juvenile-plumaged Sooty Tern was photographed near Mulberry, Crawford 17 June (Rick Carson). Interestingly, this is the first occurrence of this species unrelated to the passage of a tropical storm.

Three Caspian Terns at Bois D’ Arc Lake, Hempstead 5 July (ML, Danny & Rhonda Townsend) were most likely very early fall migrants.

Two Black Terns on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 20 June (K&LN) were either very late spring or very early fall migrants.

Quite rare in summer, a Black-billed Cuckoo at Hector, Pope 12 July (Leif Anderson) was thought by the observer to most likely be a very early fall migrant.

A calling Willow Flycatcher at Hector, Pope 5 July (LA) was also thought to be an early fall migrant because it was in habitat unsuitable for nesting by this species.

Western Kingbird is a rare and local breeder. Two adults were found on a nest at Newark, Jackson while
later the same day, another pair were found at nest near Russell, White 15 June (K&LN).

Ten Loggerhead Shrikes, including both adults and juveniles, were counted near Maysville, Benton 14 June (JN). This is a good count for this part of the state.

Considered a rare summer resident, three Cedar Waxwings were spotted at the Central Arkansas Water Grass Farm, Pulaski 17 June (Dan Scheiman, Donna Haynes, Robert Herron).

A Nashville Warbler was identified near Dardanelle, Yell on the very late date of 22 June (K&LN).

Local and very uncommon, two Cerulean Warblers were found on the St. Francis National Forest, Lee 25 June (Mitchell Pruitt).

A good count of ten Lark Sparrows was made near Maysville, Benton 6 July (JN).
**Dr. Doug James Honored with Klamm Service Award**

Dr. Doug James, professor of ornithology at the University of Arkansas, was given the Klamm Service Award for 2014 from the Wilson Ornithological Society. This award recognizes James’ commitment to the Society that spans more than 60 years and mirrors the legacy of service that Bill and Nancy Klamm demonstrated on behalf of the organization.

James has generously served the Society as President, First Vice President, and Second Vice President in addition to chairing the Resolutions Committee, the Student Membership Committee, and the Scientific Program Committee, to name just a few of his generous acts of service. James has also brought many graduate students to Society meetings, many of whom are now active Society members and leaders.

James was honored with a commissioned original painting by Julie Zickefoose of a European Starling, the species on which he completed his dissertation.

-Samantha Scheiman, *Arkansas Birds* editor

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**AAS Trust Donations (November 18, 2014 - February 16, 2015)**

**Endowment-Memorial Fund**

Chris & Rick Cash in memory of Clint Sowards
Carolyn & Walter Minson in memory of Clint Sowards
Adam & Andrea Schaffer in memory of Nao Ueda
Richard & Mari Gillham in memory of Martha and Ralph Gillham
Neva Yuds in memory of Clint Sowards
Alice Hendricks in memory of Clint Sowards
Janet Sowards in memory of Clint Sowards

**Max Parker Fund**

Helen Parker
Joseph & Terrisue Parker

**Doug James, Thurman Jordan, and Art Johnson ‘90 for 90’ Fundraiser**

Julia Connelly
Helen Parker
Cathy & Bob Ross
Ragupathy Kannan

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**‘90 for 90’ AAS Trust Fundraiser Continues**

By BARRY HAAS
Ecology Camp Treasurer | AAS Trust Treasurer

There is a special ‘90 for 90’ fundraiser to honor Doug James, Thurman Jordan, and Art Johnson in association with their 90th birthdays. Announced at the 2014 Spring Meeting, the Trust has received thirty-seven ‘90 for 90’ donations totaling $9,050.

If you would like to help us honor these men, or make a donation to the Trust for any other purpose, please make your checks payable to “AAS Trust” or “Arkansas Audubon Society Trust” and mail to 804 Konrad Court, Little Rock, AR 72223-9201. All donations to the Trust are tax deductible and are acknowledged by letter or email.
Help Wanted to Recruit Halberg Ecology Campers

By BARRY HAAS
Ecology Camp Treasurer  |  AAS Trust Treasurer

As this is written in mid-February, we await imminent confirmation from the U.S. Forest Service of our requested June Halberg Ecology Camp dates at Camp Clearfork. As soon as our dates are confirmed, we will immediately shift to recruiting a total of one hundred 11- and 12-year-old boys and girls as first-years. In addition to those 50 first-year campers each session, we also have 12 campers each session who are invited back for a second year of study.

As always, we need your help to find 100 youth interested in the Halberg Ecology Camp hands-on nature experience. Do you have an 11- or 12-year-old family member who loves nature? Or maybe you have friends or neighbors who do? Or maybe you belong to one or more community groups who may have sons or daughters or friends that meet our age requirement. Help us spread the word about this exceptional learning opportunity. And remember, we have some scholarship and tuition assistance funding available for families who can’t afford the $325 tuition.

The Arkansas Audubon Society website (arbirds.org) has information about the Ecology Camp, including a downloadable application form. There are also links to slideshows of last year’s camp sessions near the bottom of the Ecology Camp page so family members of potential campers will have a good idea of what goes on there.

We welcome donations of any size. They are tax deductible and are acknowledged in writing by letter or email (emails save on camp postage expenses). Please make checks payable to “AAS Halberg Ecology Camp” or “Arkansas Audubon Society” and mail to 804 Konrad Court, Little Rock, AR 72223-9201.

Atlas Documenting Plants of Arkansas Released

Birding and botany go hand in hand. In order to find birds that are habitat specialists—say, Smith’s Longspur, which favors large patches of three-awn grass (*Aristida*)—birders must often know something about the plants that are associated with a given bird species’ preferred habitat. In June 2014, the Arkansas Vascular Flora Committee (AVFC) released the new book, “Atlas of the Vascular Plants of Arkansas,” and this most comprehensive accounting of Arkansas’s flora serves as a helpful tool for birders and others interested in Arkansas plants and animals.

Vascular plants encompass the types of plants one encounters every day; this term does not cover algae, mosses, or liverworts, which are considered non-vascular. The atlas documents 2,892 vascular plants found in the wild in Arkansas, and each species is featured with a county-level distribution map demonstrating where it has been vouchered.

The atlas can be purchased from the University of Arkansas Herbarium at the following website: http://cavern.uark.edu/~arkflora/#publications

-Samantha Scheiman, *Arkansas Birds* editor