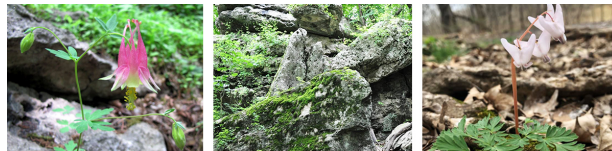


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Redbud Valley Nature Preserve

Thank you to all of the interested people who attended our Volunteer Rendezvous on August 12th! You are joining a wonderful group of people who enjoy learning about and protecting our natural environment at Oxley Nature Center.



Redbud Valley Nature Preserve



Volunteer Naturalist's Notebook

By Karen Harris

600hours

August 29, 2021

It's early morning on the last day that Redbud Valley will be open to the public until next May. I can't be there due to a breakthrough case of COVID but my thoughts are with her. Why her? Because she's a mother. "Mother of Us All," as Tracy Chapman sang about the natural world. In addition to giving birth, mothers teach and comfort. Redbud Valley does all three.

In 1978 as I began my teaching career in Tulsa, a colleague who was a student of Harriet Barclay suggested I get the key from Tulsa University and take my Ecology classes to Redbud Valley. For the next 37 years, I took students there so they could experience the ecological principles introduced to them in the classroom. Here are just two examples of how Redbud taught them. Students saw and felt microclimate and topographic differences that resulted in variations in plant communities. Students hiked from the east-facing slope woodland to an upland prairie, to a high point dry enough to be habitat for Yucca and Mammalaria cactus. (Yes, little nipple cactus. Remember we are talking about moms). Then they would descend to feel the cooler northerly facing slope with its limestone bluffs, spring, and caves and view a quite different oak/maple forest. From there, they could observe the temporary pond and return to the school bus through a third very different bottomland forest community along Bird Creek. The second example involves ecological succession. Students saw how the large sugar maples outcompeted other species while

before later successional-stage hardwood trees had a chance. For both examples, no lecture or textbook could instruct as well.

Redbud Valley also provides joy and comfort. Many native plant enthusiasts have walked her trails to see spring ephemerals like Dutchmens Breeches and have been heartened by the sense of renewal they bring. Sitting quietly by the spring listening to the water trickle over the rocks has calmed many a soul. I saw a former student out there several years after he graduated. A powerful and aggressive high school athlete, he'd occasionally get into trouble when he let his anger boil over, but he was always a gentle giant in the company of plants and animals. He told me that he came to Redbud often to find peace in her tranquil spaces.

I know of no place in Oklahoma where a person can see such diversity of life during a one-mile hike. And that might lead to Redbud's most important role. Much of the surrounding area has been or is presently being quarried for limestone to make cement. In the process, plant and animal communities are destroyed. Thanks primarily to Dr. Barclay and her students, Redbud Valley remains an oasis. When the quarries are emptied and abandoned, Mother Redbud will have seeds and young animals and a chance to send them to repopulate otherwise desolate landscapes.

But for now she needs rest and some tender loving care. The press release from the City of Tulsa explains why. As members of ONCA, we should be thankful to the city officials for hearing the concerns of the staff and for making the right call to let Redbud recuperate from overuse and abuse so she can continue to teach and comfort and be a potential source for ecological restoration and rebirth.

"Mother of us all
Place of our birth
How can we stand aside
And watch..."
Tracy Chapman

City of Tulsa Press Release:

Redbud Valley Nature Preserve Will Be Closed to the Public Until May 2022

Beginning Monday, August 30, the Redbud Valley Nature Preserve will be closed to the public until May 2022. The growing popularity of the preserve throughout the pandemic has increased foot traffic, as well as instances of vandalism, damaging the environment and the ecosystem.

The Nature Conservancy gifted the Preserve to the City of Tulsa in 1990. It is managed as part of the Oxley Nature Center. A preserve prioritizes the protection of the land and ecosystem over public access and recreational use. As part of the agreement with The Nature Conservancy, the city is required to protect the land and the wildlife who inhabit the area.

Mayor G.T. Bynum approved the closure through the Spring of 2022 to give the ecosystem a chance to recover. "It is our responsibility to be good stewards of this land entrusted to us," said Mayor G.T. Bynum. "Not only will this closure give the preserve a chance to heal, but it will also give our staff and community partners time to assess any long-term operational changes we need to make at Redbud."

Naturalist staff compiled an extensive list of examples of overuse and vandalism at Redbud. Those instances include:

- Removing, collecting, and/or stacking rocks along the trail. This is destructive to both the ecosystem and exposes homes for many invertebrates that burrow under these rocks for protection and reproduction. Every time a rock is disturbed, an animal loses a potential home. Furthermore, rocks have jobs – they hold the soil in place – removing them can cause erosion.
- Visitors poaching plants along the prairie and savanna. The small, rare barrel cactus is almost extinct in the preserve due to poaching.
- Visitor's dogs have been seen chasing the deer, rabbits, squirrels, and harassing other wildlife. Also, there is the possibility of spreading diseases to the preserve's animals. For example, diseases like distemper can ravage a local population of raccoons.
- Visitors climbing on the rocks, disrupting the habitat, and destroying the fragile lichen and moss, and the rare walking fern growing on them.
- Off-trail hiking all along the slopes between trails destroys fragile plant life just below the surface. The erosion of these areas is significant.
- Spray painting the rocks and carving names and initials creates a ripple effect, where when two or three names are seen on a busy Saturday, that number becomes 20 and so on, if naturalists don't remove the graffiti, it becomes an onslaught.

About the Redbud Valley Nature Preserve
The Redbud's ecosystem most closely resembles a Missouri glade and the Ozarks. Glades are very dry, hot, and sunny openings in the woodlands where the bedrock is close to the surface, so the soil is very shallow. It takes a tough plant to live on a glade. Plants we usually associate with deserts, like prickly pear cactus, are a prominent feature of Redbud. The glade also features a rich variety of native grasses and prairie wildflowers.



Butterflies on a Willow Tree | Glen Smith

Naturalists at Oxley have a favorite spot in the late summer to watch for butterflies. You might enjoy it too. You'll see many different species of butterflies on the willow trees that border the boardwalk on the Marsh. Come see how many you can find!

Mary K. Oxley Nature Center - September Programs

Closed Monday, September 6 for Labor Day.

Hiking the trails at Oxley Nature Center is permitted.

Call 918-596-9054 for information or to register if required (please register 48 hours in advance). We will practice social distancing.

4 September "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.

18 September "Junior Naturalist Adventures" Ages: 8 to 12

Saturday, 10:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.

Free for ONCA members, \$5 non-members.

Registration is required by Thursday, September 16 at 4:30 p.m.

Call 918-596-9054 to pre-register.

Join us for a morning of adventure and nature connection on the 3rd Saturday of every month. Program activities will include guided hikes, journaling, nature awareness, games, storytelling, and so much more. Dress for the outdoors and bring a sack lunch.

18 September "Butterfly Walk" Ages: All

Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-noon Free, registration not required.

Join us for our butterfly walk. What different species will we see today? Bring binoculars if you have them.

All skill levels are welcome.

20 September "Full Harvest Moon" Ages: All

Monday 7:00-8:30 p.m. \$3 members, \$5 non-members.

Please bring exact change (cash or check).

Registration required by Friday, September 18 at 4:30 p.m.

Call 918-596-9054 to pre-register.

This moon nearest the autumnal equinox (September 22) is named for the gathering of crops. It is a time of preparation for the winter months to follow. Let's explore the trails and see what we can discover! Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes.

25 September "Wildflower Walk" Ages: All

Saturday, 10:30-noon Free, registration not required.

As the extreme heat fades, many plants are revived. Join us for wildflower discoveries to see what is in bloom.

OXLEY NATURE CENTER HOURS

The Interpretive Building will be open Monday through Thursday, and Saturday 10:00 a.m. -

4:30 p.m. and Sunday, noon - 4:30 p.m. We are closed on Fridays.

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

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[Hiking trails](#) are accessible during Mohawk Park hours, 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.



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