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River Otter | Bryan Tapp

A wonderful omen for the new year is the discovery of a group of river otters enjoying the streams and snacks (fish, in this case) at Oxley Nature Center! As the following photos by photographer Bryan Tapp show, this group of otters appears healthy, good sized, and quite adept at catching fish.



### A little about the North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)

River otters like to live in areas which offer constant water which has fish and crustaceans, both of which Oxley Nature Center's streams abundantly offer. One reason we are pleased to see these mustelids here is that their presence indicates good water quality. Once otters were abundant in North America, however, they were over-hunted and their habitats spoiled due to certain agricultural practices. In 1984-85 the Department of Wildlife Conservation reintroduced them and they became reestablished in eastern Oklahoma. The group of otters in this photo could be a female and her young, a group of males, or several mothers and their juveniles. River otters like to make dens in abandoned beaver lodges. Interestingly, this group was spotted directly opposite a large but occupied beaver lodge!



### Volunteer Spotlight, Dennis Lewelling

We are so grateful for the time and talents of our dedicated volunteers at Oxley Nature Center. They are truly the lifeblood of this organization. This month, we are highlighting volunteer Dennis Lewelling, who works tirelessly in the workshop building new signs as well as out on the trails as part of the maintenance crew. Growing up, Dennis loved the outdoors so much he wanted to live in the woods and even spent some time in his twenties backpacking through the Olympic National Forest. He really feels at his best when he's outside.

Dennis began his volunteer work at Oxley Nature Center in the spring of 2019, when he came out with his church group to do some cleanup after the flood. Enjoying it immensely, he filled out a volunteer application and has been a steady hand ever since. His love and dedication to this resource is palpable, not just because of his logged hours (over 600 in 2021 alone) but also in his demeanor: he always has a smile and he's always enjoying it out there! Dennis's favorite part about volunteering is meeting new folks while out on the trail. He especially loves the North Woods for its quiet trails and big trees. When he's not volunteering at Oxley, Dennis loves spending time with his grandchildren, who he's raising up to be outdoor lovers too. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication, Dennis!

**OXLEY NATURE CENTER**  
**VOLUNTEERS**  
**NEEDED**

Love nature and the outdoors? Join our team and help us make a difference!

**VOLUNTEER RENDEZVOUS**  
**Thursday, February 10**  
**10 - 12pm or 6-8pm**

volunteer opportunities include  
 volunteer naturalist, visitor center host,  
 adopt-a-trail and trail maintenance crew  
 special projects, marketing and outreach, and  
 so much more!

**CALL THE NATURE CENTER 918-596-9054**  
**TO RSVP FOR THIS EVENT!**

## Winter Birds



1. Red Bellied Woodpecker, 2. Red Shouldered Hawk, 3. Wilson's Snipe, 4. Tufted Titmouse

## Mary K. Oxley Nature Center - January Programs

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

15 January "Junior Naturalist Adventures, Winter Tree Study" Ages: 8 to 12  
 Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free for ONCA members, \$5 non-members. Registration begins Sunday, January 2 at noon and closes Thursday, January 13 at 4:00 p.m. Call 918-596-9054 to pre-register.

This class fills quickly! Join us for a morning of adventure and nature connection. Winter is a wonderful time to observe trees; learning more about their shapes, growing buds, and the messy nests tucked in their branches. Dress for the outdoors and bring a sack lunch.

