Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
November 2019

In this issue:

President's Note: Book Review: The Sunflower Family

Contingency Planning for Farms and Ranches

Ped Talks Soil Health Video Series

Oklahoma Endangered Species

Fall/Winter Events: Conferences!

The season of thanksgiving is upon us once again, and we're reflecting in this issue on some of the many things we're thankful for.

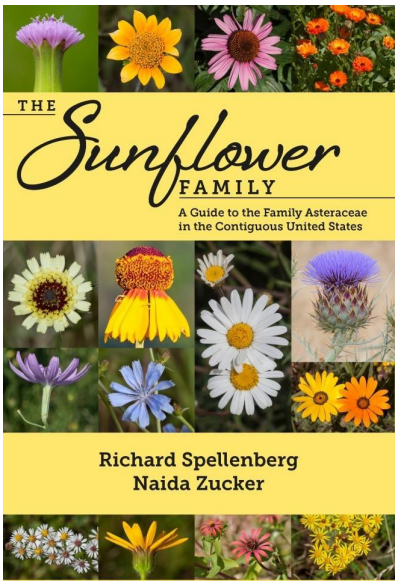
One is the amazing natural diversity of our home state - both the experts who share their knowledge of it, and the institutions that help to protect it. David Redhage reviews a **new identification guide to the sunflower family**, and the Nature Conservancy offers a **free fact sheet on Oklahoma's endangered species**.

We're also grateful for the health of the soil on which civilization depends - and explore it with a new free **video series on soil health**.

Farmers and ranchers are thankful for their land, crops, livestock, and equipment. We share **resources to help producers protect their operations in the event of disaster**.

As ever, **we're deeply grateful for your contributions** - they keep us working, and they help us know where we're working best. It's the **season of giving** as well as thanksgiving - please **donate**. (If you already have, **thank you!**)

President's Note: Book Review: The Sunflower Family



The Sunflower Family: A Guide to the Family Asteraceae in the Contiguous United States. Botanical Research Institute of Texas. 2019. 574 p.

I find that many of the flowers I try to identify as part of the **pollinator program** are from the sunflower family (Asteraceae). Many times, it can be confusing trying to identify these plants with a full-blown plant key or a simpler picture field guide.

This publication falls between the two. It breaks the Asteraceae family down by tribes, and provides a section on the key characteristics for each tribe. Once you identify the tribe, there is a color code allowing you to move to the correct section. Then, you turn pages looking for your plant, to drop down to the genus within each tribe.

The written material on each genus indicates how many species are found worldwide, how many are in the United States, and where the genus occurs in the United States, along with photos, a description, and comments. The book is heavy compared to most field guides, but the pages are printed on glossy paper, making the colors stand out.

The book is not cheap, at $45, but the large number of pages and print quality account for the cost. It is a different method of plant identification, and while I haven't used it yet, it should prove helpful identifying plants found in the field.

I would not recommend it for someone looking for a general wildflower ID book. The link above will take you to the website with some example photos of pages from the book to help you decide if it would be beneficial for you.

Contingency Planning for Farms and Ranches

Most of what we think of as "unthinkable" isn't really impossible to think about - just unpleasant. Still, when it comes to planning ahead in agriculture, every ounce of such unpleasant prevention is well worth the much more unpleasant pound of cure it saves.

That's the thinking behind resources like the **ReadyAG workbook**, which helps ranchers and farmers think through the **steps they can take to make their operations more resilient in the face of disaster**.

What kind of disaster? Just about any you can imagine - including, likely, some you hadn't before: from fire and flood to bioterrorism and pandemic disease.

A multi-state partnership of cooperative extension agencies wrote the ReadyAG guide to help farmers and ranchers become better prepared for any event that could disrupt their operation.

The checklists are thorough, and can easily become daunting, but the people who put the workbook together say it's not meant to be overwhelming. Simply reading through them, for starters, will spark some thoughts and guide your mind to begin organizing them.

You've probably already taken some of the steps in the workbook. Mark those off, and start sorting the others by priority. Once you've got a short list of a few highest-priority items, set goals and work on them little by little.

Once that list is finished, make another pass through the workbook and repeat the process. Every step you take makes your operation that much more resilient in the face of a disaster that's now no longer unforeseen.

Ped Talks Soil Health Video Series

You've probably heard of TED talks - but what about **PED talks**? Named after the term for clods of soil held together by plant roots and microbial glues, this new YouTube channel features **free short videos** explaining soil health concepts.

So far, there are five videos posted - an introduction by NRCS Chief Matt Lohr, and the following 10-15 minute segments:

- "Soil Health Diagnosed as You've Never Heard Before," by Shannon Cappellazzi of the Soil Health Institute
- "Focusing on Soil Health from the Ground Up," by Alex Fiock of the Soil Health Partnership
- "Partnering to Enhance Soil Health," by Barry Fisher of the NRCS Soil Health Division and Betsy Bower of Ceres Solutions Cooperative, and
- "You Are Changing the World!" by Jane Hardisty, former NRCS Indiana State Conservationist.

The PED Talks series was created by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), Soil Health Institute (SHI), Soil Health Partnership (SHP), Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The partners plan to continue releasing additional soil health videos on the PED Talks channel, focusing on the next generation of scientists and farmer/innovators.

Oklahoma Endangered Species

Have you ever heard of the whooping crane? The gray bat? How about the American burying beetle?

Let's make the quiz harder: what do these three seemingly disparate species have in common?

It turns out that all three are **endangered species that live in Oklahoma**. This information comes from a recent [Nature Conservancy article], based on a [free fact sheet] available from the organization.

Under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service designates species at risk of extinction as "endangered." Species that are not currently endangered, but are at risk of becoming so, are designated as "threatened."

The state of Oklahoma also maintains its own designations in the same categories. However, a species designated as endangered by the state might - or might not - have more robust populations outside Oklahoma.

At present, **Oklahoma is home to 12 federally endangered, seven federally threatened, two state endangered, and one state threatened species**. The Nature Conservancy's [fact sheet] lists them all, along with photos and scientific names.

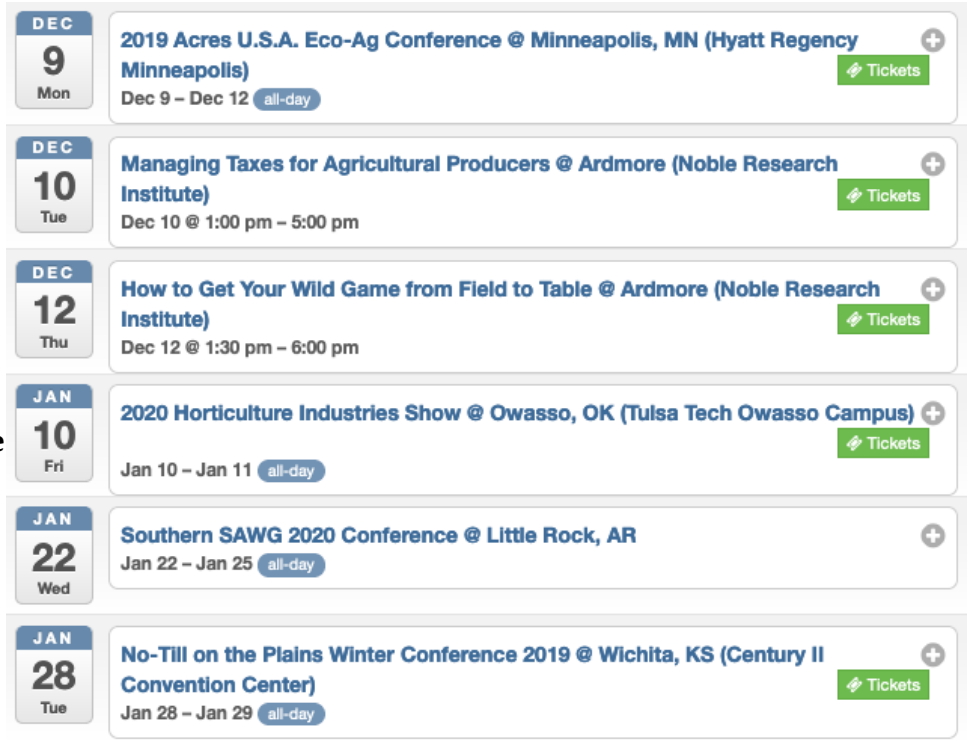
The Endangered Species Act has had some notable successes, such as the bald eagle - also found throughout Oklahoma. The iconic raptor was listed as endangered the same year the ESA was passed, but populations rebounded enough that it was de-listed in 2007.

Some species are **under review for listing as threatened or endangered**, with USFWS monitoring their status. In Oklahoma, examples of this category include the **lesser prairie chicken**, as well as the **monarch butterfly**.

The growing movement toward [establishing and protecting pollinator habitat] **can help make a difference** in this process. Listing a species as endangered can help its populations recover, but it's vastly preferable not to have to list it at all!

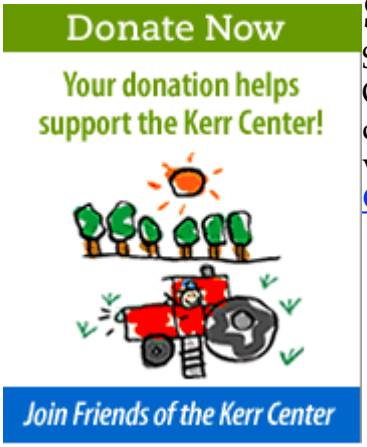
Fall/Winter Events: Conferences!

Conference season is here again: over the next couple of months, you can catch most of the year's biggest sustainable agriculture gatherings, including **Acres U.S.A.** (Dec. 9-12, Minneapolis), the **Horticulture Industries Show** (Jan. 10-11, Tulsa), **Southern SAWG** (Jan. 22-25, Little Rock), and **No-Till on the Plains** (Wichita, Jan. 28-29).



Full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region can be found on the Kerr Center's online **events calendar**.

Don't forget that you can also use our online calendar to **keep yourself and your friends up to date** on these and other upcoming events, including our **tours**:
- **Subscribe to our feed** and receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.



Support the Kerr Center

Since 1965 the Kerr Center has been reaching out to folks in Oklahoma and beyond. Today, the Friends of the Kerr Center help us continue this vital work! If you enjoy reading this newsletter or visiting our website, please consider **making a gift to the Kerr Center** today!

Quick Links...

Kerr Center website

Find us on Facebook

Contact Information

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture
24456 Kerr Road
Poteau, OK 74953
Phone: 918.647.9123
Fax: 918.647.8712
mailbox@kerrcenter.com