

Trip Report: Jester Bat Count 2018

February 3, 2018

Participants: Duane Del Vecchio, Melynda Hickman, Andrew VanDyke, John VanDyke

Report by: Duane

The gang decided to meet at the T-intersection parking lot for Jester at 11 a.m. We had obtained permission to get on the properties, received the WNS swab test kit for testing, and were ready to count noses (or ears divided by two). I had arrived quite early (10:20) and was settling in for a nice nap when John and Andrew pull up at 10:30. They had just spent the night at Jason Talbot's house literally just down the road. This was Andrews first bat count. John has introduced all three of his kiddos to this cave over the years with JT (his oldest) being a regular until this year... alas... you grow up and have to get a job. <grin>

We decided to knock out Train Tunnel before our guest showed up at 11. We made our way into the gully and discovered the entrance almost barred by a giant tree that was broken over it and at least three feet of debris piled up as the tree became a dam for the debris. We went in and still in the twilight zone found a couple of big ears. The floor was extremely muddy as we continued toward the back. At the back we had standing water (something I don't think we've had in decades) ... there was a lot of evidence in lots of the cave of a giant flood since we were last here. But it hadn't rained here in months the locals say. Hummmm..... Overall, Train got us what we came for 2 big ears, 5 myotis, 7 pips.

We exited and met our newbie to Jester, Melynda Hickman. Mel works for the Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation in the non-game department and is assigned the western half of Oklahoma. One of her primary areas in the western part of the state is bats. Duane works with her with the Selman Bat Watch and the Oklahoma Bat Committee (which COG is a member). As we didn't have many people counting this year, Duane figured we needed another set of eyes to help with the count and invited her out. We signed the release from liability from the landowner and got on our way.

We headed down to the resurgence. The day was sunny with about a 15-20 mph wind from the south... it was cool but not cold. We got to the entrance set up temp and humidity readings and started to look for bats. John had been briefing Andrew on what to look for and the distinct types of bats we'd see but now he actually got to associate what he had been told with what was actually out here. Our first mat of bats was just past the twilight zone. Though we usually find them kinda scrunched into some cracks, this year they outdid themselves with finding every little nook and cranny and wedging themselves into them very snugly. (See webpages for some pictures). Saw bats in areas we haven't in the past because of that behavior. There was water and we couldn't help but get into it early. We finally made it down to what we call Pip Hall. Usually you can get to the side sand/mud bar and crawl and stay out of the water... not this year. One had to wade at least knee deep just to get to the bar. Duane waded all the way out and it was upper thighs and COLD! Started going numb after about 3 minutes. But the room was full of pips (actually Tri-colors) and most of them were dew covered so we all got to see a lot of sparkly jeweled bats. Temp and humidity was up in this room too (as it usually is). We finished and went down the tube that by passes the water. Lots warmer here and even more humid. We found tricolors further down the hall than we usually have in the past. We took a small breather at the rest room (no... not a potty place but a place to rest) then came back and took 10 swab samples of tricolors in this area. There are these small vials that have ionized water in them. You open them and put a 12-

inch sterile wood q-tip into it and let it absorb the water. You then find a sleeping bat and roll it over their mouth and nose and over their arms. If they have any of the fungus that causes WNS then it will come off on the swab. The swab is then returned to the vial where it is snapped off at the lid and the vial is sealed with swab contained within. Then the vial is recorded with facts such as Solitaire or cluster, Adult, Juvenile, or pup (all of ours are adults), entrance, twilight, inside cave, and facts such as those for the scientists. Mel and John and Andrew took samples while Duane kept the paperwork straight. We then came back past pip hall and the water and into the main passage again and before exiting took 15 samples of myotis. All of that done we finally exited the cave having spent 2 hours inside. We didn't feel like there were as many bats this year here. Our count: Myotis - 3,388, Tri-Color - 29.

We then ate some power bars (or other junk food) and got ready for our final section down the road. Duane gave the entire testing kit and info to Mel to take back where she will put with the other samples from across the state and send it in for testing all in one group. We then piled in the cars and drove the 1/4 or so mile down to the gate for Glade/Homestead entrances.

John went in Glade to take temps and humidity levels while Duane took Mel and Andrew down the dirt slide into the Homestead entrance. We always find a few big ears in this area so we make the extra effort to come down here. We found three big ears among lots of fresh breakdown at the back... there is a lot of light coming in now at the entrance where there used to be just small holes. That done we used the connecting tunnel to meet up with John.

John, meanwhile, was standing under the first mat of bats when CRASH! Right next to him (1 foot away) a section of rock fell to the ground. He looked up and saw a space about 12 inches long in a mat with no bats in it. They were on the ground (about 60 of them) being attached to the rock. We showed up just after that and, futilely, tried to return them back to the rock wall...sadly, if they all don't wake up on their own, some raccoon is going to eat really well! The cave here was much colder than the resurgence. As we counted we also saw more mats. Though it was cold in the cave by the end of the count there were more and more flyers buzzing around. John did find a lot of pips in what we're now calling the new pip hallway on one of the side passages where it was much warmer. The guano room was really thick this year (and goopy!) We trudged through water and mud and got to our exit (Stovepipe) and left the cave after being in this section for 1 hr. 50 mins. Our count for this area was: Myotis: 15,713, Tri-Color: 28 and BE Brown: 3.

Just as we were exiting the cave my phone was pinging as I was getting a message. It was Dale & Carole Town wondering if we were out of the cave yet and if we were going to Lugi's? Heck yeah! Mel got a text and had to head home and miss opportunity to have the worlds best calzone. John & Andrew went by Jason's and clean up and Duane went on to Blair. We all met at Lugi's and shared Calzones and talked cave talk. Great day and thanks gang for all the help!!

Final Counts: Myotis: 19,106, Tri-Color: 64, BE Brown: 6. Total count is up 3,100 from last year.

Data sheets (counts, temps, humidity readings) and pictures available on our website:
<http://www.okcavers.com/bat%20counts/2018/jester18/index.htm>