

## THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S FIRST OKLAHOMA PRESERVE

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An 85 acre tract near Tulsa became the property of The Nature Conservancy in July 1969. Thus Oklahoma was added to the many states with preserves. The area, known as Redbud Valley, borders a scenic, partially settled depression bounded by limestone cliffs and erosion knobs. At the gate of the fenced boundary, below the limestone upland on the west side of the valley, there is a sign which reads "REDBUD VALLEY NATURE PRESERVE, PROPERTY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY. For information, contact the Life Science Department, University of Tulsa."

The gate is the entry to the bottomland of Bird Creek, a beautiful ravine which opens into the creek, and the upland above the ravine. Near the head of the ravine, a travertine spring flows from below the highest section of the Oologah limestone, which forms a great overhang, and a better than 100 ft cave yawns its invitation to enter. From the highest outcrops above the creek, the view spreads out for miles to the north and west.

A large variety of habitats harbor plants and animals not commonly found as natives within 15 miles of Tulsa. Large sugar maples and chinquapin oaks shade the limestone blocks which have broken away from the upland and slumped down the ravine slopes. These rock surfaces bear an abundance of columbine, ferns, and other treasures. Especially notable on the rich soil of the shaded slopes is Dutchman's Breeches (*Di-*

*centra cucullaria*, L., Bernh.). No other occurrence of it is known near Tulsa. On the upland, ravine trees phase out to scattered oaks, hickory, deciduous holly, and intervening grasses. Interesting because it is quite rare in Oklahoma, is the American smoke-tree (*Cotinus obovatus* Raf.) on the edge of the limestone bluff. The birds seen are myriad, and other animals vary with the different habitats of upland, ravine slopes, and bottomland.

The preservation of this area and its availability for scientific study, and for those who will respect and conserve it, is a forward step for Oklahoma. Some 20 years ago, the Botany and Zoology Departments of the University of Tulsa made consistent use of the climax prairie on the Oologah limestone, and the five ravines which cut into the upland and widen toward termination in Bird Creek. The climax prairie and four of these ravines have been destroyed by a cement operation which removes and crushes the limestone. The eastern-most ravine escaped this fate because it was purchased years ago by a Tulsa geologist, G. F. Boucher. He built a family home in adjacent Redbud Valley and kept the entire area as natural as possible. Now the title of the land will remain with The Nature Conservancy, and the University of Tulsa will pay one dollar per year rental. It will be available, under direction of the Project Committee, to all individuals and groups willing to cooperate in preserving its natural state and desiring to use it for appreciation and study.