

XI. OBSERVATIONS OF SOME OKLAHOMA BIRDS

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The work upon which I am reporting has been done during the past eighteen months. The greater part of this work was done in the vicinity of Oklahoma City and most of the observations recorded here are from that source, although small portions of both Murray and Delaware counties were studied to a less extent. Five days (May 1-5, 1925) were spent at Price's Falls, Murray county, where a list was made of the birds identified. All notes on Delaware county were taken in the vicinity of Grove during June, 1925. Each topic given is classed under one of the following heads:

- (1) Unusual resident or transient;
- (2) Earliest and latest dates of arrival of a species;
- (3) Those observations of habits, songs, and other characteristics of a species which may be of interest.

Rose-Breasted Grosbeak (*Hedymeles ludovicianus*). A male rose-breasted grosbeak was seen on Edgemere Creek, two miles north of Oklahoma City, April 25, 1925. He spent about two hours in an elm tree picking buds and occasionally giving his wonderful song from the top branch of the tree. This is the only bird of this species the writer has ever seen here.

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga erythromelas*). Two transient scarlet tanagers have been recorded in this county. Both were seen in the open woods on Hare's Estate, one April 19, 1925; the other April 26, 1925. Their presence in central Oklahoma is rare.

Blue-Winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*). The writer had the rare pleasure of observing a blue-winged warbler April 26, 1925, when a single transient was seen in the willows near Belle Isle lake, four miles north of Oklahoma City. For a quarter of an hour the bird searched industriously for insects, remaining silent all the time. He was unusually active, and ever on the alert for a moth or insect. With his hunger appeased, the spirit of wanderlust again seized him and he was off on his northward journey.

Black-Throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*). A single transient was seen August 7-8, 1925, in an oak grove on Hare's Estate north of Oklahoma City. His actions were much like those of a vireo, but, contrary to Goss' statement, this bird was seen to hop to the ground several times in search of insects. One time he

remained on the ground more than a minute, searching among the leaves. The upper branches of the trees seemed to be no more popular than the lower ones. No song was heard although a weak "tsip" was delivered occasionally.

Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*). The first record of this species is of several birds that were seen October 6, 1925, near C. F. Woodward's farm, northeast of Oklahoma City. They were in a thicket on the hillside, scratching around among the leaves and occasionally hopping up on an exposed perch. Their actions were much like those of the yellow-throat, but they were much easier to approach. A weak "tsip" was uttered frequently.

Louisiana Water-Thrush (*Seiurus motacilla*). One of these beautiful singers was seen and heard August 11, 1925, on a small creek, a fourth of a mile northeast of the Edgemere Public School, Oklahoma City. This bird is a very uncommon visitor in this vicinity and the writer has no previous record of its presence here. The water thrush is abundant in Delaware county and towards evening the hills along Honey Creek fairly echoed with his wonderfully clear and ringing notes. The singing was done not only from low perches in the trees along the stream, but also from rocks and logs near the water's edge. Its ordinary note is a metallic clink. On June 18th, a nest was found in the roots of a tree blown down on the bank of a small ravine a hundred yards from Honey Creek, but near a small spring. It was placed in the mud between the roots and was made of moss, fern leaflets, and fine grasses. For some unknown reason, the nest had been abandoned.

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*). The flutelike notes of the wood thrush were heard July 7, 1925, six miles east of Oklahoma City, near the North Canadian river. This stretch of woods was visited but once so the bird was not seen nor heard again, but its behavior indicated that it was nesting in this stretch of heavy timber.

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*). The pipit was seen in large flocks during the period from March 29 through April 5, 1925 in an alfalfa field just east of the Woodward farm, Oklahoma City. On April 3, 1925, flock of several hundred spent several hours there, feeding chiefly on small seeds. On being flushed, they flew a short distance, wheeled, circled, and sailed gracefully to the ground. They ran over the ground rapidly, the gray edgings of their outer tail feathers showing plainly as that appendage was dipped up and down.

Pileated Woodpecker (*Phloeotomus p. pileatus*). During the

month of June, 1925, eight pairs of these woodpeckers were seen near Grove, Delaware County, Oklahoma. One pair resided on Honey Creek; the others were seen on Grand River, Drowning Creek and Elk River. The clear, ringing bugle call of the male of Honey Creek served as an alarm clock during our three weeks stay at Big Mouth cave. This pair nested in a large cottonwood nearby and gave me an opportunity to study their habits. The bugle notes were similar to the ringing cackle of the flicker, but were several times louder as they could be heard easily a mile distant. His powerful bill was used frequently in prying off large pieces of bark from the decayed limbs, and in addition, he could deliver tremendous blows. In drumming on a limb, this log-cock would draw his head far back and hold this strained position for several seconds and then strike with startling swiftness and power, six to ten times. The prelude reminded one of the cocking of a gun. His flights from tree to tree were rather slow and steady, and, unlike those of his smaller relatives, they were in a perfectly straight line.

Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*). The only record of the residence of these birds here is of a pair that nested on the edge of a swamp near the North Canadian River, six miles east of Oklahoma City. The female was seen July 2-3, 1925, carrying food to her young. These two birds were seen several times in the open part of the woods, catching insects and giving their "watcher see", but their nest was never found. The lower branches of the trees were frequented more than the elevated ones.

Black-Capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapillus*). During the five days, May 1-5, 1925, a bird census was taken in the vicinity of Price's Falls, Murray County, Oklahoma. The vireos that were the most numerous were the black-capped and the red-eyed. The former were very common on the tops of the hills bordering Falls Creek, where practically every large thicket supported a pair of black-capped tenants. Much of their time was spent near the ground, out of sight of the observer, and often their distinctive warbling song was heard several times before the musician hopped into view. Much of their food seemed to be gleaned from the ground. Their actions were much more jerky and energetic and their song more prolonged and varied than those of the other vireos, the former being somewhat like those of the Maryland Yellow-throat. During their hasty searching in the undergrowth, short snatches of song were given, and then at intervals some of them were joined together in one rippling concert.

Black-Crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax naevius*).

A single bird of this species was observed several times on March 28, 1925, near Belle Isle lake, four miles north of Oklahoma City. A week later several others were seen perched in a large grove of elm trees near the same lake. Their flight was noiseless and their alarm note was a harsh "squawk".

Chuck-Will's-Widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*). This member of the "goatsucker" family is a common summer resident in Delaware County, even at dusk many were seen flying around. They often flew down over the camp fire as if in curiosity, and one went so far as to perch on the ridge pole of the tent to sing. Most of the people of this region refer to this bird as the Whip-poorwill, and this is not surprising for the first note is indistinct. The remaining three notes can easily be construed as "whip-poorwill." On June 18, two chuck-will's-widows were heard in the middle of the day; a peculiar clucking sound being given for several minutes.

Black and White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*). On May 21, 1924, a single black and white warbler was seen inspecting a black locust tree in Oklahoma City. It is the only one of this species ever observed in the central part of town, and they are far from common even in the outlying wooded districts. Several were seen around Price's Falls, Murray County, May 1-5, 1925, and also August 8, 1925 on Hare's Estate, north of Oklahoma City.

Western Parula Warbler (*Compsothypis americana rama-linae*). The parula warbler should be added to the ever increasing list of Oklahoma birds parasitized by the cowbird. On June 12, 1925, a warbler of this species was seen feeding a young cowbird. Several trips for food were witnessed and each time the cowbird received the morsel. No nest was seen but the young bird remained perched on the same limb of the sycamore, waiting for the arrival of his tiny step-mother. These two were watched for an hour, and, during that time, no parula babies were seen. This incident took place in a low, moist wood near Honey Creek, Delaware County, Oklahoma.

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). A nest of the ruby-throated hummingbird was found on Hares Estate, north of the state capitol, August 8, 1925. As this was unusually late for incubation, great interest was taken in the little home and mother, because it was hoped to record a new date for the latest nesting of this species. The nest was built of down, plastered with lichens from the same tree in which it was built, and glued together with spider web. It was saddled upon a small branch, fifteen feet above the ground, and entirely protected from rain by a large

bur-oak leaf just above it. During the six days in which the female was observed, the duration of the sitting periods and trips away from the nest were recorded. The length of the incubating periods was found to vary according to the time of day and weather conditions. The average length during the mid-day period and during the hottest hours was fifteen minutes, while the periods of absence from the nest varied from three to five minutes. While sitting on the nest, no movements were made by the mother except to watch any intruder in the vicinity. If any person came near the nest, she invariably turned so as to face him. Rarely she preened a feather while sitting, or fastened a bit of loosened nest material. When it came for her trips for food, she left the nest without warning, flying down the ravine like a bullet. Her departure was so sudden that often when I would glance at the nest there she would be with her bill and tail standing up over the rim of the tiny cup; but when in an instant I would look again, she would be out of sight. Most of her trips were made to a spring one hundred and fifty yards distant. Usually she returned in about three minutes and often spent a short time preening her feathers as she perched on a dead limb about fifteen feet from the nest. The male was seen rarely. Only twice did he alight near the nest, and once he annoyed a jay until the intruder departed in haste before the furious attack of the tiny hummer. Toward evening the periods of sitting increased in length and from about sundown she rarely left the nest. On the seventh day the bird was not seen on the nest. The morning of the eighth I climbed the tree and found that the nest had been robbed. Although the date when incubation began was unknown, the eggs had not hatched when the nest was robbed, August 16. The empty nest was collected and another entry made in my log of nesting failures.

On June 23, 1925, I was doing field work in the Seneca Hills, Delaware County, Oklahoma. The eerie, flute-like notes of the wood thrush had just broken the silence and while sitting enthralled in their beauty, my attention was attracted suddenly by a peculiar metallic humming sound, composed of notes of three different pitches which seemed to come from directly over me, but only at intervals of a minute or so. It was not at all loud, but was quite clear and distinct, and had a ventriloquial effect. After several minutes watching, a humming bird flew over again, and the same peculiar vibrant song was noted. The bird was seen to fly to a nest in an oak, ram a morsel of food down the throat of a young hummer, then turn back in the direction from which she had come, without

having alighted. Her trips were always in the same direction and the song was always given at about the same place. When the song was first heard it was quite distinct from the ordinary humming of her wings. This was the only time the humming bird was heard to sing. On June 25, 1925, near the Elk River, Delaware County, Oklahoma, two humming birds were seen to fly rapidly backward and forward from each other, almost touching bills, and then backing away several feet apart; then they repeated the procedure. This action was accompanied by the loud humming of their wings, the forward flight giving one tone while the reverse flight gave another and different one. It could not be determined if both the birds were males, and whether the performance was a hostile affair or a mating ceremony.

Arctic Towhee (*Pipito maculatus arcticus*). Towhees were seen first this autumn on October 6, 1925, on a brushy hillside near C. F. Woodward's farm. The flock was accompanied by chipping sparrows.

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*). The first record for this winter (1925) of the siskin, is an unusually early one. A small flock was seen on Hare's Estate, north of Oklahoma City, October 18, 1925. The birds spent an hour eating weed seeds and were off again.

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*). The writer wishes to give some evidence in favor of this bird about which so much evil is reported. Although the harm that the blue jay does outweighs the good, he should be given credit for every point in his favor. During the summers of 1920-21, a large percentage of the shade trees in Oklahoma City, especially the black locusts, were literally covered with bagworms. Time and again the blue jays have been seen scrambling around among the infested leaves, often hanging down like chickadees, pulling the bagworms off and devouring them. Today there are very few bagworms in Oklahoma City. The principal means of their elimination were spraying and the actual picking of the worms, but the jay played a large part in this work.

Red-Winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus phoeniceus*). Scores of these blackbirds nest in the alders and button-bushes that line the shores of Belle Isle lake, four miles north of Oklahoma City. The bulk of them arrive early in April, mate, and begin laying early in May. The males precede the females by several days and spend most of this time on the tops of the willows, giving their liquid *konkalee* song, and accompanying it by a spreading of the wings and amusing contortions, as if the effort is rending the vocal organs. The average nests are finished in about one week, and are, or-

dinarily, of three parts; i. e., a rough outer basket of coarse grasses and sedges, which are woven around the forking branches of the bush; an inner filling of finer grasses; and a lining of still finer material. In all the nests observed, the building and incubation were carried on by the female. The three or four eggs ordinarily are hatched in eleven days and in about eleven more days, the young are ready to leave the nest. Of the twenty nests observed, only six were successful, fourteen having been robbed by snakes or destroyed by birds, robbed by persons boating on the lake, or abandoned for some unknown reason.

Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*). Flocks of these warblers were first seen October 19, 1925. On November 1, a band of over fifty was observed in a pecan grove north of Harrah, Oklahoma. The air was filled with their sharp "chips" as they darted from their perch to catch a passing insect. The peculiar thing about this procedure was that they returned very often to the same tree, and occasionally to the same perch in the manner of the flycatchers. On the same day near Woodward's farm, north-east of Oklahoma City, another flock was seen going through the same manouvers. Several were observed to perch on fence posts and return to them after the capture. A short "chip" was given at frequent intervals. The lower half of the trees seemed to be most popular with them, but upper branches were occupied also, and several were seen hopping on the ground.

Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). A pair of these flycatchers nested in Big Mouth Cave, Delaware County, Oklahoma, where the Oklahoma Historical Society was excavating. The nest was found May 30, 1925, attached to the lime-stone roof of the cave, five feet above the floor and fifty feet from the entrance. It contained five young birds. The nest was composed chiefly of moss with some grass and mud. At first the female was very much dismayed by our constant presence near her nest, and fed the babies only when we were all outside the cave. Within a few days she became more accustomed to us and brought food even when we were within fifteen feet of the nest. Both birds attended to the wants of the five young birds, and each time that one of the parents arrived with food, it would perch on the stack of canned goods near the entrance and give a sharp chip to arouse the babies. On June 11th, we moved the nest outside the cave because it interfered with our work. Immediately all five babies took to their wings and volplaned about thirty feet. For two days we occasionally heard a baby call and the parents' answer. Five days later, the female returned to the cave and began

building a new nest nearer the entrance but within fifteen feet of her old home site. The results of this second nesting are unknown as we left the vicinity.

Sycamore Warbler (*Dendroica dominica albilora*). This warbler is a summer resident in Delaware County, Oklahoma. Several were heard and one was seen on June 8, 1925, near Big Mouth Cave, Delaware County. The bird was very hard to observe as he limited his searching to the very top of the high oak. His manner of creeping around and picking at insects was much like that of both the chickadee and brown creeper, and his song was made up of a short see-saw on two notes, followed by a trill.

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). On November 15, 1925, twelve of these birds were seen eating wild grapes on Deep Fork Creek, six miles northeast of Oklahoma City. A flicker tried repeatedly to pick a quarrel with several of them, without success. They were in full plumage and the red on the tips of their wings looked like glowing sealing wax. This is the earliest record the writer has of their arrival here in the autumn.

Winter Residents and Transients

Earliest Records For 1925

SPARROWS

Lincoln Sparrow, October 5-11-18-21.

White Crowned Sparrow, October 18-19-21.

White Throated Sparrow, October 19-21-25.

Song Sparrow, Dakota, October 4-6-11-18-19-21-25.

Savannah Sparrow (Sp?), October 4-19.

Chipping Sparrow, October 4-6-11-18-19-21-25; Nov. 1-8-15.

Tree Sparrow, Western, October 19-25; Nov. 1-8-15.

Harris Sparrow, November 1-8-15-22, Oct. 28, 1925.