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### AN OKLAHOMA NEST OF THE COMMON RAVEN

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**T**HE COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) may formerly have inhabited several parts of Oklahoma in which it has not been seen for a long time. More than a century ago, Samuel G. Woodhouse reported visiting "a bluff fifty feet perpendicular" and "numerous deep canyons" along the Verdigris River in northeastern Oklahoma—rough country that in his own words "afforded breeding places for the ravens (*C. corax* L.)" (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 376). Since those early times the only completely valid Oklahoma records for *Corvus corax* have

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#### NEST AND THREE EGGS OF COMMON RAVEN

*Photographed 22 April 1967 by Dale W. Greiner at eastern end of Black Mesa a few miles northeast of Kenton, Cimarron County, Oklahoma.*

been from the mesa country of northwestern Cimarron County. Here, where the big, handsome species breeds in small numbers, and where it has been seen or heard by almost every party visiting the area, it is probably non-migratory.

The only Common Raven nests thus far reported from Cimarron County were three "seen . . . on the side of the Black Mesa" on 21 May 1908 by R. Crompton Tate, for many years a resident of the village of Kenton, Oklahoma; these were not, so far as I know, climbed to, so their contents were not ascertained (Tate, 1923, *Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci.*, 3: 46; Nice, 1931, *The Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 127). Another nest, alleged to have been that of *C. corax*, found 18 feet up on an abandoned windmill near Boise City on 18 June 1935, and containing "seven young birds from three to ten days old" (Colvin, 1935, *Auk*, 52: 453-54), was almost certainly that of a White-necked Raven (*C. cryptoleucus*), a species known to breed regularly in the virtually treeless flat country about Boise City; to place its nest frequently on an old windmill; and to lay its eggs considerably later than the Common Raven does (Sutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-77).

On 22 April 1967, while my ornithology class and I were observing birds near Kenton, we found, climbed to, and photographed a Common Raven's nest at the easternmost end of the Black Mesa. With us were my colleagues Dale W. Greiner, Richard Sagness, Richard H. Schmidt, and Dwight Spencer; S. D. McDonald of the National Museum of Canada; and George M. Sutton. After we had parked our cars near the Cimarron River three miles northeast of Kenton, we fanned out and started up the mesa. We had climbed only a few hundred yards when a pair of Common Ravens flew out from the rocks above us and far to our right. The birds croaked so loudly in protest that we felt sure they had a nest nearby.

On the boldest cliffs we found whitewashed ledges and an old nest made of sticks; but in our eagerness we climbed too rapidly and actually passed the nest by. Convinced that an occupied nest must be somewhere in the immediate vicinity, we retraced our steps, eventually coming upon a large, nearly vertical crack in the cliff wall. There, almost hidden from view, on a rock lodged high in the crack, was a huge nest.

Greiner, Schmidt, and Eric Prather (one of the students) were first to see into the nest. They shouted down to the rest of us that there were "three greenish eggs." Greiner took a photograph from his position above the nest (see illustration). The three men could not reach the nest from where they stood without using rope; but the rest of us, by climbing to a ledge under the nest and scaling the wall from there, reached a point just above and behind the nest. Examining the eggs, I decided that they were fresh. The clutch may well have been incomplete. The nest was about three feet across and six inches deep. The lining, of deer hair and strips of bark principally, had an exceedingly foul odor.

The following spring, on 26 April 1968, the same nest, with apparently fresh

but vile smelling lining, held five eggs, which I collected. In the eggs were embryos about a week old. The ravens, possibly the same pair that had been there the year before, flew about croaking; at an elevation about the same as that of the top of the mesa, a Common Crow (*C. brachyrhynchos*) dived repeatedly at one of them.

We estimated that we saw or heard among the smaller mesas near Kenton about a dozen Common Ravens—in addition to the nesting pair. Some of these behaved as if they were neither paired nor breeding, though all appeared to be adult. Near the New Mexico state line we observed two loose flocks—one of 36 birds, the other of nine birds. In the mesa country proper we did not see or hear what we believed to be a White-necked Raven. That much smaller species seems to be restricted to the flat, treeless country.

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## GENERAL NOTES

**Purple Gallinule at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma.**—About noon on 4 May 1968 I flushed a Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*) from the edge of a cattail marsh at the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma. The flying bird looked purplish blue at a distance of about twenty feet. The feet trailed below the bird and were of a rich yellow or orange shade, not green as in the Common Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus*). The bird flew just over the tops of the cattails and dropped back into the marsh at a distance of about a hundred feet.

This is the northernmost and westernmost sighting of a Purple Gallinule in Oklahoma, according to the records cited by Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 164). The spring observation of a Purple Gallinule in an area north of the southeastern United States is in agreement with occasional spring records from as far north as eastern Canada (see *A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds*, 1957, p. 160).—Robert B. Payne, *Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 1 June 1968.*

**Capture of American Coot by Great Horned Owl.**—On the morning of 29 August 1968, while I was fishing alone from a boat along the north shore of Lake Texoma near the village of Willis, Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma, I noticed two American Coots (*Fulica americana*) resting on a sandbar between my boat and the shore. The sky was overcast. Directly over the sandbar were the branches of a large tree that towered above the hundreds of sapling willows lining the shore.

At about 11 o'clock a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) suddenly dropped from the big tree straight onto one of the coots while the other coot splashed awkwardly off. The owl did not use its beak in killing its prey. It simply sat there, in plain sight, glancing about with huge eyes open. Presently it flew back into the woods carrying the dead coot.