

GENERAL NOTES

A Pigeon Hawk captures a Starling. — On the morning of 8 February 1968 an unusual bird-sound drew me to an east window of my house in Okmulgee, Okmulgee County, east-central Oklahoma. On the ground about ten feet from the house was an immature Pigeon Hawk or Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) with a live Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in its talons. The Starling, though crying out at intervals, seemed to be struggling very little. The falcon was obviously excited and wary. With each movement or cry of its victim it shifted its talons as if trying to find a more lethal hold. Presently it flew—somewhat laboriously and only a foot or so above ground—toward the backyard, carrying the Starling. Grabbing my binocular, I followed, expecting to find the two birds in a big tree across the alley; but as I rounded the corner of the garage I surprised them on the ground only a few feet away. The falcon quickly released its victim and took flight. The Starling righted itself, shook its feathers, and flew into a privet hedge near by, apparently little the worse for its brush with death.

At such close range the diagnostic marks of the Pigeon Hawk were easy to see. The long wings when folded reached almost to the end of the barred tail and had a decidedly pointed appearance when spread for flight. The top of the head, back, and wings were dark brown, the underparts and sides of the head boldly streaked, and the eye dark. I was surprised to see so small a bird of prey carrying a Starling.—Mary P. Williams, 1205 E. Tenth St., Okmulgee, Oklahoma 74447, 27 January 1969.

Span of breeding season of American Coot in Oklahoma. — Nine nestings of the American Coot (*Fulica americana*), six of them dating back more than fifty years, have been reported for Oklahoma (Nice, 1931, *Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 96; Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 166-67; Messerly, 1969, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.*, 2: 4-5). From these meagre data we know that the breeding cycle of the species has extended at least from mid-May (three nests with eggs observed on 15 May 1899 in Love County) to mid-July (two adults and two small young observed on 15 July 1954 in Cleveland County) in this part of the Southern Great Plains.

On 18 August 1967, late in the afternoon, Ron Cox and I observed an adult coot and one quail-sized, orange-headed chick in a roadside pothole just east of Boise City, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. We saw an adult again at the same pothole on the 19th and 20th, but not the chick. We searched through the thick marginal vegetation but did not find a nest.

According to the meticulous observations of Gullion (1954, *Auk*, 71: 392) the "head filoplumes" of young coots ten days old are "still orange," while heads of chicks 15 days old have a "hoary appearance." The young bird seen by us was therefore probably about two weeks old. Since the incubation period for *Fulica americana* is at least 22 days (Gullion, *loc. cit.*, p. 385), the egg from which our chick hatched must have been laid in mid-July. In the San Francisco Bay area of California, Gullion (p. 397) observed the successful hatching of second clutches after the rearing of first broods in both 1949 and 1950. While *Fulica americana* is not known to be two-brooded in Oklahoma, G. H. Ragsdale's sighting of a "nest with 6 eggs, young nearly grown and fledglings," all of them on 28 June 1889

(Nice, *op. cit.*), suggests that two-broodedness in this state may well be possible.

The natural potholes and playa depressions of the Oklahoma Panhandle and of adjacent areas offer suitable nest sites for *Fulica americana* only during "wet" years. Permanent nesting habitat may now be available, however, at impoundments whose water-level remains fairly constant. The dense stands of cattail (*Typha* spp.) at Lake Carl Etling in Black Mesa State Park, in Cimarron County, themselves good proof of water-level constancy, provide an excellent nesting habitat for the coot. Here the species nested successfully in 1966 (Messerly, *loc. cit.*). Here J. D. Tyler, Ron Cox, and I saw several adult (or adult-sized) coots on 17 August 1968. Here J. Weldon, of the field force of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, has seen both adult and young coots on numerous occasions in mid-summer during recent years. — William A. Carter, *Department of Biology, East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma 74820, 10 September 1968.*

Black-chinned Hummingbird at Silver Lake, near Oklahoma City. — About 1 May 1959 an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) with malformed bill appeared at my Silver Lake banding station near Oklahoma City in Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. Though obviously attracted by a hummingbird-feeder, he was unable to stick his bill into the 1/8 in. wide feeder-mouth because his mandibles would not meet. His tongue, too, appeared to be damaged or misshapen, for at times it lolled out between his mandibles. When, a day or so later, he again came to the feeder, we offered him red sweetened water in a spoon. This he took eagerly, perching on a hand or finger when reaching for the liquid. Meanwhile, we had fastened an inch-wide plastic cup to the feeder's mouth. The feeder now had two mouths. The Black-chin adopted the wide mouth and defended it vigorously, forcing several Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*A. colubris*) — all of which had normal bills — to use the other mouth.

This Black chin became quite a pet. He followed Alma, my wife, or me around the corner of the house as if expecting us to feed him from the spoon. Often we did feed him in this way. On one occasion, when Alma was sitting in the yard wearing a white blouse marked with red dots, the Black-chin suddenly appeared and began poking at the spots with his bill. Occasionally we observed him working around flowers in the yard. He must have found insects and spiders enough to supply him with protein, for he spent the whole summer with us. We last saw him on 5 September 1959 (1959, *Audubon Field Notes*, 13: 439).

On 28 July 1965 I captured and banded an adult male Black-chin whose bill was normal. Unlike the many Ruby-throats that I had had occasion to handle, this bird spent little time jabbing his bill nervously through the half-inch mesh hardware cloth of the gathering cage, trying to escape; instead, he squatted quietly on the floor of the cage (1965, *Audubon Field Notes*, 19: 558).

On 5 July 1968 another Black-chin appeared at my banding station. He visited the feeders regularly for a month. The glistening band on his lower throat was hard to see. The purple reflection there was perceptible only when the sun struck it directly. We could easily have caught and banded this bird, but we decided against such a move for very few hummers that we have caught

have stayed with us and we wanted this one to stay. We last saw him on 5 August 1968.

On 13 August 1968 I caught a male hummingbird that I might not have tried to catch had I realized what he was. Indeed, I am not sure to this day what species this interesting bird represented. Only the lower half of his throat was bright, and the purple throughout this brilliant area had a reddish glint. I kept the bird in the gathering cage for half an hour. During this period of captivity he spent much of his time on the floor. We banded him, found that his exposed culmen measured 18 mm., and were about to tackle the delicate task of measuring the chord of his wing when he escaped. I continue to believe that this beautiful individual was a hybrid between a Black-chin and a Ruby-throat.

Quite possibly we have seen female Black-chins from time to time, and perhaps we have banded them, but we have not handled any female or immature hummingbird with an unusually long bill. — V. J. Vacin, *Route 2, Box 123, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73114, 24 September 1968.*

Early spring and late fall records for the Winter Wren in Oklahoma. — The Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) winters widely but sparsely throughout the main body of Oklahoma. There is only one record for the Panhandle—that of a single bird seen by W. E. Lewis at or near Gate, Beaver County, on 30 January 1927 (Nice, 1931, *The Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 135). The species is said to occur in the state “from October 13 to April 7” (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 407). That it may arrive from the north earlier than 13 October and linger later than 7 April is evident from the following sightings in and near Bartlesville, Washington County, in northeastern Oklahoma.

On the morning of 3 October 1968, after the arrival of a cold front the previous evening, Emma Messerly and I were observing birds in a partly wooded stretch of Turkey Creek bottomland along the edge of suburban Bartlesville. The area is crossed by several ravines, in one of which a stream sometimes flows. In tall weeds at the edge of heavy woods we flushed a wren that flew into the lowest branches of a tree close to the ground. The bird was so much smaller, darker, and shorter-tailed than the many House Wrens (*T. aedon*) we had been seeing thereabouts the previous week, that we knew our bird was a Winter Wren. When we approached for a closer look, it flew into the woods and out of sight.

We crossed a narrow grassy area and were about to enter another patch of woods when another Winter Wren flew up. This one lit in full sunlight a foot from the ground in a bushy tree. I approached to within about ten feet and clearly saw the dim line above the eye, indistinct eye-ring, heavily speckled underparts, and stubby tail. Alarmed by our close approach, the wren flew to the edge of the woods where we followed it as it flitted, always close to the ground, never far at a stretch, from one brushpile or tangle to another.

Later that morning, in a weed-patch 200 yards from the area in which we had seen the first two Winter Wrens, we found a third. This one flew about 15 feet into a bushy tree. I approached to within about five feet; well camou-

flaged by its dark colors, it was perched in a shady spot about six inches from the ground.

We returned to the same stretch of bottomland on 4 and 10 October. On 4 October we found no Winter Wren, though we did see several other interesting bird species. On 10 October, again after the arrival of a cold front during the night, we found one Winter Wren. This bird took refuge in some bushes.

On consulting the records of various bird observers in Bartlesville, and data filed by the recorder of the Bartlesville Audubon Society, we found that Mrs. Messerly had seen a bird she believed to be a Winter Wren on 3 October 1966 in the Turkey Creek bottomland near her house; that Mrs. V. S. Cronquist had seen one in a wooded ravine just east of Bartlesville on 13 April 1966; and that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Haas had seen one on 30 April 1966 in their heavily wooded backyard near Bartlesville (1966, *Audubon Field Notes*, 20: 524). The date of this last sighting is probably exceptional. —Sophia C. Mery, 345 S. E. Boston Ave., Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003, 15 January 1969.

Early nesting of the House Finch in Oklahoma.—The earliest date on record for the nesting of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) in Oklahoma is 13 May 1961; on that date George M. Sutton and I found a nest with three fresh eggs along Texakeet Creek a few miles southeast of the village of Kenton, Cimarron County (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 590). Another nest that I found that day, but that I have not reported until now, held four heavily incubated eggs. Each of these nests was about 4 ft. up in cholla cactus (*Opuntia imbricata*) growing in gently sloping, rather heavily grazed pastureland.

On 25 April 1968, members of my ornithology class, Charles W. Comer, and I watched upwards of a dozen House Finches in trees immediately back of the general store in Kenton. Subsequent search in patches of cholla cactus near the trees disclosed three House Finch nests, each about 4 ft. above ground. One nest was old. The two occupied nests held, respectively, four slightly incubated eggs and four fresh eggs. We flushed a female bird from each of the occupied nests.

The House Finch has not been found nesting anywhere in Oklahoma except in the Black Mesa country of northwestern Cimarron County. In that area the species obviously favors a cholla cactus nest-site, though in the summer of 1924 a pair in Kenton nested 7 ft. up in a black locust that was a bit over 8 ft. high and that was "surrounded by tall rose bushes" (Tate, 1925, *Condor*, 27: 176).—David F. Parmelee, *Department of Biology, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas 66801, 18 September 1968.*

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