

Bulletin of the

OKLAHOMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Vol. X

June, 1977

No. 2

THIRD SPECIMEN OF FRIGATEBIRD FOR OKLAHOMA

BY VICTOR J. HELLER AND JOHN S. BARCLAY

On the morning of 3 November 1975, Delbert Foltz, a Ranger of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, received a call from Oklahoma Highway Department personnel concerning a strange bird that had been found atop the Highway Department building in Perry, Noble County,



FRIGATEBIRD

Found in weakened condition atop a building in Perry, Oklahoma, this wanderer from the ocean may well be the first of its species to have been taken in North America. Photograph by Victor J. Heller.

north-central Oklahoma. Foltz captured the weakened bird and brought it to Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, where we identified it at once as a frigatebird of the genus *Fregata*. Its most notable features were its extremely long wings, deeply forked tail, long, strongly hooked beak, small, flesh-colored feet, and red gular pouch. It weighed 718 grams.

We offered it living and dead fish, which it refused to eat. For three days we tried to force-feed it, but to no avail. On 7 November it died. Its plumage was alive with mallophagans, some of which we preserved. The carcass was extremely emaciated. The sex organs were not discernible, but the redness of the gular pouch led us to believe that the bird was a male. A No. 8 lead shot was found in the anterior lobe of the left kidney. The specimen (Oklahoma State University Museum No. 1770) was mounted with wings partly spread.

The bird is so small (wing chord 546 mm.; flattened wing 573; tail 404; culmen 94) that we seriously question its being a Magnificent Frigatebird (*F. magnificens*), two Oklahoma specimens of which have been preserved, one taken in Woods County, northwestern Oklahoma in August 1936, the other in Caddo County, southwestern Oklahoma, in April 1933 (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 23). Two Magnificent Frigatebird specimens available for direct comparison, one (sex unknown) in the University of Oklahoma collection, the other a male courteously lent by the American Museum of Natural History in New York, measure, respectively: wing chord 622, 610; flattened wing 631, 621; tail 418, 410; culmen 108, 110. We suspect that our bird is a Great Frigatebird (*F. minor*), a species that has never been taken in North America, but final identification must await further investigation. The important fact of the moment is that another individual of the wide-ranging genus *Fregata* has strayed from the ocean, across a vast stretch of land, into Oklahoma.

The Family Fregatidae contains five closely allied species, all placed in the genus *Fregata*. Though essentially oceanic birds, they do not habitually frequent the high seas. They nest on islands, many of which are far removed from continents. The fact that in early November of 1975 wind that blew across north-central Oklahoma was from the southwest suggests strongly that the frigatebird found in Perry had been carried inland from the Pacific coast.

We wish to thank Wesley E. Lanyon and John Farrand Jr. of the American Museum of Natural History in New York for lending specimens of *F. magnificens*, *F. minor*, and *F. aquila* (Ascension Frigatebird) for our use, and George M. Sutton, of the University of Oklahoma, for his help.