

BREEDING OF EARED GREBE IN
KINGFISHER COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

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At 0730 on 23 June 1984, while conducting an avian census of the Cimarron Terrace wetlands in north-central Oklahoma, I discovered a large aggregation of waterfowl and wading birds at a place known locally as Hajek Marsh, a prominent inundation located 1 mile (1.6 km) west and 3.5 miles (5.6 km) south of Lacey in northwestern Kingfisher County. The birds were feeding and loitering about a pool of open water all but surrounded by an extensive cattail (*Typha latifolia*) marsh of some 60 acres (24 ha). I was approximately 200 yds (180 m) away but hesitated to move closer lest I flush the birds before I could count them. I had seen seven Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) and more than 90



EARED GREBE

A bird in full nuptial plumage that behaved as if paired with another Eared Grebe at the Boise City sewage lagoons in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. Note unturned shape of the bill. Photo taken by John S. Shackford on 5 June 1981.

Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*) when I noticed a Common Moorhen (*Galinula chloropus*), a species not often encountered in Oklahoma. Within a short time, I had counted all the birds in view. Because the light had become progressively brighter I decided to sneak nearer the moorhen for a photograph. As I approached the open water, most of the waders took flight. At that moment, several others birds I had not previously noticed emerged from the grassy water's edge and slid into the pond. I stopped about 100 yds (90 m) away and set up my 25X spotting scope. Immediately, two Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) hens swam into view, one accompanied by 12 ducklings, the other by 8. Further scanning revealed three more broods of 12, 8 and 4 Mallard young. Three Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) hens with 6, 8, and 4 offspring, and a pair of Northern Shovellers (*Anas clypeata*) with 5 young I also saw. Most surprising of all was an Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) followed by 4 young grebes. At the time I did not realize the importance of this sighting, for the species had been quite common during the preceding few weeks. The grebe family emerged from an area of Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) shoreline and meandered along the edge of the cattails for about 20 feet, chicks following adult in single file a foot behind and about six inches apart, before finally disappearing back into the reeds. The young birds appeared dark in color and were perhaps four inches long. More distinct was the adult's plumage. The "ear tufts" were quite noticeable.

In neighboring marshes later in the day I was to observe three more Mallard broods of 11, 4, and 4 and a Blue-winged Teal with 9 young. Other notable species I found included a pair of Ruddy Ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), a King Rail (*Rallus elegans*), and another adult Eared Grebe.

Eared Grebes are considered transients throughout the state from early September to mid-December and from the middle of March to about the second week of June, being more common in spring than fall, but there are several winter records (Sutton, G.M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, pp. 2-3). One record for mid-summer has been published: on 20 July 1958, John G. Newell saw an adult in breeding plumage at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County (Sutton, G.M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 10). W.M. Davis observed 3 birds in nuptial feather in Texas County on 3 June 1969 (1970, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 3:14). There are several recent summer sightings of Eared Grebes at the Boise City sewage ponds in Cimarron County at the west end of the Panhandle (J.D. Tyler field notes): on 4, 5, and 7 June 1981, John S. Shackford, John S. Tomer and Jack D. Tyler saw 8 on the first date, 9 on the latter two. Two of these birds appeared to be paired and their behavior suggested that they might have been nesting. On 17 June 1983, Tyler and Lawrence Dunn found 6 Eared Grebes there. Again on 4 and 6 July 1983, Shackford saw two birds. The latest spring date for Oklahoma heretofore was 13 June 1973, when Tyler and Carrol Henderson observed three birds 3 miles east and 4 south of Lawton, in Comanche County (J.D. Tyler field notes). However, there is no previous breeding record for Oklahoma.

Hajek Marsh (not an officially recognized name) is but one of an extensive series of more than 400 marshes, ponds and small lakes scattered throughout

that region north of the Cimarron River where Kingfisher, Major, and Garfield counties converge. This palustrine complex, stretching over an area of 142 mi² (368 km²), is called the Cimarron Terrace wetlands. Though temporary in nature, and usually lasting no more than about 10 years, these wet places reappear every 50 years or so (historical data and pers. comm. with local landowners), providing ideal nesting habitat for waterfowl and other lowland species (Taylor, T.J., *et al.*, 1984, Groundwater wetlands of the Cimarron Terrace, northcentral Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Univ., Stillwater). Though most of this aquatic habitat had disappeared by 1986, a few wet spots persist. They should be monitored closely by ornithologists in the future.

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Roseate Spoonbills near Deep Fork River in Lincoln County, Oklahoma. — At 1125 hrs on 26 August 1984, I observed two large birds feeding on mudflats in a flooded field adjacent to the Deep Fork River, approximately 3 miles south and ½ mile east of Chandler, Lincoln County, central Oklahoma, near State Highway 18. I watched them for several moments from a distance of approximately 100 m (330 ft). The pair seemed unconcerned, and continued feeding among five Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*). Observed through binoculars, the pink coloration and spoon-shaped bills identified them as Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*).

The pair continued to forage, pausing occasionally to preen. When a vehicle drove by, they flushed, flew a short way, landed on another mudflat approximately ½ mile from the access road, and resumed feeding.

I and members of the Tulsa and Bartlesville Audubon societies observed the spoonbills again at 1115 hrs on 3 September. The overflow area had received rain since the previous week, and many of the previously exposed mudflats were inundated. The spoonbills were perched on a dead snag that was completely surrounded by water and no more than ¼ mile from my first sighting.

According to G. M. Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 5), the Roseate Spoonbill is an occasional visitor to eastern Oklahoma in summer and fall, having been reported from 30 June to 15 October as far west as Alfalfa and Tillman counties. More recently, C. Clemons and J. Malinowski (1980, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 13:20-21) observed an immature spoonbill near Lawton in Comanche County. What has been reported above constitutes the first record for Lincoln County.

There is apparently no definite record of a fully adult spoonbill in Oklahoma and all four birds collected in Choctaw County now housed in the University of Oklahoma collection are immature (see Sutton Summary of Bird Records, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). However, I believe that the pair I observed could have been adult birds. Although they lacked crimson shoulder patches characteristic of adults, they had dark legs and bills and their over-all coloration — pink neck, wings, and body with no crimson patches — was similar to that of the winter adult described by A. C. Bent (1926, Life histories of North American marsh birds, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 135, p. 18). He states that the winter plumage is achieved when the adult undergoes a complete postnuptial molt in July, August, and September, a period that coincides with