

Bulletin of the

OKLAHOMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Vol. XXI

June, 1988

No. 2

GREAT KISKADEE IN ROGER MILLS COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY WARREN M. PULICH

The occurrence of the Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) is unexpected in Oklahoma. The following account and photo document the first valid record for the state and represent an extralimital range extension northward of about 425 miles.

On 25 and 26 November 1983, Dr. Ronald J. Hill, a physician from Odessa, Texas, visited the Black Kettle National Grasslands in Roger Mills County, west central Oklahoma. He spent both days in the Turkey Creek drainage about 6 miles southwest of the village of Crawford, or 3 miles west of Spring Creek Lake. The creek bed here wound through a grove of Eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) to a spring encircled by willows (*Salix* sp.), and emptied into a small lake less than a hundred yards away. The oak (*Quercus* sp.) thickets that dotted the low surrounding hills were alive with several species of wintering birds.

At approximately 1100, he noticed a bird of medium size perched low on a willow branch above the little creek. The bird's head was unusually large, but what had first caught Hill's eye was the brightness of its yellow breast. Closer scrutiny revealed that the head was striped black and white. When it took



GREAT KISKADEE

Two views of bird discovered and photographed in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, on 25 November 1983 by Ronald J. Hill. Note contrasting stripes on large head. The white throat, bright yellow belly, and heavy body proportions can also be seen.

flight, Hill noticed flashes of rusty brown in the bird's wings and tail. It was not overly shy, allowing the observer to approach to within 25 or 30 feet for photographs. Occasionally, the bird emitted a low whistle. It eventually flew down the creek about 75 feet, and again perched over the water. Here it began to "hawk" for insects in typical flycatcher fashion. Dr. Hill studied this unusual bird for about 45 minutes that day.

Next day, Dr. Hill, his wife Olivia, and their daughter found the Great Kiskadee where it had been the previous day. After carefully studying this bird once more, all three agreed upon its identification. They further noted that it behaved normally and did not appear to be incapacitated in any way.

The two slides kindly sent me by Dr. Hill clearly show the typical color, form and size of the species (see cover photo). These have been deposited in the files of the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee (OBRC), and establish this species on the official list of Oklahoma birds.

There is an unpublished sight record from Tulsa in northeastern Oklahoma. Mr. and Mrs. John O. Kremer reported that they observed a Great Kiskadee in a dense riparian woodland approximately a mile from the Arkansas River on 5 May 1972. They leisurely watched it for five to eight minutes under ideal light conditions from approximately 45 feet away. So confident were they in their identification that they telephoned Dr. George M. Sutton at the University of Oklahoma several days later. He admitted that he had no idea what other species it could have been, based on the detailed description given by the Kremers (letter in OBRC files).

The Great Kiskadee normally ranges south through Mexico to central Argentina (1983, A.O.U. Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., p. 467). In the United States, it is a locally common resident of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, occurring regularly northwestward along the Rio Grande River to the vicinity of Laredo in Webb County. Occasionally, it has been reported west to Val Verde County and north to Jim Wells County (Arnold, K.A., 1984, Checklist of the birds of Texas, Texas Ornithol. Soc., p. 80). There is one unconfirmed sighting for Big Bend National Park in Brewster County (Wauer, R.H., 1973, Birds of Big Bend National Park and vicinity, Univ. Texas, Austin, p. 207). Along the Gulf Coast, the species ranges northeastward to Nueces, Aransas and Chambers counties (Arnold, K.A., 1984, *loc. cit.*).

The record farthest inland for Texas was in San Marcos, about 30 miles south of Austin, where two kiskadees appeared on 14 and 15 January 1987. These were joined by a third bird on the 17th; all were seen and well photographed until 9 February (Williams, F., 1987, Amer. Birds 41:302). This locality is more than 400 miles south of Roger Mills County, Oklahoma.

George M. Sutton (1951, Mexican birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 44) pointed out that, although he observed Kiskadee Flycatchers in Mexico that spent considerable time along streams where insects appeared to be plentiful, these birds frequently caught minnows from low perches above water. It is possible that the species' propensity for fishing is more strongly developed than generally recognized. This habit could help to explain the Great Kiskadee's presence in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, in late fall.

I wish to thank Dr. Ronald J. Hill for allowing me to draw freely from his field notes and to present his slides to the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee. Dr. Jack D. Tyler gratefully provided me the data on the Tulsa sighting, and Greg Lasley of Austin alerted me to the San Marcos records.

BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS, IRVING, TEXAS 75060, 19 FEBRUARY 1988.

A PILEATED WOODPECKER NEST IN WOODWARD COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY STACI AND RANDALL HOBLET

During the warm midafternoon of 15 May 1987, as we were making camp at Boiling Springs State Park near Woodward, Woodward County, northwestern Oklahoma, we heard a dull *tap-tap-tap* coming from a damp, low-lying wooded area behind our tent. Upon investigation, we saw an adult male Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) clinging to the shaded eastern side of a towering cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*). The old tree, perhaps 65 feet tall, and long since dead, was devoid of bark on its upper trunk and branches. Other species making up these moist woods, part of the lush riparian habitat in the valley of the North Canadian River, included predominantly American elm (*Ulmus americana*), but also some Eastern red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), soapberries (*Sapindus drummondii*), walnuts (*Juglans* sp.), buckbrush (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). A well-shaded pool lay approximately 60 yards north of the big cottonwood.

Dissecting the woodland, and affording us a closer view of the woodpecker, was a hiking trail from which we noticed several oblong cavities in the western side of the cottonwood. After watching us for several moments, the bird edged around the trunk and stationed himself at one of these holes, about 35 feet above ground level. As he made this move, we became aware of activity within the nesting cavity, and suddenly realized that what we were seeing there were the sharp little bills of at least two Pileated nestlings. Soon we could see protruding from the nest hole the heads of two young woodpeckers about ready to fledge. Their crest feathers were pinkish instead of brilliant red as in the adult, and we could see some downy feathers among them.

This woodpecker quickly fed the chicks, then flew away. Soon, the adult female, with darker head lacking the red "whiskers" of the male, put in an appearance. She seemed unconcerned about our proximity, less than 30 feet from the base of the tree, and tended to the chicks without delay. She joined them inside the cavity for a very brief time, then emerged with what we believed to be a fecal sac in her bill.

Because we were attending the spring field meeting of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, many expert birders shared our sighting. First on the scene was John G. Newell, who told us that this represented the most westerly breeding record of the Pileated Woodpecker for Oklahoma. Adult birds had previously been seen in the park during winter (Powders, V., 1986, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 19:27-28).