

## GENERAL NOTES

**Records for the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in the Oklahoma Panhandle.** — On 11 October 1980, during a duck hunting trip, I first observed Yellow-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax violaceus*) at the newly impounded Optima Lake in eastern Texas County, Oklahoma. As I set out my decoys in the half-light early that morning, 14 adult Yellow-crowns flew past, travelling west up Coldwater Creek. Despite the dim light, I could discern their rounded wings and chunky gray bodies. Even the white stripes along the sides of their black heads were evident. Later in the day, I noticed them feeding singly at various places along the lakeshore. Several Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) were also present.

During three other visits to Optima Lake in the fall of 1980, I encountered this species. On 15 October, I watched several as they flew steadily westward along Coldwater Creek. On 19 November, I came upon seven that were feeding on dead shad (*Dorosoma* sp.) that littered the shoreline. Then, on 6 December, Lanny Pricer and I noticed two that were winging westward along the aforementioned creek not long after sunup. But during subsequent visits to the lake, we failed to see any night-herons whatsoever. It is possible that these herons remained in Oklahoma so late in the year because of the unseasonably mild winter of 1980-81.

While enroute to Colorado, my family and I stopped briefly at Optima Lake on 22 June 1981. Near the confluence of Coldwater Creek and the lake, I identified an adult Yellow-crown with the aid of my 10 x 50X binoculars.

At about 1900 on 14 June 1986, John S. Shackford and Jack D. Tyler flushed an adult Yellow-crowned Night-Heron from a small flowing stream that formerly fed into Lake Shultz, a Wildlife Conservation Department lake no longer holding water, the bed of which had overgrown to weeds, brush and trees (Tyler field notes). The site is 8 miles south of Optima Lake.

The sightings reported above represent the first for Texas County, Oklahoma (Wood, D.S., and G.D. Schnell, 1984, *Distributions of Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 14). There are two records for Beaver County, at the east end of the Panhandle, the first on 31 July 1960, when two subadults were seen 3 miles south of Gate by L.E. Dunn and G.M. Sutton, and the second on 29 June 1961, when Sutton and J. Janovy Jr. saw an adult at the same spot (Sutton, G.M., [1982], *Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records*, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). The only known sighting of the species farther westward in Oklahoma was on 16 June 1986 when Jack D. Tyler flushed an adult from dense cattails at the sewage ponds in Boise City, Cimarron County (Tyler field notes). These June and July sightings probably were of wandering individuals or migrants and do not necessarily represent breeding birds, although the possibility of nesting cannot be ruled out. — G. William Sallee, *Tulsa District Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 61, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74121, 15 September 1983*.

**American Swallow-tailed Kite in Texas County, Oklahoma.** — On the west side of Guymon, Oklahoma, which lies in the center of the Oklahoma Panhandle, is a small park. The numerous stands of mature hackberry (*Celtis* sp.), cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), and Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) trees

dispersed about a small lake and the county fairgrounds there attract several pairs of Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) each summer. Particularly in the larger elms near the lake, I have for several years watched these graceful birds raise their young.

At noon on 17 August 1988, while several of these kites soared above the park, I noticed among them one that was strikingly different in form and color. Although its body was pure white, the trailing edge of its wings and its deeply forked tail were black. This bird's vividly contrasting color pattern, extraordinary form and elegant style not only transfixed my attention, but also made identification easy: it was an American Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). This kite presently breeds from South Carolina south to Florida and westward to Louisiana (formerly also through central Texas, Oklahoma, eastern Kansas and Nebraska, northwestern Minnesota and southern Wisconsin), winters principally in South America, and migrates along the east coast of Mexico; in the United States, there are extralimital sight records for a few southwestern and northeastern states and also southern Canada (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., p. 102).

In Colorado, a Swallow-tailed Kite was watched at length near Denver on 2 July 1947 (Bailey, A. M., and R. J. Niedrach, 1965, Birds of Colorado, Denver Mus. Nat. Hist., p. 192). One was repeatedly observed in western New Mexico near Socorro from 29 August to 7 September 1982 (Goodman, R. A., ed., 1982, New Mexico Ornithol. Soc. Field Notes 21(4):62) for the first sighting in that state in recent history. In Texas, the species is listed as a "casual to rare migrant in all parts of the state except the Panhandle and western half of the Edwards Plateau" (Texas Ornithol. Soc., 1984, Checklist of the birds of Texas, 2nd ed., p. 30).

The earliest recent Kansas record was on 6 September 1972 near Topeka, Shawnee County, in the northeast part of that state, and there also were two sightings in Arkansas during 1972 (Sutherland, R., 1972, Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Bull. 23:17-18). In 1983, however, young Swallow-tailed Kites were transplanted into Mississippi Kite nests near Newton, in Harvey County, southeast Kansas, and at Meade State Park in southwestern Kansas. At each site, only one young fledged (pers. comm., L. Smith and M. Schwilling). Even though the possibility that the kite I saw was one of these is unlikely, the fact that the latter location is only 70 miles northeast of Guymon should also be considered.

There are early-day records for this species in what is now Oklahoma for 1849, 1867, 1876, 1884, 1885, 1902, and a specimen from Ottawa County taken in 1910 (Sutton, G. M., [1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). In recent years, single adult Swallow-tailed Kites have been seen in Oklahoma (Newell, J. G., 1971, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 4:15-16), Alfalfa (Kirk, J. A., 1981, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc., 14:22), and Caddo (Wilson, J., 1984, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 17:30) counties. Except for the Alfalfa County record of 1 June 1980, the other two (6 September 1970 and 24 August 1984, respectively), as well as the present sighting, were in early fall. My observation in Guymon also represents the first known for Texas County. — Kurt Schaefer, *Bax* 68, *Goodwell, Oklahoma 73939, 19 August 1988.*

**Merlin preys on Savannah Sparrow.** — On 20 January 1984, in north-west Oklahoma City, central Oklahoma, I saw a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) pluck and eat a Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). The day was bitingly cold with about three inches of snow on the ground. As I checked some overgrown fields about one mile west of North Portland Avenue and immediately south of Northwest 150th Street, I caught sight of a Merlin winging swiftly by with prey clasped in its talons. A Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) momentarily pursued the falcon, but was unsuccessful in garnering the smaller hawk's prey. Continuing its flight, the Merlin presently perched about 20 feet up in a large hackberry tree (*Celtis* sp.). It commenced to pluck and tear at what I could now tell was a small bird, a portion of which it dropped to the snow. Its hunger momentarily satisfied, the little falcon rested sedately, watching as I snapped several photographs. But when I finally edged too near, it flew off.

After a tedious search below the falcon's perch, I found the head of a freshly-killed sparrow buried in the snow. Carefully comparing its plumage pattern with pictures in my field guide, I concluded that it was that of a Savannah Sparrow.

Since 5 December 1983, I had had this 80-acre field under surveillance anticipatory to the annual Oklahoma City Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. The open grassy spots, stands of sunflowers and other weedy patches provided excellent feeding habitat for many birds, particularly the smaller finches. On this cold, snowy January day, I estimated present at least 75 each of the following species: Chestnut-collared Longspurs (*Calcarius ornatus*), American Tree Sparrows (*Spizella arborea*) and Savannah Sparrows. I also identified a lone Vesper Sparrow (*Poocetes gramineus*). I had also spotted a Merlin here, quite possibly the same individual described above, on 15 January.

Merlins are known to capture many small bird species, including "various sparrows" (Bent, A.C., 1961, Life histories of North American birds of prey, Vol. 2, Dover, N.Y., p. 75.) But I could find no specific reference in the literature to the Savannah Sparrow as a prey item, nor am I aware of any other unpublished report of a Merlin preying upon this species. — John S. Shackford, 6008-A Northwest Expressway, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73132, 6 October 1988.

**A Yellow Rail in the Texas Panhandle.** — At approximately 1715 on 15 August 1987, I arrived at a large playa lake about 2 miles southwest of Amarillo, in Randall County, Texas. The sky was clear, the temperature 60°F, and winds were light. The night before, Don Myers had told me of the dozen or so Soras (*Porzana carolina*) that he had been observing here since 11 August. A dirt road ran north and south along the western extremity of the lake. Open water lay eastward, and to the west was a marshy area of tall emergent vegetation. Walking slowly down the road, I could see numerous Soras feeding and running in the ditch just east of the road. As I approached them, they flew up in turn, then westward across the road to alight in the marsh. Altogether, I flushed at least a dozen, and heard as many more calling from the marsh area, an unusual gathering in itself (Williams, F., 1988, Amer. Birds 42:97).

Suddenly, I was startled to see one of the birds flash conspicuous white patches on the trailing edges of its wings as it pitched into the aquatic weeds

about 30 feet away. Even with so brief a look, I could tell it was a Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*).

On returning to Amarillo, I notified several others of my find. The following morning, Peggy Acord returned to the playa. When the rails began to fly up, she noticed one that was slightly smaller than the others, was more tawny-colored, and that displayed a patch of white on the secondaries of each wing. As it flew, she also noticed its legs dangling. Acord agreed that this bird showed diagnostic markings of a Yellow Rail. On succeeding days, I and others failed to find it again, and by 20 August only two Soras still fed along the ditch.

To my knowledge, these are the first observations of the Yellow Rail in the panhandle of Texas. Probably the nearest previous record was on 16 September 1974, when a Yellow Rail appeared in Bailey County, at the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge (Williams, F., 1975, *Amer. Birds* 29:79), approximately 100 miles southwest of Randall County. There have been three sightings in Oklahoma: at Fort Wayne, near the Oklahoma-Arkansas state line in Delaware County, William Eustis collected one on 7 March 1842 (Tomer, J., 1959, *Auk*, 76:94-95); beneath a television broadcasting tower 2 miles north of Coweta, Wagoner County, two specimens were found in the fall of 1976, one on 27 September, the other on 3 October (Norman, J., 1977, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 10:7); and a Yellow Rail was closely observed at a pond 2½ miles north of Stillwater in Payne County on 23 April 1975 (Scott, D. 1978, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 11:14). Johnston (1965, *A directory to the birds of Kansas*, Univ. Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist. Misc. Publ. No. 41) considered the species an "uncommon or rare transient in east, around marshes" in Kansas, with records for April and October. A recent record from Pawnee County in the western part of that state is worthy of note: a Yellow Rail was flushed by a swather from a field of sorghum on 29 September 1987 and observed in flight at close range five different times by Scott Seltman, who commented on the "white secondaries and rich yellow coloration of head, neck and breast" (1988, *Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Newsletter*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 1). — Kenneth D. Seyffert, 2206 S. Lipscomb, Amarillo, Texas 79109, 8 September 1988.

**Albino Bluebird at the Oklahoma City Zoological Park.** — On 28 May 1986, an albino Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) was removed from a brood of four nestlings which had hatched on 18 May in an artificial nestbox in rural Pushmataha County, Oklahoma. The owners of the property on which the box was located, Mr. and Mrs. Cletis Hill, reported that they removed the aberrant chick following an incident of attempted predation by an unknown species of snake which caused the death of a fifth nestling. The remaining three offspring fledged successfully.

The Hills hand-reared the young bluebird on a diet of earthworms and lean hamburger meat. It was donated to the zoo in June. Attempts to house it in a walk-through aviary failed, however, because the bird was apparently imprinted on humans. Frequently, the white bluebird perched on or near visitors, which greatly increased the possibility of its theft or injury. The as yet unsexed bird is a true albino with pink eyes and flesh-pink bill and feet.

Albinism is not uncommon among the thrush family, Turdidae. Isaacs

(1985, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 18:23) photographed a partially albinistic American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) in Moore, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma, in April 1983. Gross (1965, Bird-Banding 36(2):67-71) summarized 1847 cases of complete or partial albinism in North America, of which the American Robin ranked highest, with 157 records (8.2% of total). In fact, the thrush family was exceeded in numbers of occurrences only by the much larger finch family. — William Todd, *Oklahoma City Zoological Park, 2101 N.E. 59th St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 1 September 1988.*

**A bilateral gynandromorph Northern Cardinal in Oklahoma.** — At various times from 10 to 14 February 1986, I noticed at my backyard feeder in Fort Gibson, Muskogee County, Oklahoma, a Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) so parti-colored that I could not ascertain its sex. The weather had been extremely cold, with daytime highs only reaching into the 30's(°F) and lows at nights dipping into the teens. There were two or three inches of snow on the ground and winds were moderate from the north.

The left side of this unusual cardinal's body was light buff-brown, as in the female, whereas its right half was as brilliant red as any male's (see inset). An extensive splotch of jet black that encompassed its eyes, bill and throat was more male-like than female, but because this bird was not internally sexed, its true sex will never be known.

As natural food was hard to obtain, the 20 or so cardinals, together with about 75 American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*) and several Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*), Pine Siskins (*Carduelis pinus*) and Harris' Sparrows (*Zonotrichia querula*) were making maximum use of the feeders. The other cardinals were sometimes hostile to the strange one, even attempting on several occasions to drive it from the feeders.

For wild birds, there are few reports of avian gynandromorphism in the literature. Brodkorb (1935, Auk 52:183-184) described an American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) specimen in the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology (No. 62319) collected at Grafton, North Dakota, on 27 April 1925, in which the plumage on the left underside and part of the left wing was typically male, the remainder female. When sexed internally it proved to be a female. Two instances of bilateral gynandromorphism in the Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), one in Massachusetts during November 1955, the other in New York state in January 1959, were reported by Shaub (1960, Pass. Pigeon 22 (1):18-21). The Massachusetts bird was female on the left side, male on the right, and other birds around the feeder paid it little mind. The anomalous grosbeak in New York, by contrast, displayed the reverse coloration. — Jeri A. McMahon, *Rt. 1, Box 50, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma 74434, 5 January 1987.*

**First winter sighting of the Clay-Colored Sparrow in the Texas Panhandle** — During midafternoon on 5 December 1984, I entered the Tub Springs Draw of Palo Duro Canyon, in Randall County, Texas. The sky was clear and the wind moderate from the west. Because of their depth and seclusion from the wind, such side canyons can be quite warm in winter, and this one must have been several degrees higher than the 50°F I had recorded when leaving my home in Amarillo.

At a point near where this canyon divides into two narrow, rocky branches, I encountered a mixed flock of a dozen or more dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*). The habitat here was dominated by junipers (*Juniperus pinchoti*), mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*), skunkbush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), and associated grasses. As I examined the flock, I noticed a small brownish bird that I assumed to be a Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*). But even though this bird possessed a whitish eyebrow, it lacked the black eye-line of a Chipping Sparrow. Its clearly defined cheek patch was of a distinct light brown, bordered with dark feathers and subtended by a fine whisker stripe. The crown was striped and the rump clearly brown, not gray as in the Chipping Sparrow. I concluded that this bird was a Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*). I had considered the possibility of its being a Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), but that species has more subtle markings and its more darkly bordered ear patch tends to blend into the very fine crown and nape streaking. The Brewer's also has a noticeable white eye ring which was lacking in the bird I observed.

There are few records of the Clay-colored Sparrow in the Texas Panhandle past mid-October. The latest was of several seen at the Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Randall County on 15 November 1968 by Peggy Acord and Rena Ross (pers. comm.). Its winter range in Texas has been placed from the Trans-Pecos, the southern South Plains and the southern Edwards Plateau regions south to the Rio Grande and also along the Coastal Prairies (Texas Ornithol. Soc., 1984, Checklist of the birds of Texas, 2nd ed., p. 121). In Oklahoma, Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 626) cited a late date of 26 November but stated that winter records for Comanche (28 December 1956 and 30 December 1950) and Kay counties were in need of confirmation. — Kenneth D. Seyffert, 2206 S. Lipscomb, Amarillo, Texas 79109, 25 October 1985.

FROM THE EDITOR: A paper published recently in the Journal of Field Ornithology (59(4):337-344, 1988) merits attention of the OOS membership. Entitled "Site tenacity in culvert-nesting Barn Swallows in Oklahoma," it was authored by Sarah S. Iverson. During 1980 and 1981, 524 nestlings and 225 adult swallows were banded at 23 concrete culverts along state highway 51 between Interstate Highway 35 and Stillwater, in Payne County. Return rates in 1981 and 1982 were significantly higher for adults than nestlings. All three nestlings that returned were recaptured in culverts other than those where they had hatched. Of 40 returning adults, 35 came back to culverts where they had previously nested and the percentage of returns was positively correlated with nearness to Interstate Highway 35. This suggests that this north-south thoroughfare might function as a migratory guideline. A second variable, thought to be social, that correlated with culvert tenacity was colony size. Although there was no significant difference between male and female return rates, no male swallow changed culverts.—Jack D. Tyler.

## INDEX OF BIRD NAMES

BY JACK D. TYLER

- Alopochen aegyptiacus*: 26  
*Anas querquedula*: 18  
*Aquila chrysaetos*: 17, 22  
*Ardea herodias*: 29  
*Archilochus alexandri*: 21, 22  
*colubris*: 20, 21, 22  
*Bartramia longicauda*: 17-18  
Bluebird, Eastern: 32-33  
Bobwhite, Northern: 3-5, 17-18  
*Branta canadensis*: 25  
*Bucephala albeola*: 18  
Bufflehead: 18  
Bunting, Lark: 23-24  
*Calamospiza melanocorys*: 23-24  
*Calidris canutus*: 19  
*Carduelis pinus*: 33  
*tristis*: 33, 34  
*Calcarius ornatus*: 31  
Cardinal, Northern: 7, 33  
*Cardinalis cardinalis*: 7, 33  
*Carpodacus purpureus*: 7-8, 33  
Chat, Yellow-breasted: 17  
*Circus cyaneus*: 12-13, 31  
*Coccothraustes vespertinus*: 7, 33  
*Colinus virginianus*: 3-5, 17-18  
*Callipepla squamata*: 3-5  
Curlew, Eskimo: 8  
Crane, Sandhill: 13-15  
Whooping: 13-15  
*Coturnicops noveboracensis*: 31-32  
*Dendrocygna autumnalis*: 25-26  
Dove, Mourning: 3  
*Dryocopus pileatus*: 11-12  
Duck, Black-bellied Whistling: 25-26  
Eagle, Golden: 17, 22  
*Elanoides forficatus*: 29-30  
*Eremophila alpestris*: 7  
*Falco columbarius*: 31  
*sparverius*: 33  
Finch, Purple: 7-8, 33  
Fulmar, Northern: 17  
*Fulmarus glacialis*: 17  
Goldfinch, American: 33, 34  
Goose, Canada: 25  
Egyptian: 26  
Grackle, Great-tailed: 8  
Grebe, Eared: 1-2, 5-6  
Horned: 2  
Pied-billed: 1-2, 6  
Grosbeak, Evening: 7, 33  
*Grus americana*: 13-15  
*canadensis*: 13-15  
Gull, Herring: 19  
Harrier, Northern: 12-13, 31  
Heron, Great Blue: 29  
*Hirundo rustica*: 19, 22, 35  
Hummingbird, Black-chinned: 21, 22  
Ruby-throated: 20, 21, 22  
Rufous: 21, 22  
*Icteria virens*: 17