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6008-A NORTHWEST EXPRESSWAY, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, 73132, 21 DECEMBER 1990.

GENERAL NOTES

Nesting of the Anhinga in McCurtain County, Oklahoma. — In fresh water situations, Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) inhabit "swamps, lakes and sluggish streams at low elevations" (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, Allen Press, Lawrence, Kansas, p. 40). This type of habitat typifies McCurtain County, in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma. Within this wettest and lowest area of the state live numerous species of plants and animals typical of the Gulf Coastal Plain.

There are at least 31 records for the Anhinga in Oklahoma dating back to 1913 (Nice, M.M., 1931, *Birds of Oklahoma*, Rev. ed., Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv., Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 54-55). Nesting has been documented six times in McCurtain and Sequoyah counties (Nice, M.M., 1938, *Auk* 55:121-122; Norton, P.W., 1973, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 6:12-13). There have been no published records for this species for the state since 1980, when two were seen in Tulsa County (Jennings, R.G., 1981, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 14:12-13), and there are no winter records (Sutton, G.M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, *Contrib. Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist.* No. 1, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 3). It is an irregular summer and fall visitant recorded from 9 April to 29 October and reported from McCurtain, LeFlore, Tulsa, Osage, Payne, Oklahoma, Murray, Johnston, Grady and Alfalfa counties and from Canton Reservoir and Lake Altus (Sutton, G.M., 1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 21).

On 1 May 1991, I visited a heron rookery on the Little River National Wildlife Refuge approximately 6.5 km south of Broken Bow, in southern McCurtain County.

There I identified 14 Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) and discovered at least two active nests. Also in this heronry were approximately 80 Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) nests and 20 of the Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*). The Great Blues began building nests here about 1 March, but the rookery had grown considerably in two months.

Several Arkansas heronries along the Little River bottom were within 50 km of the one near Broken Bow. On 30 April 1991, I made an aerial tour of this section of the river just east of the Arkansas state line and saw four different rookeries that contained active Anhinga nests, indicating a viable breeding population in the region.

Near this site prior to 1991 I had observed a young or female Anhinga in September 1987 and a flock of 19 birds on 21 April 1989. I had also found 12 Anhingas on 5 May 1989 in a Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) - Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) rookery just west of the Mountain Fork River approximately 13 km east of Broken Bow, 6.5 km north of its confluence with Little River. However, I was not able to confirm nesting at that time. The willow trees that supported this large breeding colony were cut late in 1990 and I have no idea where these herons will nest in the future.

The two Anhinga nests were built in Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) trees approximately 20 m tall growing in a round oxbow lake some 350 m in diameter. At almost every level in these trees, ardeid nests had also been constructed. Many of the male Anhingas were vigorously displaying by rotating their slightly opened wings, much as man would if he placed his fists on his chest and alternately rotated his elbows. Several times I watched males, wings half open, raise their long tails straight up, then slightly fan them, revealing the white tips of each feather. This striking display is probably the source for the local name "water turkey." One male I saw carrying a green cypress bough in his bill flew into a tree, possibly to use the needles as nest lining material (see Bent, A.C., 1922, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. No. 121, p. 231). On 15 May, I found six additional Anhinga nests here.

The last known McCurtain County breeding record was in 1937, when H.S. Davis and others located an estimated 10 pairs of Anhingas nesting in a rookery 11.3 km south of Eagletown (Nice 1938). This site is approximately 16 km east of the heronry described above and about an equal distance west of the nearest one with active Anhinga nests in Arkansas. — Berlin A. Heck, *Manager, Little River National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 340, Broken Bow, Oklahoma 74728, 20 May 1991.*

An invasion of the Steller's Jay into the Oklahoma Panhandle.—The Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) is considered an irregular winter visitor to Oklahoma (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Contrib. Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist. No. 1, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 28). It is a resident of the Rocky Mountains about 100 miles west of the Panhandle (AOU Check-list, 1983, p. 500). During the winter of 1989–90, however, a remarkable irruption of these jays occurred in the Black Mesa country of northwest Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma.

Approximately 10 records for Steller's Jays exist for the state, all but two from Cimarron County, where one to "about 20" birds have been recorded, with extreme dates of 30 September and 11 May (Sutton, G. M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ.

Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 372; [1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). The two records east of the Panhandle were of single birds. One was observed near Hinton, in Caddo County, southwestern Oklahoma, on the unusual date of 2 July 1955 (Sutton 1967, *op. cit.*). The other lingered in Woodward County of northwest Oklahoma from 20 November 1960 until about 31 March 1961 (Baumgartner, F. M., 1961, *Aud. Field Notes* 15:55, 341). Sanford D. Schemnitz first recorded this species in the state on 4 October 1954 when he saw one jay about 7 miles north of Boise City (Sutton 1967; [1982], *op. cit.*).

Participants of the Kenton, Oklahoma, Christmas Bird Count of 31 December 1989 tallied an unprecedented 57 Steller's Jays (*Amer. Birds* 44:860, 1990). By contrast, it has been seen on this count only twice during the past 20 years: singletons were recorded on the counts of 29 December 1980 and 2 January 1982 (*Amer. Birds* 35:625, 1981; 36:653, 1982). The invasion was already under way by September, for on the 21st, Don Verser of Bartlesville and his brother M. L. Verser found two of them along Texakeet Creek 4 miles south of Kenton. This is apparently a new early fall date for the species in Oklahoma.

I had learned of Don Verser's sighting when he and Steve Metz visited Oklahoma City in late October, but this had not prepared me for the raucous flock of Steller's Jays that greeted me when I drove up to Laurance Regnier's remote ranch house 4 miles south of Kenton on 30 December 1989. Crested like a Blue Jay but larger, these birds were dark blue save for a wash of sable over their heads and upper backs. I could even discern the white streaking on their foreheads and above their eyes, a trait unique to the Rocky Mountain race, *C. s. macrolopha* (National Geographic Society, 1987, *Field guide to the birds of North America*, Wash., D.C., p. 302). Mr. Regnier feeds birds during the winter, and he estimated that at least two dozen Steller's Jays had visited his feeders at one time or another during the past few months. Throughout the afternoon, a bitterly cold day with occasional snow flurries, I observed and photographed the jays. Interestingly, I sometimes saw three different species of jay feeding side-by-side: Blue Jay (*C. cristata*), Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and Steller's Jay.

The next day, I participated in the Kenton Christmas Bird Count, in which the 57 Steller's Jays were recorded. Blue Jays, Scrub Jays and Pinyon Jays (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) also were seen during the count.

I saw Steller's Jays every day until I left on 3 January 1990, but on 7 January a party from Tulsa and Bartlesville that included Don Verser, Steve Metz, Melinda Droege, Jim Woodward, Michael L. Gray, Bonnie Gall and George Hansen arrived and also saw them. Verser and Gray made a return visit on 4 March and encountered an estimated 20 jays in the Regnier yard. Mr. Regnier informed me in July 1990 that the Steller's Jays had lingered around his house until about the first part of April, but he did not record the exact date of their departure. The Steller's Jay invasion of 1989-90 was noted not only in Oklahoma, but also in the neighboring states of Kansas (The Horned Lark 17(6):14, 22, 1990), Texas, and Nebraska (*Amer. Birds* 44:452, 1990). When I visited Capulin Mountain National Monument in northeastern New Mexico in May 1990, a ranger there commented on the extraordinary numbers of Steller's Jays which had been present the previous winter. Whether triggered by food shortages farther west, severe weather conditions, or perhaps exceptional reproductive success in 1989, this invasion onto the southern Great Plains was truly remarkable.—Mitchell Oliphant, 3113 N. Virginia, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73118, 15 December 1990.

A Sharp-tailed Sparrow in Creek County, Oklahoma. — On 13 December 1988, I stopped at a field containing approximately 10 acres of fairly tall mixed grasses about 14 miles south of Bristow in southern Creek County, Oklahoma. At the other end of this pasture were several acres of nearly barren ground where I hoped to find Smith's Longspurs (*Calcarius pictus*). The only longspur I heard that day was the Lapland (*C. lapponicus*). However, as I walked back through the taller grasses, a small sparrow repeatedly flushed ahead of me, flew a short way, then "flopped" back down into the grass. It flew with head up and tail down. This behavior was suggestive of both LeConte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) and Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*A. caudacutus*), both of which I had studied in North Dakota.

After about 20 minutes, the diminutive bird finally landed in a six-foot shrub, allowing me to approach to within perhaps 25 feet. For at least 15 minutes, I scrutinized it very closely from this distance. It was richly buffy below, with faint breast streaking. The eyebrow was also buff and the earpatch a faint grayish. Unlike the whitish central crown stripe of a LeConte's Sparrow, this bird's stripe was gray, closely matching the gray unstreaked nape (LeConte's has a streaked nape). The white stripes on the bird's almost black back were very conspicuous. In addition, the wings were uniformly dark, lacking bars, and the belly was noticeably whitish. There was no doubt that this bird was a Sharp-tailed Sparrow. In fact, it showed several characters of the richly colored *nelsoni* race which has been taken before in Oklahoma (see Sutton, G.M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, p. 610).

According to Sutton (1967, *loc. cit.*; [1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman), *Ammodramus caudacutus* is a transient, probably statewide, that has been seen several times in fall between 27 September and 17 November (Beaver, Cleveland, Murray, Wagoner, Noble, Osage, and Tulsa counties) and at least twice in spring (Tulsa and Washington counties) from 9 March to 3 May. On 6 and 7 May 1990, three or four birds were observed in Tulsa County by Walter J. and Margaret Davis, Jeff Webster and others (1990, Amer. Birds 44:457).

This constitutes the first record of this species for Creek County. It is to be looked for throughout Oklahoma during migration in rank vegetation, particularly in low-lying moist places. — Joseph Himmel, 1848 14th Ave., Greeley, Colorado 80631, 30 May 1989.

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