

attack, while sentry birds watch for predators. However, two factors argue against this conclusion: 1) there would appear to be few nocturnal predators which pose any real threat, and 2) we found that walking through the Wagoner roost alarmed the birds only after they were awake anyway, and had no effect while it was dark.

It is also possible that nearby lights may provide some birds a nocturnal food source. Allan (1950) described a Scissortail flycatching at night by the light of a streetlamp. However, if this nocturnal foraging behavior was common enough to guide whole roosts toward light sources, then it would surely have been widely noted by now.

Preferred roosting sites seem to be open stands of medium to large sized deciduous trees that lack appreciable understory. Parks, orchards and residential plantings are therefore occasionally selected as roosts by Scissortails.

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161 BIRCH ROAD, LONGMEADOW, MASSACHUSETTS 01106, 4 DECEMBER 1990.

### GENERAL NOTES

**Early nighthawk records for northcentral Texas and southwestern Oklahoma.** — G.M. Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Contrib. Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist. No. 1, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 22) listed 23 April as the earliest expected date of arrival for the Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), a transient and summer resident in Oklahoma, but also gave exceptional dates of 15 April for Cleveland County in the central part of the state, 18 April for western Oklahoma (Custer County), and one "puzzling" winter date of 30 December 1964 in Logan County, northcentral Oklahoma (1964, Aud. Field Notes 19:272).

Since 1981, several other early sightings have been made in the southwest Oklahoma — northcentral Texas region, a few exceptionally early. On 14 February 1991, for instance, one of us (McKee) was leaving work at 1735 in downtown Wichita Falls, Wichita County, Texas, when she heard overhead the familiar "beerrt" call of a Common Nighthawk. Looking up, she briefly glimpsed a bird the shape and size of a nighthawk. Before it disappeared over a building, she noted the conspicuous white wingband about halfway between the wrist and wingtip of each wing. The weather was clear with a temperature of 67° F. On 26 February 1982, one was seen and heard by D. Williams in Wichita Falls (The Cardinal 10 (3):1, 1982). In consulting a checklist of the birds of northcentral Texas (Zinn, K.S., and N. Moore, 1976, privately published), she found that on 15 March, 1975, Leroy and Lafayette Stankewitz saw one in Wichita County. W.M. Pulich (1988, The birds of north central Texas, Texas A & M Univ. Press,

College Station, pp. 182-183) gave 23 April as the earliest date known for Wichita County.

For southwest Oklahoma, Tyler (1979, *Birds of southwestern Oklahoma*, Contrib. Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist. No. 2, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 29) listed 18 April as the earliest date for this species. He mentioned another very early sighting on 14 March 1975, by John W. Ault 1 mile north of Indianola, Comanche County (Ault, 1978, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 11:7). In his personal field notes, Tyler has also recorded several other unusual dates for northward migrating nighthawks, primarily through personal communication with competent observers. On the very early date of 20 February 1986, Debi Clark, a volunteer worker at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Comanche County, reported seeing a nighthawk there that was flying about 10 feet aboveground. Though she discerned the white wingtips, she failed to note how close to the wingtips they were. This record was rejected by the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee for lack of accompanying details. A graduate student from Oklahoma State University, Allen Ratzlaff, recounted both seeing and *hearing* a nighthawk at Fort Sill on 12 March 1985. On 3 April 1974, refuge biologist Chris Enright *heard* one calling there. On the same day in 1990, Randy Stoltenberg discovered the earliest bird of the season in southwest Lawton, Comanche County; he failed to hear it call. One day and one year later, Gerard A. Clyde, Jr., observed a nighthawk near Headrick in Jackson County, but at a considerable distance. In four of five other records spanning the period between 13 and 19 April (1981-1990; four in Comanche County, one in Caddo County), nighthawks were sighted only, but on 16 April 1986, Toni Montaperto of the Fort Sill Wildlife Division *heard* one there.

A majority of these early records were of birds that were seen but not heard. Because most Oklahoma observers were unfamiliar with the voice, behavior and field marks of the Lesser Nighthawk (*C. acutipennis*), it is possible that some of these unusually early migrants were of that species. It has been collected once in the far western Oklahoma panhandle (23 April 1961; Davis 1962, *Wilson Bull.* 74:287-288); paradoxically, a juvenile bird in the U.S. National Museum was ostensibly collected in Tulsa County on 15 June 1933 (Dickerman, R.W., 1986, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 19:1-2). However, the Lesser Nighthawk has not been recorded in northcentral Texas.

Known as the Lesser, Trilling, or Texas Nighthawk, *C. acutipennis* breeds in open dry regions of the southwestern United States. The nesting record closest to Oklahoma was apparently in the southcentral part of Texas in Kerr County (Oberholser, H.C., 1974, *The bird life of Texas*, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, p. 473). It characteristically flies quite low to the ground, occasionally emitting "purring" or trilling, toadlike calls and its white bands are closer to the wingtip than are the Common's. Very early or exceptionally late nighthawks in the region should be examined critically for these traits, for there are too many recent unseasonal records to be dismissed offhand. — Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biology, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505*, and Terry McKee, *1202 Sunnyside, Wichita Falls, Texas 76303, 2 May 1991*.

**First record of Northern Wheatear in Arkansas.** — The Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, is a sparrow-sized thrush of arctic barrens. The eastern form nests in northern Canada and is a widespread breeder on the coast of Greenland and throughout much of Eurasia. North American birds migrate across the Atlantic and winter in the Old World. However, some waifs occasionally show up in the eastern United States, and there is one record for Colorado (AOU Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., 1983, p. 548). One such stray was discovered on 18 October 1990 in

southwestern Arkansas by Max and Helen Parker and Curtis Marantz (Amer. Birds 45:117, 1991). The location was near Ashdown, Arkansas, on the east side of Millwood Reservoir at the Okay boat landing, only about 30 miles from Oklahoma.

On 19 October 1990, Vera Jennings of Muskogee, Oklahoma, informed me of this discovery. Because I was only a short distance away, I immediately drove to Lake Millwood. Arriving at the Okay boat landing a little before dark, I soon located the rather tame bird and photographed it as it bobbed and flitted about a rock dike about a half-mile from the boat ramp. An immature individual of the eastern form, it was almost entirely buff in color, and had a conspicuous white rump. The black part of its otherwise white tail formed a distinct inverted "T." A black shrike-like mask was also quite noticeable.

The Wheatear was observed from 18 to 22 October and was the first for Arkansas. During the autumn of 1990, an amazing 16 Northern Wheatears were recorded in the United States, most along the northeastern coast. This species is rarely encountered so far inland as Illinois and Arkansas (see Amer. Birds 45:63-64, 1991).

Thus far, there is no record for Oklahoma, but field observers should check carefully for it during fall migration, particularly in open rocky habitat. — Jeffrey D. Webster, 3131 N. First, Apt H-2, Durant, Oklahoma 74701, 17 May 1991.

**Varied Thrush in Rogers County, Oklahoma.** — On our large wooded acreage 6 miles south of Chelsea in Rogers County, northeastern Oklahoma, my husband J. Walter and I discovered a Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) on 25 November 1990. At about 1630, we were closing a gate when we noticed the unusual bird not far away on a limb next to an eastern red cedar tree (*Juniperus virginiana*). We both studied it carefully in good light through our binoculars for about five minutes. The bird resembled an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) except for its two orangish wingbars and an eyestripe of similar color, the solid orange throat, and a distinctive black band across the upper chest, a mark of the male bird. Eventually, the thrush flitted into the juniper, apparently to roost.

On 26 November, only one among a party of four persons, after having searched for three hours in a light rain, was fortunate enough to see the Varied Thrush well enough for identification. Jeri A. McMahon finally saw it near where we had, and at about the same time of day. It was not seen thereafter. This sighting was reported in American Birds (1991, Vol 45:124).

This species is a denizen of moist conifer forests in the northwestern states. It breeds from there northward through western Canada and most of Alaska. The winter range extends southward along the Pacific coast from Alaska to northern Baja California (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., Allen Press, Lawrence, Kansas).

There is but one other Oklahoma record: between 11 December 1977 and 10 January 1978, a Varied Thrush was viewed by numerous bird enthusiasts in Mohawk Park, Tulsa, Tulsa County. Possibly another bird was discovered there on 12 February 1978 (Tomer, J. S., 1978, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 11:25-26). — Margaret Davis, R.R. 1, Box 202-1, Chelsea, Oklahoma 74016, 10 February 1991.

**FROM THE EDITOR** — Years ago, Dr. George M. Sutton predicted that the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) would someday be found nesting in western Oklahoma. That prediction has come to pass. In a recent issue of *The Wilson Bulletin* (103:305-308, 1991), Dr. Roger Boyd of Baker University in Baldwin County, Kansas, has published a note documenting the first nest at Optima Reservoir in Texas County during the spring of 1987. He found both parents with four chicks on 17 June. The young birds were measured, photographed and released. Nearby, the presumed nest scrape was located. On 26 June, only one adult and two juveniles could be found. When he last checked on 7 July, Boyd saw no plovers, and assumed that none of the young had fledged.

On 25 June the following year, Mark Eddings, a ranger at Optima Lake, discovered a nest with four eggs in the same area. He, Patricia Cefalli and John S. Shackford also found three adult plovers, one of which Shackford photographed at the nest. This nest was unsuccessful, for torrential rains in early July inundated the sandbar it was on; neither eggs nor young would have survived.

During 1988 and 1989, water levels in the lake rose several feet higher than 1987, and all suitable nesting habitat (i.e., gravelly sandbars) was flooded. No adults were seen at Optima Reservoir in 1989 and 1990.

These breeding records are noteworthy for two other reasons. First, they extend the known breeding range southward approximately 490 km (305 mi.). Second, they are apparently the first instances in which the Piping Plover has nested within the breeding range of the Snowy Plover (*C. alexandrinus*).

The ornithological diversity of Oklahoma is amazing: while Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*) nest in the humid southeastern lowlands, Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*), Vermilion Flycatchers (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) and Piping Plovers breed in the arid high country of the far northwest.

Are our wanderings after birds in vain? Nay, and may their wonder never wane!

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THE BULLETIN, the official organ of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December, at Norman, Oklahoma. Subscription is by membership in the OOS: \$5 student, \$7.50 regular, \$10 family, \$15 or more sustaining, per year. Life membership \$125. Treasurer, Jeffrey A. Cox, P.O. Box 27516, Tulsa, OK 74149. Editor, Jack D. Tyler, Department of Biology, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505. Associate editors, John S. Shackford, 6008A NW Expressway, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73132, and Melinda Droege, Rt. 1, Box 516AA, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74006. Questions regarding subscription, replacement copies, back issues or payment of dues should be directed to: Darrell W. Pogue, OOS Membership Circulation Chairman, P.O. Box 65, Ada, Oklahoma 74821-0065. ISSN 0474-0750.