

BREEDING SEASON RECORDS FOR GRAY-HEADED JUNCOS IN OKLAHOMA

BY DON VARNER

In the Oklahoma Panhandle, the Gray-headed race of the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) is "fairly regular" in Cimarron and Texas counties during winter and there are a few isolated records for Beaver, Comanche, Payne, Oklahoma and Cleveland counties (Sutton, G.M., 1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 622).

The breeding range encompasses montane regions of the western United States from western Texas through southern New Mexico, central Arizona, eastern California, then northeastward to southern Idaho, northern Utah and southern Wyoming (*AOU Check-list of North American birds*, 6th ed., 1983, Allen Press, Inc., Lawrence, Kansas, p. 716).

It was of great interest, therefore, when Chris Claunts discovered a Gray-headed Junco at her feeder in Catoosa, Rogers County, northeastern Oklahoma, on 12 July 1990. Her daughter Sharmen also saw this bird, which they then compared to field guide illustrations. Prior to the bird's last appearance on 14 July, several recognizable photos were obtained and sent to the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee, which accepted the record (see *The Scissortail* 40(4):51, 1990). Why this junco



GRAY-HEADED JUNCO

Fig. 1. Male Gray-headed Junco captured 25 May 1992 on the Fort Gibson State Waterfowl Refuge in Wagoner County, Oklahoma. Photo by Don Varner (a different picture of this bird was published in *American Birds* 46 (3):445, 1992).

was not summering in the mountains of western North America is not known.

On 25 May 1992, I mist-netted an adult male Gray-headed Junco on the Fort Gibson State Waterfowl Refuge near Wagoner, in Wagoner County, Oklahoma, some 23 miles southeast of Catoosa. It was banded (No. 1760-83097) and photographed. Diagnostic characters included the black eye, dark gray head, upperparts and breast, white belly and outer tail feathers and, most importantly, a rusty triangular patch of feathers on the back (see Fig. 1). It weighed 21 g and the wing chord measured 77 mm. Before its capture at 0740, this bird appeared sporadically as early as 0630 that day and was apparently in good health. The surrounding habitat consisted of a recently burned and sparsely vegetated area of low brush near a small woodland within 50 yards of Fort Gibson reservoir. Others who observed the junco were Joyce Varner, David Gill, Jim Harmon, Jackie English and Charlotte Jernigan.

ROUTE 1, BOX 1, WELLING, OKLAHOMA 74471, 26 AUGUST 1992.

Mississippi Kite attacks Chimney Swift.—As I prepared to leave my home in west Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, at 0845 on 16 July 1990, I noticed two large birds swooping towards the ground, one trailing the other. Then I heard a faint “thud.” Before I could investigate, a cat ran by me in the direction of the impact. The two birds began swooping at the cat, which quickly retreated. I walked toward the spot I had heard the “thud” and found a Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) lying still, breathing rapidly and shaking. The larger gray bird that had been in pursuit of it was a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), but I could not identify the other. Possibly both were kites, but they flew away upon my arrival.

I gently picked up the swift, which had its eyes open but its feet drawn up and clenched. Finally, I managed to get it to cling to my finger, one foot at a time, in a crouched position. The swift appeared to be in shock and did not attempt to fly. I placed it on a log in my backyard woodpile and it remained in whatever position I placed it. When I returned in the late afternoon, the little bird had disappeared.—Howard R. Hopkins 304 Parkwood Lane, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, 16 July 1990.

Regular appearance of a hunting *Accipiter*—Beginning on 12 December 1993, I monitored the bird populations that came to roost on the grounds of the Oklahoma Museum of Art in Nichols Hills, a suburban town about 5 miles north of downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. In addition to the hundreds of European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) roosting on the ten-acre grounds of this facility, a flock of approximately 50 House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) came to a grove of eastern red cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*) near the museum building.

Every evening for three evenings, while these finches were gathering from surrounding areas and aggregating in bare trees near the cedars, a curious incident occurred. At precisely five o'clock (1700 hrs), a dark, fast-moving form streaked across the sky from southwest to northeast, causing a spontaneous, explosive exodus of roosting birds. I assumed that the interloper was either a small *Accipiter* or falcon, judging from its size, speed, and flight pattern. Because of poor light and the bird's rapid flight, I was unable to identify it with certainty.