

STATUS OF THE CRESTED CARACARA IN OKLAHOMA

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The status of the Crested Caracara (*Polyborus plancus*) in Oklahoma has been based on two sight records, one in the early spring of 1944 in Pontotoc County, and a second on 7 February 1965 in Garfield County (Sutton 1967). Because no specimen or photograph existed, Sutton (1967) designated the species as hypothetical, indicating that its occurrence in Oklahoma was unconfirmed.

Since 1990, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee (OBRC) has examined a number of old records, including those for the caracara, using a structured set of criteria and procedures (Oklahoma Bird Records Committee 1988). This process evaluates the validity of each record's supportive documentation (i.e., specimens, photographs, written description, or other material). Because no written details of the early caracara observations exist (Sutton 1982), the OBRC withdrew the hypothetical status of Crested Caracara in Oklahoma and removed the species from the state list (Grzybowski *et al.* 1992).

Two additional records of Crested Caracara for Oklahoma have recently been put forward. One bird was reported for the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge from 24 September to 1 October 1990 (Beierman 1993); however, no descriptive details of these observations were presented in the note or were available from the observer (Beierman, pers. comm.), leaving the record without support for future reference. A second recent report for a bird observed near the Atoka-Bryan county line on 19 May 1993 was evaluated by the OBRC. The brief description was considered insufficient to support the record as the first acceptably documented for Oklahoma.

Could the Crested Caracara occur or have occurred in Oklahoma? In Texas, the caracara is characteristic of south Texas brush country and coastal grasslands, breeding northward in a continuous but narrow band of blackland prairie to Navarro and Kaufman counties just southeast of Dallas (Pulich 1988). Caracaras are rare to uncommon residents in these counties, but regular enough that birds have also been sighted in bordering Hunt, Rains, Rockwall and Van Zandt counties, and in areas just south of Dallas-Fort Worth. Nearer the Oklahoma border, pre-1962 records exist for Grayson County (bordering the Red River) and Baylor and Young counties (Oberholser 1974), with a more recent sighting on 30 August 1974 in Collin County (just south of Grayson County; Keating 1975).

The Crested Caracara apparently is not prone to wander widely as few records occur for individuals far from potential breeding areas, and

some of these have limited verifying details. The species is widespread in open country of Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995). Its breeding range extends northward from western Mexico into south-central Arizona, and from eastern Mexico into Texas (see above) and southwestern Louisiana (rarely); a declining population occurs in south-central Florida (Lowery 1974, Oberholser 1974, Palmer 1988). Excluding likely escapees (Palmer 1988), extralimital records include a small number along the Rio Grande River in western Texas and southwestern New Mexico, with an exceptional record of nesting just south of Albuquerque (Oberholser 1974, Palmer 1988). Three records exist for the Texas panhandle; occasional records for the Edwards Plateau (central Texas) include that of a nesting in Concho County during 1881 (Oberholser 1974). Several vagrants are known for southeastern Louisiana (Lowery 1974), with one verified in Mississippi (Palmer 1988), and another for Charleston, South Carolina (Potter et al. 1980). The most exceptional of these (outside Oklahoma) are for the Texas panhandle, New Mexico, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

The appearance of the Crested Caracara in south-central Oklahoma, just 110-190 km from the northern limit of its breeding range, is within the purview of only occasional wandering recorded in central and south-western Texas (Oberholser 1974). However, given the caracara's rarity in north central Texas (Pulich 1988), its occurrence in south central Oklahoma would still be very unusual. Records from other parts of Oklahoma would be exceptional. Thus, all future Oklahoma observations of Crested Caracaras should be thoroughly documented, and birds photographed or collected if possible.

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GENERAL NOTE

Yellow Rail in downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma.- At 0930 on 9 April 1994 while walking along Third Street, just east of the Main Mall in downtown Tulsa, I was surprised to find a Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) sitting in an alcove of the Parker Drilling Building. The night before had been overcast with a low ceiling, intermittent light drizzle, and a light south wind, ideal conditions for attracting and trapping migrants to the artificial lights of cities (Verheijen, F.J., 1985, *Exp. Biol.* 44:1-18). The rail was alert, observant, and did not appear to be injured. After observing the bird for approximately 5 min, I approached to within 2 m at which time it flew approximately 90 m down the Main Mall, landing in a 3 by 9 m raised concrete planter. As the bird flew I saw the white patch in the secondaries and the dangling legs. I searched the sparse vegetation of the planter and found it hiding behind a small clump of English ivy (*Hedera helix*). At that time I reached down and captured it.

I took the bird to my house and called John S. Tomer to help photograph it. Tomer and I took several photographs, and one is on file with the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee and the Tulsa Audubon Society. After photographing the bird, I took it to a marsh in south Tulsa County at approximately 1400 and released it. When I placed it on the ground it slowly walked away into the vegetation. Even when I approached it to within a few cm, it would sneak around and through the vegetation by