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First record of the Black Phoebe for Oklahoma

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On the morning of 27 October 1999, I was birding at the Webbers Falls Wildlife Management Area, 4 km west of the town of Braggs, Muskogee County, northeastern Oklahoma. The day was sunny and clear when I arrived at about 0815. I had been there almost two hours, when I heard a call familiar to me from my many years of living in California. I immediately thought of the Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) but dismissed that possibility as improbable. I followed the sound of the call, and finally located the bird at the top of a tree across a small body of water. I realized I was looking at a Black Phoebe. Using a spotting scope, I could see that the bird was black on the upperparts, head, and breast. The belly and undertail coverts were white, with the white of the belly extending up the



Fig. 1. Black Phoebe in Muskogee County, Oklahoma. Photographed by Stephen H. Metz on 30 October 1999.

middle of the breast, forming an inverted V. The eye and small thin bill were dark. Its tail-wagging and erect posture definitely put it in the fly-catcher family. Satisfied that it was a Black Phoebe, I video-taped the bird for several minutes. The bird would perch on low branches near the water, as well as high branches, and was constantly darting out for insects. When not feeding, it would repeat its two-note high-pitched call. An Eastern Phoebe (*S. phoebe*) was nearby, and occasionally it would chase the Black Phoebe.

I notified several people of the bird, and Jim Arterburn drove to the marsh that same afternoon and photographed it. It stayed in the same area for over a month. Birders from Oklahoma and western Arkansas were able to observe the bird. Stephen H. Metz photographed the phoebe at close range on 30 October 1999 (Fig. 1).

The last time I saw the Black Phoebe was 27 November 1999. James L. Norman, J. J. Harman, and I checked the marsh several times the first week of December, but the bird could not be found. I received a report that William Brazelton of Fort Smith, Arkansas, saw the phoebe in the same area on 8 December 1999. That was the last report I received.

The Black Phoebe breeds from southwestern Oregon, California, southern Nevada, southwestern Utah, northern Arizona, southeastern Colorado (Pueblo area), central New Mexico, and west central Texas south to southern Baja California and in the highlands throughout most of Central and South America south to northwestern Argentina (Wolf 1997; A.O.U. 1998). Vagrants have been reported north to southern British Columbia and western Washington and east to southeastern Texas and Florida; there are sight records for Idaho and Minnesota (A.O.U. 1998). Except for its normal occurrence in western Texas, there are few records of the Black Phoebe in states adjacent to Oklahoma. It is considered hypothetical in Kansas in the absence of a specimen or photograph; there is one possibly valid report from near Elkhart, Morton County, extreme southwestern Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1992). The Black Phoebe is accidental in north central Texas, with sight records from Bosque, Dallas, Tarrant, and Grayson counties and a specimen from Dallas County (Pulich 1988). There is one record for the Texas panhandle in Ochiltree County. Consistent with the Oklahoma record, most of the extralimital Texas records have also been in the fall, with Black Phoebes in general seeming to wander more in the fall and winter (Wolf 1997). There are no records for Missouri, Arkansas, South Dakota, Nebraska, or Louisiana. This sighting represents the first record of the Black Phoebe for Oklahoma.

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Recent Literature

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Farber, Paul Lawrence. 1997. *Discovering Birds. The Emergence of Ornithology As a Scientific Discipline: 1760-1850*. John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, Maryland. ISBN:0-8018-5537-3. 191 pages. \$14.95.

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Until almost the start of the twentieth century, the taxon-based natural sciences (e.g., ornithology, entomology, mammalogy) were subsets contained within general natural history. Few people specialized on one group of animals, and universities offered no specific training on birds or other taxa. These three books tell part of the fascinating story of how ornithology developed as an independent science.

Discovering Birds begins the story in eighteenth century Europe with the publication of Mathurin-Jacques Brisson's *Ornithologie* and George Louis Leclerc de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux*. Prior to the appearance of these two books, there was considerable interest in general natural history in Europe, but birds were not considered to be subjects of serious scientific inquiry. Both books were intended to stimulate further scientific study of birds although from different perspectives. Brisson's