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SIGNIFICANT (?) MODIFICATIONS IN BIRD SIGHTINGS AT WOLFF LAKE (fall 1979 to spring 1990)

One of the problems of having a computer handy is that you begin to start organizing your notes. Recently I began to organize the notes I had taken since 1979 for the *Nebraska Bird Review*’s semi-annual occurrence reports. Partly I wanted to verify my suspicions about variation in the occurrence of several species during that period of time. I try to visit the area called Wolff Lake (a sand-and-gravel operation on the south side of the Platte River in northwestern Saunders Co. each weekend. But there are many variations, and there are periods of prolonged absences. I average about 20 such visits each half year.

On each visit I spend several hours from dawn to late morning walking through the area, and sometimes there is an added walk in late afternoon or evening.

**WILD TURKEYS** are one of only two encouraging notes in this report. They were introduced into the area in ‘82 or ‘83. They began to show up on my lists in Spring of ‘84. This year they have become abundant with three or four groups of females and chicks (20-30 to a group) wandering around the area, mostly on the Wolff property, where they are not (yet) hunted. They have become almost as tame as barnyard chickens.

**PIPING PLOVER** was regular, 1 to 4 birds, May through July or early August, up through 1987. Only two sightings of a single bird on 7 and 8 May 1988. None since.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** was seen with some regularity, during May, and August to September (once in late October) 1979-1980, and 1984-1987. None since.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** was a common summer breeding bird on the sand/gravel pits, 1979 through 1988. Last year (1989) I could visit only March through May, but saw none. This year I had only 3 sightings of single birds through June 30. I saw one or two along the Platte the first two Saturdays in September.
LEAST TERN commonly attempted breeding on the sand tailings from the sand/gravel pits here every year from 1979 at least through 1985, but has become much less common with no sign of attempted breeding since then. I have only one sighting, along the river, in late May of both 1988 and 1989 (that may reflect my inability to get as far as the river those two years, I don't recall.) This year I had 11 sightings along the river from 26 May to 5 Aug., but no sign of breeding.

WHIP-POOR-WILL were heard on 7 visits the spring of 1980, on 5 visits the spring of '81, once in late Apr. and once in early Aug. of '82. That is all.

A single OLIVE-SIDED FLYCatcher was seen, invariably in the same tree, on from one up to 3 visits, each year in late August or early September, from 1979-1984. I saw one on 6 June in 1987 (at a different part of the property). I can speculate that the bird from 1979-84 was the same bird, and that something (fatal?) happened to it. In any case, no more Olive-sided Flycatchers.

TREE SWALLOWS are the second encouraging note. In '81 and '82 there was one occurrence a year. From '84 through '89 there were two or three occurrences a year, with some evidence of an interest in nesting sites. This year they surely nested, though I could not find the nest, and were present constantly from 28 Apr. to 14 July.

BROWN CREEPER appeared from once up to 4 times spring and fall, 1979-84. Since then only two sightings, in Jan. and Mar., 1987.

BLUE—GRAY GNATCATCHER nested in our yard, 5/31-7/27/80. I have one sighting recorded for May and for July, '81, and one for Apr., '82. None after that.

BELL'S VIREO was a regular, May to late July or early Aug., 1980-1987. Only one sighting (or "hearing") since, on 20 May, 1989.

TREE SPARROWS were winter residents from 1979 to the spring of 1982. From then on they began to get scarce and disappear altogether from early Dec. to usually late Feb. or early Mar. Last fall ('89) they disappeared by 11 Nov., and the last couple winters they have been as scarce as Fox or Lincoln's Sparrows, no flocks at all.

HARRIS' SPARROWS have not been so scarce as Tree Sparrows, but their schedule has been very similar: no winter residents since the winter of '81-'82, although twice they have stayed till 3 Jan., but then disappeared till Feb.

PURPLE FINCH was hard to find when I began keeping tabulations in '79. But by the following winter they were positively abundant, from 10/21/80-3/28/81. I recorded them 7 times in Oct. and Nov., '81; but just 2-4 times in spring and in fall of '82, in spring of '84, and again in fall of '87. And that's all.

Here are some changes that might account for some of the decline. The '80's were a dry period in Nebraska. If this is part of the reason, there should be a corresponding decline in other reports from the state. The sand-and-gravel operation also extended into areas that were previously woods, brush, or prairie, but there are other plots that are still undisturbed.

— Rev. Thomas A. Hoffman Creighton University, Omaha, Neb. 68178