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## SOME BIRDS OF THE PONY LAKE AREA OF THE EASTERN SANDHILLS, NEBRASKA


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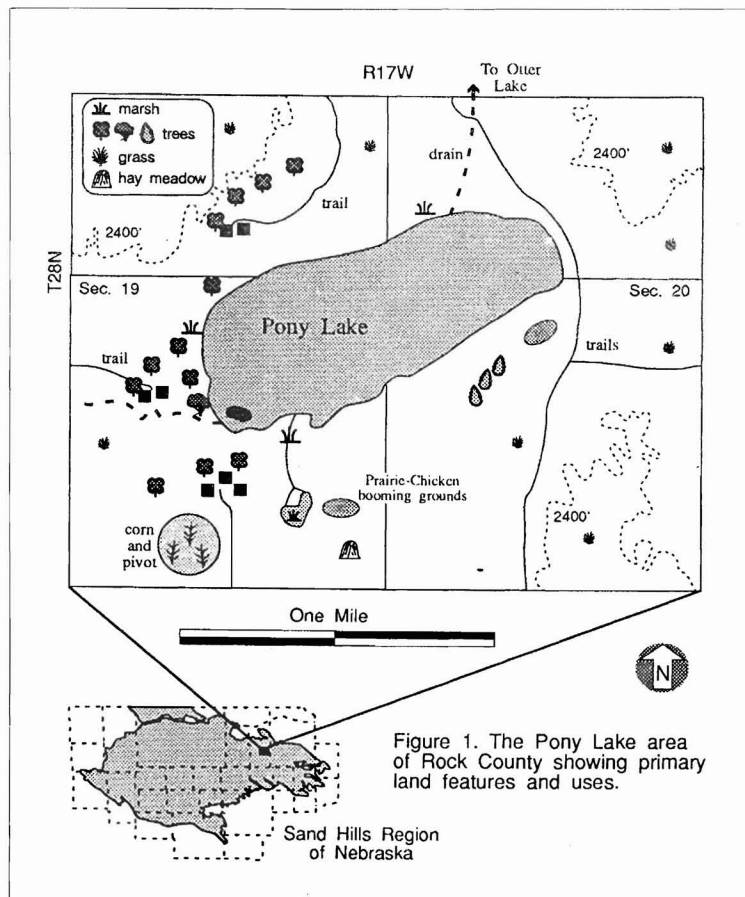
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### SOME BIRDS OF THE PONY LAKE AREA OF THE EASTERN SANDHILLS, NEBRASKA

A partial survey was made of the bird life in the vicinity of Pony Lake, located about 15 miles south of Newport, in portions of sections 17-20, T28N, R17W, Rock County.

Pony Lake was reportedly named according to a legend from "early days" when a native American was thrown and killed on its banks by a wild pony (Perkey, 1982). Originally Pony Lake was reported to be 20 feet deep (lake history based on conversations and observations of Jerry Schoenenberger). In the late 1800s, possibly 1900-1910, a town site was platted on the southwest corner of the lake. Construction included a lumberyard and dance pavilion. There was also a dock for a sail boat on which rides were given.



About 1910, Orley Peterson purchased the lots and surrounding land from the various owners and developed a ranch headquarters at the site of Lake City. The post office was established 8 June 1910. In the early teens, Oscar Peterson and his sons would annually plow a fire break from Pony Lake northeast toward Otter Lake. Then one spring day they shoveled out a short way between the lake and the end of the fire break, draining Pony Lake to its present level. It was said that the water ran out for two years. The post office was discontinued 15 August 1929.

In 1934 Pony Lake went totally dry from the drought. Corn was planted in the lake bottom in 1936. When Chester Schoenenberger moved to Pony Lake from Newport in 1947, he wore four-buckle overshoes while hunting pheasants all over the lake. Pony Lake refilled in the late 1940s and early 1950s, then in 1956 was nearly dry. Ducks were more plentiful then than I have ever seen since.

Fish have been in the lake in varying amounts and species through the years. Since the lake is ditched to the northeast, it eventually connects with the Elkhorn River. Fish make their way up the ditch during high water periods. Pony Lake was almost all covered with vegetation after it refilled in the late 1950s. Then carp came up from the Elkhorn, and today there is such a large population of carp, that the only vegetation is cattails and bulrushes around the perimeter. The water is very muddy and there is almost no food, i.e. duckweed, for waterfowl.

The maximum water depth currently is about five feet. The lake bottom which was originally white sand has become silted in to a depth of 18 to 24 inches in some places. Pony Lake is about 330 acres in size with a mean recorded depth of about 24 inches and a maximum depth of about 36 inches (McCarragher, 1977).

#### List of Species

The annotated list is the species seen in the Pony Lake area, the date observed and numbers seen enclosed in brackets. Records are from three visits by Ducey, and records throughout the summer and fall kept by Schoenenberger (who had just really started to watch birds) while doing ranch chores.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>NOTES ON ITS STATUS IN THE PONY LAKE AREA</u>
American White Pelican	28 April {6}, 14 May {20}, 26 July {6}; numbers vary all summer with 500+ birds at times; birds leave in late summer (August).
Double-crested Cormorant	Summer visitor.
American Bittern	2 June {1}; summer resident.
Great Blue Heron	2 June {1}; summer visitor.
Cattle Egret	2 June {1}; 21-22 July.
Black-crowned Night Heron	2 June {1}; summer visitor.
Canada Goose	28 April {6}; 2 June {22 incl. young}; 1 August {36}; 24 Nov. {500+}.
Mallard	28 April {4}; 2 June {one}; present when open water available; summer resident.
Northern Pintail	2 June {one}; seasonal visitor.
Blue-winged Teal	2 June {pair}; summer resident.
Northern Shoveler	28 April {four}; seasonal visitor.
Gadwall	28 April {one}.
Bald Eagle	23-26 November and 28 November {one adult}.
Northern Harrier	28 April {one}.

Swainson's Hawk	2 June {one}; summer resident.
Red-tailed Hawk	Permanent resident.
American Kestrel	28 April {one}; permanent resident.
Ring-necked Pheasant	28 April, ; 2 June; population of 25-30 birds in area south of the lake; young noted in late June.
Greater Prairie-Chicken	28 April; population of 30-40.
Sharp-tailed Grouse	permanent resident; fewer numbers than Greater Prairie-Chicken.
Wild Turkey	2 June; population of nine on south side of the lake in ranch area.
Northern Bobwhite	Occasionally heard in the area; may nest some years.
Killdeer	28 April, 2 June {young to north}; common summer resident.
Willet	28 April {one}, 8 May {two}, 2 June {copulating pair}.
Upland Sandpiper	2 June {pairs}; very common summer nesting resident.
Long-billed Dowitcher	28 April {two}.
Common Snipe	Summer resident.
Wilson's Phalarope	8 May {six}, 2 June {two}; uncommon migrant.
Herring Gull	28 April {four} (1990: J.E. Ducey).
Forster's Tern	28 April {two}.
Mourning Dove	28 April, 2 June; common summer resident.
Great Horned Owl	Permanent resident.
Common Nighthawk	2 June, 7 July; summer resident.
Western Kingbird	2 June; summer resident.
Eastern Kingbird	2 June; summer resident.
Horned Lark	2 June.
Barn Swallow	2 June; many nesting birds on buildings at Pony Lake.
Blue Jay	Permanent resident.
American Crow	28 April, 2 June {19}; permanent resident.
Black-capped Chickadee	Permanent resident.
Marsh Wren	2 June; Pony Lake was the site of a comparison of songs for the eastern and western races of Marsh Wrens ( <i>NBR</i> 56:40-42).
American Robin	2 June, 26 July; present all summer.
Loggerhead Shrike	Permanent resident.
Common Yellowthroat	2 June, 26 July; uncommon summer resident.
Vesper Sparrow	28 April.
Lark Sparrow	28 April.
Savannah Sparrow	28 April.
Bobolink	22 May {one}; common summer resident.
Red-winged Blackbird	28 April, 2 June; common summer resident.
Eastern Meadowlark	2 June.
Western Meadowlark	28 April, 2 June; common summer resident.
Yellow-headed Blackbird	28 April, 2 June.
Common Grackle	28 April; common nesting resident.

Brown-headed Cowbird      28 April.  
Northern Oriole            29 July {pair}; summer resident.  
American Goldfinch:      May 6 {one}; permanent resident.  
House Sparrow:            Resident year-round; nests in ranch buildings.

#### References

- McCarragher, D.B. (1977). *Nebraska's Sandhills lakes*. Lincoln: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.  
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