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NOTES ON BIRD SIGHTINGS IN NEBRASKA

Albino Eastern Bluebirds. On 24 July 1996, I banded two totally white Eastern Bluebirds in Sarpy County, Nebraska. These two birds were in a nest with two other normally plumaged siblings. They were not only white-plumaged, their feet and bills were white and the eyes were a pinkish-red. They were just as well-developed as the two normal birds and were ready to fledge, which they did the following day.



I believe these birds fit the description of total albinism as defined by John K. Terres in The Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds. He defines total albinism as the rarest form, in which the bird has a complete absence of melanin from the eyes, skin, and feathers.

---- Ruth C. Green, 506 W 31st Ave., Bellevue, NE 58005-5520

American Goldfinch. Bird banding tells us many things about various species - where they migrate, distribution, age, and much more. I had an experience with a female American Goldfinch recently that I never dreamed would happen. I banded this bird 21 March 1996 in my Bellevue yard. On 12 March 1997, while banding at Ft. Kearny near Minden, NE, I re-netted the same bird - a year later and 185 miles west of Bellevue. The chances of this happening are so remote that

I can't imagine what the odds would be. What was surprising was not the distance the bird had moved, but that the same bander encountered it at such widely separated places.

----Ruth C. Green, 506 W 31st Ave., Bellevue, NE 58005-5520

Clark's Nutcrackers. On 8 February 1997, Helen Hughson, Robin Harding, Lanny Randolph, Larry Malone, and I were in the town of Morrill in western Scotts Bluff County, looking for two Clark's Nutcrackers that had been reported to be visiting feeders there since 11 January 1997. We found the birds in a residential neighborhood. They were easily identified as Clark's Nutcrackers - gray birds a little larger than an American Robin, with a long, black bill, black wings and tail with white wing patches and outer tail feathers clearly visible in flight. After we had identified and watched them for a few minutes, one of them flew away and our attention focused on the one that flew to a feeder area in a nearby yard. We could not see it there, so we decided to move the car to a spot from which we thought we could see it. We had just moved the car a few feet when the Clark's Nutcracker flew from the feeder, went across the street in front of us, and lit on the ground. We noticed that it had its beak open quite far. It appeared to have something stuck in the back of its throat and seemed to be struggling to get it out. We were concerned that it might be choking on something and were trying to figure out how to keep this bird from dying right in front of us. It soon flew to another spot on the ground 10 to 15 feet from the original spot. It continued to have its beak open, but periodically would close it very briefly and we could see something in the end of it. Then it began to move dried grass and leaves. It was then that Larry Malone realized the nutcracker had stored food in its throat or sublingual pouch and was burying it. Edna Claire Thomas, whose feeder the bird had visited, reported to me that the Clark's Nutcrackers fed mainly at her suet feeders. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds notes that Clark's Nutcrackers can carry up to 70 seeds in their throats (or sublingual pouches). They store these seeds by burying them and appear to eventually eat up to 70 % of those stored.

----Alice Kenitz, 190648 Co. Rd. 22, Gering, NE 69341-6700

Sabine's Gulls. In late September 1996, we joined Ross Silcock and John Sullivan for a trip to western Nebraska. One of the species we were looking for was Sabine's Gull, but we did not expect to find five different individuals at three locations. Their occurrence in western Nebraska probably resulted from the passage of a strong cold front on 25-26 September. This report includes details of these sightings and comments on the species' status in Nebraska.

On 26 September 1996, we arrived at the inlet canal of Lake Maloney in Lincoln County. We immediately spotted a small, brown-mantled gull resting on the water near the inlet canal at the northwest end of the lake. We studied the bird from 2:43 to 3:17 p.m. CST. It was roughly 20% smaller than nearby Franklin's Gulls. It had a dainty appearance created by the small bill and rounded head. The forehead, throat, breast, and flanks were white. The bill was short, straight, and black. The eye was dark. The crown, nape, and mantle were a dark gray-brown. On the water, the wings appeared to be the same color as the mantle except for black primaries. In flight, the upperwing pattern was striking: outer primaries black; inner primaries, secondaries, and some greater secondary coverts white; remainder of secondary coverts dark gray-brown. The tail was white, slightly forked, and had a narrow, black terminal band. Within a few minutes, this juvenile bird was joined by a second

juvenile and an adult, which was similar to the juveniles except for gray on the upper secondary coverts, a yellow-tipped bill, and a black hood with some white flecks on the forehead. At times, the perched adult appeared to have a black shoulder bar, but this may have been due to missing or out-of-place feathers. We returned on 29 September and found one juvenile still present.

Later on 26 September, we stopped at the Sutherland Reservoir in Lincoln County. We were searching through the thousands of Franklin's Gulls when Joel spotted a juvenile Sabine's Gull along the southeast shore of the lake. We watched the bird from 3:55 to 4:15 p.m. CST. It was slightly smaller and had more tern-like wings than the Franklin's Gulls, with which it was feeding. The upperwing pattern was three-toned: black outer primaries, white inner primaries and secondaries, and brown secondary coverts. It was otherwise similar to the juveniles noted at Lake Maloney.

Finally, on 28 September 1996, the four of us observed a juvenile Sabine's Gull on Lake McConaughy in Keith County. We watched the bird from 8:55 to 9:15 a.m. MST from a boat. It was in the middle of the lake near the west end, associating with a small flock of Franklin's Gulls. It was similar to the juveniles noted earlier.

These represent the seventh, eighth, and ninth records of this species in Nebraska. Previous records were from April (1), September (1), and October (4). Eight additional undocumented reports, many of them probably correct, are from September (4) and October (4). Perhaps regular checks of the large reservoirs in western Nebraska after strong cold fronts in September and October might produce more records of this species.

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----Joel G. Jorgensen, 1218 Jackson St., Blair, NE 68008