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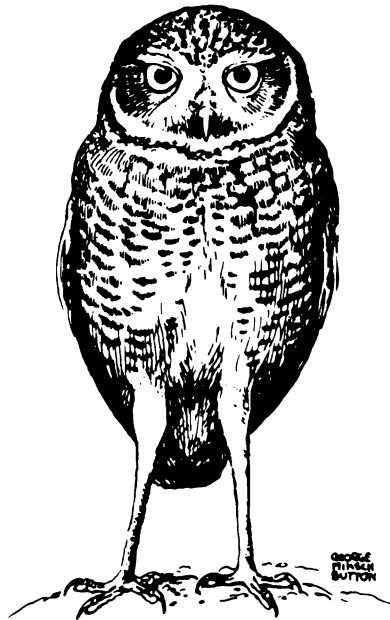
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GREAT GRAY OWL DISTRIBUTION, WINTER 1977-78

Wayne J. Mollhoff

This is a further report on the 1978 specimen of Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) previously reported by Lock (NBR 46:16), and on distribution of the species elsewhere on the continent during the winter of 1977-78. The owl reported by Lock was first observed on 31 December 1977 and was shot illegally on 1 January 1978, 2 miles north and 2 miles west of Dixon, Dixon County Nebraska. It was confiscated and held by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission until they decided on its final disposition. The specimen will remain the property of the state and has since been mounted by Professor A. Jewell Schock and me for display, and it will remain on display at Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska. This is the fifth record for this species in Nebraska: it was reported near Omaha 17 December 1893 and a mounted specimen in a saloon at Long Pine was claimed to have been taken in that vicinity (Bruner, Wolcott, and Swenk, 1904); Omaha 4 April 1948 (NBR 16:86); Brady 12 January 1950 (NBR 18:83); and this report.

The following data were recorded for this adult female: ovary — 4 × 15 mm, total length — 660 mm, wing chord — 430 mm, tail — 320 mm, beak from cere — 26 mm, weight 892 g. These measurements were taken as described in Roberts (1955). Ridgway (1914) gives the following measurements, based on a series of seven females: wing chord — 430-465 (446, avg.), tail 310-347 (323), beak from cere — 24.5-28.5 (26.1). Robert W. Nero and Herbert W.R. Copland (Nero, pers. comm.) are actively studying Great Gray Owls in southeastern Manitoba. They provided the following measurements, based on a series of six birds believed to be females which they banded and released during the winter of 1978-79: wing chord — 425-440 (433), weight — 1300-1500 (1380). Compared to these data, the owl taken in Nebraska was slightly smaller than average and markedly underweight.

The bird was thin but still in fairly good flesh, although there was no visible fat and its stomach was empty. The keel of the sternum protruded 2-4 mm, as compared to 8-10 mm in starving Screech Owls (*Otus asio*) that I have examined.

The bird was moulting the remiges but the molt in all other feather tracts was virtually complete. The feathers of the alula were all new. On both wings primaries nos. 5 and 6 and secondaries nos. 5, 9, 10, 11, and 12 were new, dark gray feathers. The others were faded brownish-gray and well worn. The molt in the greater coverts corresponded with that of the remiges. The rectrices were all new. This wintertime molt is at variance with that reported by Bent (1938:216) and the sequence is somewhat different. Bent states that the wing molt occurs first, followed by the body molt, and that the molt is completed in early December.

Distribution

An attempt was made to determine the extent of extra-limital appearances by Great Gray Owls during the winter of 1977-78, roughly from 1 November 1977 to 31 March 1978. Thirty-eight queries were sent to ornithological societies, individuals, and the Bird Banding Laboratory at Patuxent, Maryland. The area queried covered 28 states north of the 38th parallel and the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. Twenty-one replies were received from 18 states and provinces.

The Owls were much more visible than usual at several locations within, or along the periphery of, the normal range of the species. Unusually large numbers were noted in southeastern Manitoba (125 sightings from December through February) and in Minnesota along the north shore of Lake Superior, from Duluth to Grand Marais. The North Shore area had an unusually large number of Owls (at least 43 individuals) and they were easily seen, attracting bird watchers from all over the U.S. (Eckert, 1978a, b).

It is possible that these birds traveled only a short distance; one color-marked adult female owl in Manitoba was seen in December 1977, about 20 miles from where it had been banded at its nest. On the other hand, a nestling banded in Manitoba in 1976 was found dead in extreme southeastern Minnesota in January 1977 (Nero, pers. comm.). Many owls may have moved from normal habitat deep in spruce-tamarack bogs to adjacent areas which happened to have roads and thus the Owls became more visible. Nero believes this to have been the case with the Manitoba and Minnesota birds, and that the large number of sightings was the result of "good nesting conditions in the summer of 1977 (with a resultant population increase) and harsh winter conditions and a shortage of small mammals in the spruce-tamarack bogs". In northwestern Montana near Marion, Daniel DeJong (pers. comm.) reported seeing at least 6 owls beginning

in October. He thought the increase in sightings there was possibly the result of an "exceptional mouse population that brought the birds out of the heavy timber and onto the open meadows". Conversely, in Alberta, Robert E. Gehlert (pers. comm.) had only 14 sightings for the winter, fewer than usual. He felt the low number was due to lower than normal snowfall which in turn meant easier hunting.

Long-range winter movements by these Owls tend to be as much to the east as to the south (Bent, 1938). It seems likely that the local population in northeastern Minnesota shifted in this direction until stopped by Lake Superior. This barrier caused a concentration in the immediate area of the lake shore, although a few birds spilled around the lake in both directions and were reported as far as Thunder Bay, Ontario (Goodwin, 1978) and Douglas County, Wisconsin (Follen, in press).

The two Owls reported at Ottawa, Ontario, in February 1978 and Plattsburgh, New York, in January 1978 were slightly outside the usual area of winter wandering but probably at no great distance from timbered tracts similar to habitat within their normal range. Three or 4 birds were observed during the winter in the mountains of northeastern Utah (Anne J. Keene, pers. comm.). This is only the third time they have been recorded in Utah (Behle and Perry, 1975), making their appearance there almost as surprising as in Nebraska. However, the two previous Utah records were in the early 1960s and are closer to the breeding range as it is presently known. The Utah birds could have reached the area where they were seen without crossing unforested areas of any extent.

In view of past records in Minnesota (Wechsler, 1973; Nero, pers. comm.) it seems likely that the Nebraska Owl had its origins in Minnesota or possibly in adjacent Canada. Recent nesting records show that there is a resident population at least as near as Aitkin County, Minnesota (Blanich, 1975), a distance of about 350 miles from the Nebraska specimen locality. Being a bird of the forests, our bird probably kept as much as possible to wooded river valleys in its wandering, possibly via the tributaries of the Minnesota River and the valleys of the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers. Its underweight condition indicates a period of poor hunting, probably due to a combination of unfamiliar habitat and severe weather.

It is interesting to note that in Minnesota and Montana the Great Gray Owls did not appear alone. In Minnesota they were accompanied by the largest number of Boreal Owls (*Aegolius funereus*) ever recorded in the state. In Montana, De Jong states that there was also "an unusual number of Pygmy Owls (*Glacidium gnoma*)". This reinforces Nero's suggestion that it was a prey shortage affecting more than one species of predator that caused the owls to move.

The prey shortage was compounded (or caused) by the weather. Great Gray Owls feed primarily on small mammals — voles, mice, and shrews. These three are all active both above and beneath the snow, but as the snow depth increases a greater percentage of their time is spent beneath the snow, where they are less readily accessible to owls. Weather records from Canada and the U.S. show that in the area between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg precipitation was 150-400% of normal (1½-4 times average) during November and December 1977. In addition, in mid-December, southern Manitoba was hit with freezing rain that formed an icy crust on the snow. This made it more difficult both for the small mammals to get to the surface and for the Owls to penetrate it from above. Thus, after mid- or late December, much of the usual food supply was unavailable and the Owls had to move to secure food. This apparently caused the increase in sightings in Manitoba and Minnesota.

A similar situation developed in December in the Rocky Mountains from Utah to the Canadian border, an area which received 200-400% of its normal snowfall. Great Gray and Pygmy Owls were highly visible in northwestern Montana and the former appeared at several places in northeastern Utah, outside their usual haunts.

Contrast these two instances with that what occurred near Edmonton. There the snowfall ranged from 50% of normal in early winter to no more than normal later. Gehlert reported fewer sightings than usual and was probably right in attributing this to the lack of snow.

The winter of 1977-78 brought a number of uncommon visitors to Nebraska. Especially notable were large numbers of Common Redpolls (*Carduelis flammea*) and Snow Buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) (NBR 46:66-85). It is interesting to note that the first sighting of this Owl occurred at the end of December, just before northeastern Nebraska was hit with freezing rain, wind, and several inches of new snow. On the morning of 31 December I picked up 75 dead Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*) that had struck the KCNA-TV tower, near Albion, Nebraska, during the previous night (NBR 46:23). It may be that the Owl was moving in response to the same weather system that prompted the Longspurs to move.

TABLE I. Great Gray Owl records, winter 1977-78

Alberta, no locale	7(s)*	Dec. '77-Feb. '78	Serr, 1978
Alberta, near Edmonton	14(i)**	winter '77-'78	Gehlert, pers. comm.
B.C., Vernon	1(i)	Feb. '78	Rogers, 1978
Manitoba, SE part	125 (s)	Dec. '77-Feb. '78	Serr, 1978
Minnesota, NE 1/3 (nearest record in Aitken County, about 350 miles from Dixon, Nebraska)	58(i)	Nov. '77-Mar. '78	Eckert, 1978a
Montana, near Marion	6(i)	Oct. '77-Mar. '78	De Jong, pers. comm.
Montana, NW of Kalispell	1(i)	no date	Rogers, 1978
Nebraska, near Dixon	1(i)	Jan. '78	Lock (<i>NBR</i> 46:16)
New York, Plattsburgh	1(i)	Jan. '78	Mack, 1978
New York, Essex (may have been the same individual as at Plattsburgh)	1(i)	Jan. '78	Kibbe, 1978
Ontario, Thunder Bay	5(i)	Feb. '78	Goodwin, 1978
Ontario, Ottawa	1(i)	Feb. '78	Goodwin, 1978
Utah, Bear Lake	1(i)	Jan. '78	Keene, pers. comm.
Utah, W. of Vernal	1(i)	no date	Keene, pers. comm.
Utah, Oakley	2(s)	no date	Keene, pers. comm.
Washington, Addy	1(i)	Feb. '78	Rogers, 1978
Wisconsin, Solon Springs	1(i)	Dec. '77	Follen, in press

*(s) — numbers of sightings reported, includes repeat sightings of the same bird in some cases.

** (i) — number of individual birds reported.

Summary

Great Gray Owls were recorded in increased numbers at several points around the periphery of their normal breeding range and their usual range of winter wandering (see map in Robbins et al, 1966). A few individuals appeared in Utah about 300 miles from their usual range and in Nebraska one was found about 350 miles from the nearest recorded breeding area.

Acknowledgements are due the many people who took time to reply to my letters of inquiry and to the Canadian and U.S. Weather Services for their assistance in obtaining weather records. Special thanks go to my colleague A. Jewell Schock and to Willetta Lueshen, who were instrumental in having the Owl placed at Wayne State College, and to Dr. Robert W. Nero for suggestions and criticism in the preparation of this report.

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— 736 S. Third, Albion, Nebraska 68620

BOOK REVIEWS

A Field Guide to Western Birds' Nests, Hal H. Harrison, xxx + 279 pp., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 256 color photographs, 161 black-and-white. Indexed, hardbound, \$11.95.

This unit of the Peterson Field Guide Series covers 520 species found breeding west of the Mississippi River, though for some species whose nesting territory barely reaches into the covered area the entry is essentially a reference to the author's Eastern Guide. After a short explanation of how to use the book, and of the terms used, the individual species are taken up in AOU Check-list order. The discussion covers breeding range, habitat, nest, eggs, and often further comments under notes. The color plates are in the center of the book, but for those species for which there is a color plate there is a reference in the species account. The author's definition of terms he uses is given just before the index. There is no key to use to go from an unidentified nest to the species; the user has to check the entries for possible species and work by elimination (and hope he has included the right species in those checked). The author does emphasize distinctive points that may confirm an identification, or points that are very similar to those of another species. The book will be useful to anyone who would like to try to identify some nest he has found, or to one who is trying to locate a specific nest, or nests of one or more specific species.

— Editor

Owls, Tony Angell, 80 pp., University of Washinton Press, Seattle. 63 drawings by the author, no index, paper, \$8.95.

This is a paperback issue of a book published hardbound in 1974. The illustrations are the chief attraction (and they are attractive), but it does include comments by the author on owls in general, and then on each of the eighteen species of owls resident in North America. These are not intended as scientific accounts, but are usually anecdotes from his experiences. There is a short (eight items) bibliography for those who want more information. This is a book for those who like owls, or good bird pictures, or particularly, both. (There is a fancy cloth limited edition also available, at \$100.00.)

— Editor

NOTES

WHISTLING SWANS. I saw three Whistling Swans in a basin close to here on 27 March 1979. They were about 150 yards from the road, in the basin weeds and reeds among a lot of ducks. When I first saw the three white birds I thought they must be Snow Geese, as many of them were in the vicinity at the time. But when I put the binoculars on them it was plain to see that they were Swans. I have seen them around here only once before.

— *Lee Morris, Benedict*

GREATER SCAUP. On 21 March 1979 I was observing a flock of about fifty ducks, mostly divers, when I noticed one of the Scaups had a greenish cast to its head. After watching it for some time I decided that it had to be a Greater Scaup. It was among several Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks for comparison of size and color. The light was excellent and I was very close. Its head was rounder and it looked larger than the Lesser Scaup. I had just seen Greater Scaup in Texas so I was familiar with them.

— *Lee Morris, Benedict*

WHITE-WINGED SCOTERS. George Grube, Blair, and John and Marlene Weber, Omaha, saw two male and one female White-winged Scoters at DeSoto NWR on 31 March 1979. They were diving in the eastern part of the lake, in a large concentration of Ring-billed Gulls. The observation was made at 10 A.M. on a partly cloudy day, about 40°F.

— *Marlene Weber, Omaha*

HAWK CONCENTRATION NEAR ALBION. About 7:15 P.M. on 27 September 1979 I got a phone call that there was a flock of large hawks circling down out of the sky and landing in the trees around a farmstead several miles southwest of Albion. I drove out and found several hundred buteos in a shelterbelt and scattered over about 80 acres of pasture and alfalfa. They were resting and feeding on the ground. Looking into the setting sun made it impossible to identify most of them, but nearly all that I got a good look at were Swainson's Hawks. The exceptions were two Prairie Falcons and a possible Broadwinged Hawk. I got a fairly good count on the largest section of the flock as they went to roost in a shelterbelt after sundown, and estimated the number at 400-600.

The next morning I returned to the area before sunrise and found the hawks scattered out over parts of three sections, feeding on the ground. They appeared to be feeding on the grasshoppers and crickets, which were very numerous in the area. About 9 A.M., as the northwest breeze picked up, they began taking off in groups of 75-200, circling around like leaves in a whirlwind. As they gained altitude they drifted south with the wind at 15-20 mph. By the time they were out of sight they had risen to 500-1000 feet, still circling like a whirlwind. The scattered flock lifted off over a 45-minute period, allowing me to make positive identification of many individuals and a fairly accurate count. A single Red-tailed Hawk was seen moving with the flock; the rest were all Swainson's Hawks. The total count was 600-800 birds.

Later I had other reports of flocks of hundreds of large hawks seen in this area. One was "about 10 years ago", and the other was "many years ago", probably at least 40 years ago.

— *Wayne J. Mollhoff, 736 S. Third, Albion, Nebraska 68620*

(A report of a similar concentration of hawks, on 29 September 1973 at Valentine, Nebraska, is given at *NBR* 42:19.)

On 29 September 1979 John Manning, of Norfolk, and I saw approximately 250-350 hawks, on the ground and on fence posts and in trees. These Swainson's Hawks were seen 2 miles west of Ewing, Nebraska, on U.S. 275. The temperature was around 40° F. and the sky was hazy.

— *Rick Manning, 2909 S. 93rd Plaza, #1, Omaha, Nebraska 68124.*

EAGLE COUNT. On 18 February 1979 an Eagle count was made at the Harlan Reservoir. The sky was clear, wind NW at 10 mph., temperature 46° to 5° F., Observation time was 1:30 to 5:30 P.M. The area covered was the north shore from Methodist Creek to the dam, and below the dam toward Naponee on the Republican River. A total of 170 Bald Eagles were sighted. No

attempt was made to differentiate between mature and immature birds. At one time we had 23 in a single setting of the scope. Participants were Warren and Eileen Paine and George and Marion Brown.

— *George W. Brown, Kearney*

WHOOPIING CRANES. On 9 April 1979 four Whooping Cranes, the first reported in Nebraska in the year, showed up at the Moses Hill area near Funk, but were chased away by Game Commission personnel because of fowl cholera in the area.

A POSSIBLE BLACK RAIL. On 20 September 1979 I was walking through some chest-high vegetation on the shore of Lake 11, trying to flush Marsh Wrens. There was a small area ahead of me which lacked stiff plants, and in which the grass-like plants were matted down. As I got to about two steps from it a bird, which appeared to me as a very short-tailed blackbird, flew over the matted grasses and immediately down on the other side — a flight of from 2 to 3 feet high and 4 to 6 feet long. I tried to flush it again, but was unsuccessful. I was not expecting such a bird, and even if I had seen it longer I had no idea of what to look for. I immediately checked my Peterson, which I had with me, and Robbins as soon as I got back to the car. I had seen a Sora, in the open, at the last stop, and this bird didn't remind me of a Sora, but it seemed larger than the Song Sparrow to which Peterson compares the Black Rail — maybe Cowbird size or so. (But then, I don't usually get so close to a bird, and a Marsh Wren, which I saw shortly afterwards at about the same distance, seemed about as large). After reading the descriptions in the guides I thought I remembered seeing a speckled back. On 4 October (my next visit to the area) I started to check that patch of vegetation, coming in from different direction. Before I got to the patch — I was maybe 20 feet or so from it — a bird flew up and over the top of the vegetation, probably over 50 feet and dropped down. It was a slaty-gray, not the blackbird black of the earlier bird, and seemed noticeably larger. It was mostly end-on, but its dangling legs were yellowish. I went over toward where it went down and a bird (presumably the same one) went up and over the vegetation, but down fairly quickly when it got to the edge of the lake. This time it was at an angle to me, and the lack of a long bill showed it wasn't a Virginia. When I got to the lake edge the bird was, of course, out of sight. This bird was undoubtedly a Sora, and the differences in appearance and in the actions make me pretty sure the first was a Black Rail.

— *R. G. Cortelyou, 5109 Underwood Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska 68132*

MARSH BIRDS. On 11 May 1979, at the Gleason Lagoon, we saw three Soras, a Virginia and a Yellow Rail, a Woodcock, and an American Bittern. The weather was clear, wind north at 10 mph, temperature 65°F, and the observation time from 7:30 to 9:30 P.M. On 13 May, at the Funk Lagoon, we saw two Soras, a Black Rail, and an American Bittern. This was at about 6:30 P.M. In both cases the observers were Warren and Eileen Paine and George and Marian Brown.

— *George W. Brown, Kearney*

AGGRESSION IN FALL PECTORAL SANDPIPERS. On 4 August 1979 Alice Rushton, Mrs. Cortelyou, and I saw some Pectoral Sandpipers at a small pond about a mile north of Waterloo and we noticed no unusual behavior. On 18 August Pectorals were still there, but we saw examples of aggressive behavior that I don't remember ever seeing before, and on 25 August Clyde and Emma Johnson saw Pectorals there and saw aggressive behavior that was new to them, too. William J. Hamilton III (*Condor* 61:161-79) reported on aggressive behavior he had seen in post-breeding (migrant) Pectorals at Delta Marsh, Manitoba, one year in the late 1950s. He noted the probability that the birds migrate in stages, staying a while at each landing point, which gives time to establish territories. About a third of the birds at Delta Marsh established territories, and the size of these birds suggested that they were primarily males. In the "central area" or non-territorial birds "the stimulus most likely to provoke an attack was the proximity of another bird". The first situation that attracted my attention was that of two birds on a bare mud flat on the far side of the pond, with no other birds near. They were facing the same way, parallel, with their heads stretched out, and it seemed to us, looking down from an embankment, that they were flat on the ground. Once one bird seemed to squirm down closer to the mud. Hamilton calls this position crouching: "In the crouched position the head and neck are stretched forward over the ground and the ankles may be bent, lowering the body close to or touching the ground". The birds can be parallel, either facing the same way or opposite

directions, or, less commonly, they can be facing each other. What I thought was a "squirm" may well have been what he calls "shaking", and others call feather-settling: "Rapid rotating shakes of the body, closely resembling a similar movement found in most birds, were frequent during preening and after bathing . . . Following territorial encounters shaking was also frequent . . ." I didn't notice the end of this situation. A little later, on the near side of the pond, I saw a couple of birds facing each other and waving their bills. This apparently was "sparring", which Hamilton describes as "birds standing bill to bill swaying their outstretched necks in unison in an arc from side to side". While we watched this sparring I think a couple instances of "supplanting" occurred behind the sparring birds. Supplanting consists of one bird flying or rushing at another which has invaded its territory or has come too close. When the Johnsons were there the next week they saw an example of crouching, but with the birds facing each other. We saw no example of actual fighting, which Hamilton says does occur, nor did we notice some other, less spectacular, movements which he describes (various wing movements and displacement feeding) which could have occurred without attracting our attention. Of the displays we saw Hamilton says: "In territories crouching occurred only at the boundaries, but it was also conspicuous in the non-territorial area" and "Sparring and overt fighting were rare" (in the non-territorial area). Even if we had known what we were seeing we didn't see enough to try to figure out any territories, but from the locations and the general conditions I am inclined to think that these were just reactions of individual birds that felt that they had been approached too closely.

Hamilton says: "Inter specific aggression was noted regularly but it was less frequent and intense than intra specific aggression" and that Killdeer and Solitary Sandpipers were not bothered; interactions with Lesser Yellowlegs were frequent early in the period, but none were seen after 25 July; Solitary Sandpipers might be objected to or tolerated; and Least were frequently evicted. In our case there were several Killdeer at the pond, and at least one representative of each of the other species except Least Sandpiper, but no inter specific encounters were noticed. However, the supplanting attacks were not well seen and one or both might have been inter specific.

— R. G. Cortelyou, Omaha

WHIP-POOR-WILLS. I had Whip-poor-wills, maybe three different ones, at Ponca State Park, Dixon County, 18 July 1979.

— Ruth C. Green, Bellevue

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER. Dr. John Janovy, Jr., saw a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Kingsley Dam, Keith County, on 11 June 1979.

BLUE JAY PREYING ON HOARY BAT. On the afternoon of 30 June 1966 my attention was drawn to our back lawn in Blair by a prolonged shrill distress call. I rushed to investigate and observed a Blue Jay, heavily laden, fly from a tall (60') American elm tree into a redbud, where it perched. The Blue Jay was frightened off by my approach and left behind its apparently stunned prey—an adult female Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) on the breast of which were hanging two sizeable young bats. The Jay had carried them an estimated 20 yards from an estimated elevation of 45 feet in the elm tree to 6 feet in the redbud.

The bats were collected, weighed, and skinned. The adult female weighed 26.94 grams. One young, a female, weighed 18.41 grams, and the other, a male, weighed 18.72 grams. Thus the total burden carried in the feet of the Jay was 64.07 grams. An adult Blue Jay in our collection (GEG #132, 3 May 1968) weighed 93.4 grams, so this Blue Jay was carrying a burden of about 68.5% of its own weight while in flight.

It is of further interest to note that bats have not been mentioned in the literature as a part of the diet of the Blue Jay. Mice and other small mammals are dietary items of record (Bent).

— George E. Grube, Dana College, Blair

(Victor H. Cahalane's *Mammals of North America*, p. 131, does say "One bat is known to have fought off a blue jay with teeth, wings and hisses." The kind of bat is not indicated. *Editor.*)

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRES IN SIOUX COUNTY. On 20 July 1979 students of a biology institute under the sponsorship of Kearney State College were hiking in the Pine Ridge directly west of the campground at Gilbert Baker Special Use Area in Monroe Canyon. Members of the

group included Teri Tallant of California, Bob Williams of Maryland, Joe Hopkins of Omaha, Stan Longfellow of Kearney, and me. We observed one juvenile and one adult Townsend's Solitaire at close range with ample time for seeing details and comparing them with pictures and text of *Birds of North America* (Robbins et al.) The juvenile had a white eye-ring, slightly notched tail, and mottled breast. The wing patch was not well-defined as it is in the adult, but the outer tail feathers were whitish. The adult had the eye-ring, buffy wing patch, and white outer tail feathers. We feel that there was no mistake in identification of the birds. One adult was seen in the same area on 18 July by another group of students. The most recent account of the species (Johnsgard, *NBR* 47:11) indicated some doubt on the breeding status of the species in Nebraska. While these birds may have moved in from the Black Hills following nesting, I hope that others will make an effort to cover this area next summer to see if we do, indeed, keep Townsend's Solitaire on our list of breeding birds.

— Twile Fickel, Gresham

MELANISTIC HOUSE SPARROWS. From 18 January 1979 to early March the Somerhalders, North Platte, had two black sparrow-sized birds at their feeder. The first two weeks they were usually seen together, but after that it wasn't uncommon to see only one. They would usually wait until there was a crowd around before they came to the feeder, but sometimes were the last to leave when the birds were frightened away. Color pictures (several) of the birds were shown to speakers at the Wilson Ornithological Society meeting who had talked on sparrows, and to others in attendance, and it was the consensus that they were melanistic House Sparrows.

ODD SLATE-COLORED JUNCO. I have banded over 200 Slate-colored Juncos this winter. On 27 March 1979 I took one out of my nets, set up in my yard, that was unlike any I have ever seen before. This Junco had very prominent white eye rings, much like those of a Townsend's Solitaire. These eye rings were not white flesh, but tiny white feathers that completely encircled the eye. There were also a few white feathers in the dark part under the throat. Otherwise there were no other marks any different from any other Slate-colored Junco. At the Omaha meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society I found some other bird-banders who had netted similar Juncos, and I was told that this was a type of symmetrical albinism.

— Ruth Green, Bellevue

LITTER AND WILDLIFE. In the fall of 1978 Shirley, Tom, and I had a very interesting and unusual experience at Lake McConaughy. We were driving on a hard-surfaced road a little before sunset, after a storm had passed. I noticed what appeared to be a can going down the middle of the road. This seemed a bit unusual as I had never seen a live can before, so I stopped and backed up for a better look. It was a beer can, and it would go a ways and then rise up and down and go again. As I approached I could see in the dusk that a fairly large bullsnake had its head caught in the hole in the top of the can. I tried unsuccessfully to pull its head loose but it was really lodged tight. Finally I opened the hole enough with a pair of pliers to set the snake free, and it immediately went under the car. I couldn't understand why a snake would try to get into such a can unless it had acquired a taste for beer. Then I noticed a nose come peeking very slowly out of the can. As it came out a little farther I could see that it was a little field mouse. It was too frightened to come out of the can, and I couldn't even shake it out until I enlarged the hole a lot more. When I finally did manage to shake it out, would you believe it ran straight under the car and directly over the top of the snake? The snake ignored it this time. I suppose the snake was as scared of us as the mouse was of it. As it was, both the snake and the mouse lived, but if I hadn't stopped to investigate both would have died, trapped in the can. We had no flash bulbs, so the pictures we took were too dark to show well, but the people at the Kearney meeting seemed to enjoy them.

— Lee Morris, Benedict

1978 NEBRASKA NESTING SURVEY. The data for this Survey have been misplaced. It will be printed when they are located.

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