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NOTES

CATTLE VS. WATERFOWL. After three years of comparatively dry weather that kept our rainwater basins dry most of the time, in 1982 we had lots of rain and lots of water in our basins. The rains started the latter part of April and the waterfowl and shorebirds came in great numbers. Although the waterlevels raised with each rain, the vegetation grew fast enough to keep most of the water covered. This is where the nesting population of Coots, Pied-billed Grebes, etc., hide their nests, and it is hard to guess how many birds are nesting or where the nests are located.

One of these large basins lies between two of our farms, and I usually drive by it twice a day or so. It is divided into two parts that are fenced and both are used for pasture. Most of the water area is located on a neighbor's land. As usual, several cows and calves were placed in each pasture around 1 May. This is the procedure, and it works well in a normal year, but this was not

a normal year, and as more and more rain fell it created a very unusual set of circumstances. The water level kept rising until in June the neighbor's pasture was all underwater except one small corner that was slightly higher ground, and this was where the cattle spent most of their time, except when foraging out into the water. By this time the water had covered most of the vegetation that hadn't already been grazed off. Daily I watched as the water level kept rising and the vegetation got thinner and thinner and it was easier to see the birds on their nests. Also, by this time the cattle were very hungry and were foraging in water more than belly deep, with their calves swimming to follow, even though supplemental feed was being provided for them.

Finally there was practically no vegetation to hide the Coot and Pied-billed Grebe nests. The birds still stayed on their nests and tried to defend them from the cattle that were all around them. Each day it seemed that there were fewer nests, and one morning, while I was watching, I saw a bull actually eating a Coot nest while two Coots were attacking it with flailing wings, but to no avail. It continued eating as if the birds weren't even there. Of course, these nests are made of reeds and basin weeds and the cattle were very hungry. The nests continued to disappear until all were gone. The water kept rising, and the cattle kept almost every spear of vegetation eaten, except for the roadside ditches and the pasture I use, which were protected by fences. These areas no doubt produced successful nests, as many birds were observed all summer in these areas.

When the water was at its peak in June it covered the roadway that I used, and it was like being in a boat when I crossed it daily. We had an unusually large number of Soras spend the summer this year, and they would forage in the shallow water on the roadway. Several times I almost had to stop to avoid running over them. I'm sure they were nesting in the roadside ditches. By July this area really looked like a shallow lake, since most all of the vegetation was gone. This attracted several different species of birds which don't normally frequent our basins. In the latter part of July about 30 American White Pelicans arrived, and for the next six weeks we had Pelicans numbering sometimes more than 200. I have no idea how so many could find enough food for such a long stay. Also several Double-crested Cormorants have been staying in this basin lately, and seven White-faced Ibis and seven Cattle Egrets were here for some time in September. In the same month a female Ruddy Duck and six newly-hatched young were seen daily, swimming away from the roadside ditches as I crossed. It was a very late hatch, probably caused by earlier nesting failure, and no doubt caused by the cattle.

Two Greater White-fronted Geese showed up in late August and stayed several weeks. Lots of gulls, terns and shorebirds were here in September. Now in October lots of Dowitchers are here. Although it was sad to see a basin denuded and nests destroyed, it did provide a rare opportunity to observe different species than normally frequent our rainwater basin areas.

—Lee Morris, Rt. 1, Box 14, Benedict, Nebraska 68316

CATTLE EGRETS. On 17 September 1982, about 6:30 P.M., I saw a flock of 16 Cattle Egrets half a mile north of Humphrey, in a pasture adjacent to highway 91. They were feeding and resting in a wet-meadow/pasture beside a small stream, sharing the area with a small herd of cows.

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

RAINWATER BASIN NOTE. I have had a White-faced Ibis on my basin for the last several days now (written 28 May 1982). Earlier this spring I had six Cattle Egrets just south of my house, with my cattle. They even came into my front yard but stayed only one day. The four Snow Geese that stayed so late in a basin near here and finally left are back. I thought they had finally gone north, but I saw them again on 26 May, near here. I have never seen Snow Geese stay this late before. We have lots of Sora and American Bitterns in our basins. Also lots of Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds nesting, since we have so much water.

—Lee Morris, Rt. 1, Box 14, Benedict, Nebraska 68316

ASSORTED HAWKS. On 27 March 1981, on the floodplain 2 miles northwest of Peru, Nebraska, eight hawks were seen flying in a circle of less than .5 mile in diameter: 4 Swainson's, 2 Red-tailed, 1 Rough-legged, and 1 Northern Harrier. This unusual combination of birds flew around each other for an additional 15 minutes after the initial sighting, and then dispersed. There was agricultural activity in the vicinity which may have stirred up prey species, but no kills were made while we were watching.

—Steve Shupe, Box 151, Peru State College, Peru, Nebraska 68421

SOCIAL RED-TAILED HAWKS. On several occasions during the last two winters (1980-1982), groups of Red-tailed Hawks were seen flying together near Peru, Nebraska. Groups of seven, five, and four have been observed over the loess bluffs deciduous forest. Each of the gatherings dispersed within one mile of the point of sighting, with no unusual behavior noted. No explanation of this activity is known. However, Orians and Kuhlman (Red-tailed Hawk and Great Horned Owl Population in Wisconsin, *The Condor* 58:371-385. 1956.) suggested group hunting.

—Steve Shupe, Box 151, Peru State College, Peru, Nebraska 68421

GRAY PARTRIDGES. On 17 May 1982, while I was driving northwest of Benedict, York Co., on a gravel road near my home, two birds flushed directly in front of my pickup. I immediately noticed the short, rusty-colored tail and rusty face pattern. Also they were larger than Bobwhites and smaller than Pheasants. They flew a short distance, one landing in tall cover but the other was in plain sight. These were the first Gray Partridges I have seen in this area.

—Lee Morris, R 1, Box 14, Benedict, Nebraska 68316

WOODCOCK. At 8 PM, Saturday, 17 April 1982, I heard two singing male Woodcock performing their courtship flight in the nine acre wildlife management area immediately southeast of Spencer Dam, on the Niobrara in northern Holt Co. The noise caused by the water releases from the dam made it impossible to determine the exact number of Woodcock using the area. I could positively identify only two singing birds.

—Mark Wilson, 1830 W. 11th Avenue, Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

DOWNY WOODPECKER. In late October 1982 a Downy Woodpecker spent considerable time one day at my sunflower-seed feeder, eating the seeds. This is the only time that I know of that a Downy hasn't used the suet feeder, but Bent gives estimates as high as 24% for vegetable matter in the Downy's diet.

—Alice Rushton, 5617 Parker, Omaha, Nebraska 68104