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THE 2003-2004 NEBRASKA NEST REPORT

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Due to the fact that I was recalled to active duty by the US Army, I have been out of the state for the past two years. Hence, the number of observations made will be much abbreviated, and the usual comments on climatic conditions will be more limited.

A brief visit to the western Panhandle in June 2003 revealed that at least the southwestern Panhandle received enough rain to grow a crop of wheat, and there was more grass on the hills than in the previous several years. Despite this, some other parts of the state, especially the western Republican River drainage and the Sandhills, remained dry. In 2004 the Panhandle and western Republican Valley again remained dry through most of the breeding season, although rains returned to some areas later in the season. The northwestern Panhandle remained especially dry, with pastures in some areas virtually without grass, and ranchers again forced to sell off breeding stock. These climatic conditions doubtless affected the birds, with species requiring more humid conditions adversely affected, while xerophilous species like Lark Bunting and Cassin's Sparrow may have found expanded breeding opportunities.

Observations reported on NEBirds are not included unless additional details have been obtained because those reports are usually included in the seasonal reports.

OBSERVERS

The following individuals submitted records for the nesting report: Linda Brown (LB), Mary Dowd (MD), Jon Farrar (JF), Mitzi Fox (MF), Stephen Jones (SJ), Clem Klaphake (CK), Wayne Mollhoff (WM), Jeff Nichols (JN), Allen Reyer (AR).

A total of 110 reports was received on a total of 52 species. Species reported but not included in this account include: Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Rock Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, and Orchard Oriole.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

SRA State Recreation Area;
WMA Wildlife Management Area

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Eared Grebe A colony of about 100 birds was noted in the middle of Bungler Lake, about 30 mi. S of Gordon, Sheridan Co., on 23 June 2003 (CK).

Double-crested Cormorant A group of cormorants was observed sitting on nests and feeding young on 22 June 2003 in the mixed cormorant-Great Blue Heron colony at Mayhew Lake, ~45 mi. SW of Valentine, Cherry Co. (CK).

Great Blue Heron Herons were likewise observed sitting on nests and feeding young at the mixed colony described above on 22 June 2003 (CK).

A colony of at least 25 nests occupied by both adults and young was noted on Gordon Creek at Highway 97 about 40 mi. SW of Valentine, Cherry Co., on 22 June 2003 (CK).

Swainson's Hawk A nest with 2 eggs was located 36 feet up a willow tree one half mi. SW of Bushnell, Kimball Co., on 2 June 2004(WM).

Red-tailed Hawk The large old stick nest on a ledge on the north face of Jail Rock, 5 mi. S of Bridgeport, Morrill Co., held a pair of half-grown young on 15 June 2003. Positive identification was made when the adults arrived and fed the young (WM,JF,SJ).

Wild Turkey A hen and at least 3 week-old chicks were noted in the edge of the 1985 McIntosh Burn in West Ash Creek Canyon, 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 5 June 2004 (WM,MD,JN).

Marbled Godwit In the second recent report of apparent breeding in the state, a territorial pair was noted on 15 May 2003, and later noted performing a distraction display at the same location near Diamond Lake, about 15 mi. N of Lakeside, Sheridan Co., on 11 June 2003 (SJ).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo An adult was observed feeding a fledged young bird twice at the Memphis SRA, Saunders Co., on 19 July 2003 (CK).

- Burrowing Owl** Four separate broods of young owls were noted exercising their wings while standing on the mounds beside their burrows in a small prairie dog colony near the SW edge of Gordon, Sheridan Co., on 22 June 2003 (CK).
- White-throated Swift** A nest with at least 2 eggs was found at the previously-reported colony in West Ash Creek Canyon 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 13 June 2003. At least 3 more pairs were present, occupying narrow, crooked crevices that precluded viewing (WM).
On 8 June 2004, the above crevice nest was occupied by a Violet-green Swallow (see below). Swifts again occupied other crevices. Apparent copulation was noted on 5 June 2004 as a pair grappled in flight and tumbled through the air a few feet from the face of the cliff, then separated and continued their courtship flight (WM, MD, JN).
- Lewis's Woodpecker** The nest used by the woodpeckers in 2002 was occupied by a pair of American Kestrels in 2003. After extensive searching, the pair was located in the same burned area (McIntosh Burn, 1985) in West Ash Creek Canyon, Dawes Co., 13 mi. SE of Crawford. The new nest snag was located about a mile away across a canyon from the 2002 nest. Adults were seen carrying tiny food items into the nest on 14 June 2003. No further investigation was made due to the very unstable condition of the nest snag (WM, JF).
On 4 June 2004, the 2003 nest mentioned above was found occupied by a pair of kestrels. Further searching finally turned up a Lewis's Woodpecker in that area on 9 June 2004, but neither its mate nor the nest were discovered (WM, JN, MD). Another pair of woodpeckers was found occupying a nest on a territory several miles away, but the nest was empty (WM).
- Downy Woodpecker** A nest with 4 young was found near the picnic ground in West Ash Creek Canyon about 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 14 June 2003 (WM, JF).
- Pileated Woodpecker** Adults were noted carrying food to a nest in late May and again in mid-June 2003 at a site on the North Stream Trail in Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co. On 19 June the heads of two well-feathered young were seen peering out of the nest hole, and on 26 June the nest appeared empty (CK).
- Western Wood-Pewee** A nest with 4 eggs was found and photographed in the above-mentioned picnic ground in West Ash Canyon, Dawes Co., on 14 June 2003 (JF, WM).
An adult was noted delivering food to a nest high in a cottonwood at Smith Lake, 22 mi. S of Rushville, Sheridan Co., on 23 June 2003 (CK).
- Eastern Phoebe** A nest was found in a cavity in a cliff face in West Ash Creek Canyon on 8 June 2004. A pair of adults and 3-4 recently-fledged young were found foraging nearby (WM).
- Say's Phoebe** A nest with 2 eggs plus 2 Brown-headed Cowbird eggs was found and photographed on a ledge beneath an overhang in a canyon 8 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co., on 15 June 2003 (WM, JF).
A nest in the same location mentioned above held a single egg on 3 June 2004 (WM, MD, JN).
A nest in an abandoned house 7 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co., held 1 egg on 20 May and 6 eggs on 2 June 2004 (WM).
A nest placed in the entrance of a Bank Swallow burrow 7 mi. SSW of Harrison, Sioux Co., held 5 eggs on 5 June 2004 (WM).

- Cassin's Kingbird** Two empty nests were found in a canyon 9 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co., on 16 June 2003. One was complete, the other nearly so. An additional 5 nests found in the same area on 15-16 June 2003 held 1, 2, 2, 4, and 5 eggs, respectively (WM).
- Western Kingbird** Two nests found in the above-mentioned area S of Redington on 15-16 June 2003 held 4 eggs each (WM).
Two nests were found on 2-3 June 2004 in the same area. One was 1/3 complete and the other held 5 eggs (WM).
- Eastern Kingbird** Construction was just begun on 16 June 2003 on a nest in the above area S of Redington (WM).
- Plumbeous Vireo** A nest tended by a pair of adults was found on 5 June 2004 in West Ash Creek Canyon 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co. (JN, WM, MD).
When investigated further on 8 June, it held a single half-grown young (WM).
- Black-billed Magpie** A nest in a tree hanging over the road in Smiley Canyon, Ft. Robinson, Sioux Co., held 4 two-week-old young on 7 June 2004 (WM).
- Tree Swallow** A nest box at Twin Lakes WMA 13 mi. SE of Seward, Seward Co., held 3 eggs on 15 May 2003. When re-checked on 21 May, the eggs were gone. The nest was removed on 12 June. The box held a new nest with 4 eggs on 21 June, 5 eggs on 26 June, just hatched young on 4 July, and 10-day-old young on 15 July. The young had fledged by 18 July (LB).
- Violet-green Swallow** A female incubating 2 eggs in the same tree cavity used in 2002 in West Ash Creek Canyon 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., refused to leave the nest on 14 June 2003 (WM, JF).
A swallow nest, placed in a crevice nest in West Ash Creek Canyon and used in 2003 by a White-throated Swift (see above), held 5 eggs on 8 June 2004 (WM).
- Bank Swallow** The colony in a dry, vertical blowout bank in a shortgrass prairie pasture located 7 mi. SSW of Harrison, Sioux Co., had 14 occupied holes on 5 June 2004. All occupied nests held eggs, with clutch sizes of 3-6 eggs (WM).
- Pygmy Nuthatch** Two occupied nests were found in dead snags in East Monroe Canyon 6 mi. NW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 6 June 2004. An adult was seen carrying something from one of the nests, perhaps a fecal sac. At the other nest, an adult repeatedly carried food to the hole and gave it to the adult inside, which came to the cavity entrance to receive it. Neither nest was investigated further due to the very fragile nature of the dead snags (JN, WM).
- Carolina Wren** A pair of fledged young was noted following, begging from, and being fed by a pair of adults on 14 Aug. 2003 at the Schilling WMA at the mouth of the Platte River just N of Plattsmouth, Cass Co. (CK).
Nest-building was noted on a front porch in Bellevue, Sarpy Co., on 6-7 Aug. 2004. The nest appeared complete on 8 Aug. but was abandoned on 9 Aug., and the birds were not seen again (AR).
- Sedge Wren** An agitated adult was noted dropping into the grass several times to deliver insects to peeping young at Walnut Creek Lake Recreation Area, SW of Papillion, Sarpy Co., on 6 July 2003 (CK).
- Marsh Wren** An adult was noted feeding noisy young in a nest at least twice on Smith Lake, 22 mi. S of Rushville, Sheridan Co., on 23 June 2003 (CK).
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** A nest with 3 young, 2-4 days old, was found and photographed on 15 June 2003, 8 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co. (WM, JF).
- Mountain Bluebird** A pair of adults was noted feeding at least 3 recently-fledged young in the pine-covered canyons 8 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co., on 3 June 2004 (MD, JN, WM).

- Swainson's Thrush** At least 5 singing males were noted in West Ash Creek Canyon 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 5 June 2004 (JN, MD, WM). Further investigation on 8 June revealed at least 2 pairs, one of which had a complete but empty nest that was closely guarded by the singing bird (WM). The only other nest which has been found in the state was found in the same canyon in 1973.
- Cedar Waxwing** Apparent courtship activity was noted in Monroe Canyon 6 mi. NNW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 7 June 2004. A pair was seen repeatedly visiting a particular stream-side, vine-covered tree, following which one begged from the other on several occasions (WM).
- Yellow Warbler** A pair of adults was noted feeding a single fledged young bird on 19 July 2003 at Memphis SRA, Memphis, Saunders Co. (CK). Three nests were found on 8 June 2004 in West Ash Creek Canyon, 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co. Two nests each held 4 eggs, while the other nest held 1 egg and 3 newly-hatched young (WM).
- Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler** A female was seen carrying food in Monroe Canyon 6 mi. NNW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 7 June 2004, but a search for the nest was unsuccessful (WM).
- Common Yellowthroat** A nest with 4 eggs was found along the Niobrara River 9 mi. SW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 5 June 2004 (WM, MF).
- Spotted Towhee** A nest with 3 young was found in West Ash Creek canyon 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 8 June 2004 (WM).
- Chipping Sparrow** A nest with 4 eggs was found in West Ash Creek Canyon, 12 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 8 June 2004 (WM).
- Lark Sparrow** Two nests were found 8 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co., on 2 June 2004. One nest held 3 sparrow eggs plus 2 cowbird eggs; the other held 1 sparrow egg plus 4 cowbird eggs (WM, MD, JN).
- Dark-eyed (White-winged) Junco** A pair of adults was seen feeding at least 2 recently-fledged young atop a ridge in the West Ash Creek Canyon drainage 13 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 8 June 2004 (WM).
- Black-headed Grosbeak** A pair was noted gathering nesting material atop a ridge in East Monroe Canyon 6 mi. NNW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 7 June 2004 (WM). Two nests, each with 4 eggs, were found in West Ash Creek Canyon, 12 mi. SE Crawford, Dawes Co., on 8 June 2004 (WM).
- Brewer's Blackbird** A colony of 3 pairs was found in Smiley Canyon, Ft Robinson, Sioux Co., in the Soldier Creek Burn (1989) on 7 June 2004. Two nests were found, one with 4 young that were 7-10 days old; the other held 4 young that were 4-8 days old, plus an unhatched egg (WM). Another colony of 4-5 pairs 9 mi. E of Harrison, Sioux Co., was again occupied on 4 June 2004. Only a single nest was found despite prolonged searching. It contained 2 eggs and 3 recently-hatched young (WM). A colony of 6-8 pairs 12 mi. E of Harrison, Sioux Co., was again occupied on 4 June 2004. A nest with 4 young, about 1 week old, was found. Another nest with 3 one-day-old young, 2 blackbird eggs and a cowbird egg was also found.
- Brown-headed Cowbird** See comments above in the Say's Phoebe, Lark Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird accounts.
- Bullock's Oriole** A nest under construction, with the sack barely formed and still at the see-through stage, was found on 3 June 2004, 8 mi. S of Redington, Morrill Co. (WM).