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## The 2005 Nebraska Nest Report

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## THE 2005 NEBRASKA NEST REPORT

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The drought that gripped much of western Nebraska for the past 5 years loosened its hold this year as rain returned to more normal levels, especially in the northwest Panhandle. Some other areas of the state still remained at below normal rainfall levels.

### OBSERVERS

The following observers submitted records for the nest report: Kathy DeLara (KD), Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Mike Fritz (MF), Robin Harding (RH), Derrick Keim (DK), Alice Kenitz (AK), Courtney Kerns (CK), Daniel H. Kim (DHK), Thomas Labeledz (TL), Andre Lima (AL), Leonard McDaniel (LM), Wayne Mollhoff (WM), Colleen Noecker (CN), Don Paseka (DP), Janis Paseka (JP), Lanny Randolph (LR), Allen Reyer (AR), Ben Skipper (BS), Dave Stage (DS), Susan Sullivan (SS), Cara Walker (CW), and Thomas Walker (TW).

A total of 305 reports were received on 68 species. Species reported but not individually included in the following report are: Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Swainson's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Warbling Vireo, American Crow, House Wren, Yellow Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole.

### ABBREVIATIONS USED

NGPC : Nebraska Game & Parks Commission  
PLJV : Playa Lakes Joint Venture  
RMBO : Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory  
VNWR : Valentine National Wildlife Refuge  
WCT : Whooping Crane Trust (=Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust)

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

**Trumpeter Swan** A pair was noted on Doc Lake, 1 mi. SW of Whitman, Grant Co., on 2 March 2005. Three teal-sized young were seen with the pair on 17 June (WM).

**American White Pelican** Old records recently made available show that eggs were occasionally "dumped" by non-breeding pelicans in a Double-crested Cormorant colony on Marsh Lake, VNWR, Cherry Co. Two eggs were found there on 25 May 1988, 4 eggs were found on 2 June 1991, and 4 eggs

were found 17 May 1993.

While checking on waterfowl production 24 May 1995 at the above site, a biologist found attempted breeding with pelicans on 10 nests. On 29 May he found the remains of the nests and eggs abandoned. Later, on 12 June, he again found 4 eggs randomly scattered in the cormorant colony (LM). This is the only nesting reported in the state.

**Bald Eagle** A nest with 2 young was noted on 22 April 2005, 5 mi. W of North Bend, Dodge Co. Three young were present on 13 May and 1 June. No activity was noticed during a later visit on 22 June (DP).

**Cooper's Hawk** Staff at NGPC were entertained through the spring by a pair nesting in a white pine on the west side of the headquarters building at 2200 N. 33rd St., in Lincoln, Lancaster Co. On 15 April 2005 an adult was still brooding. By 15 June, two young had already fledged, leaving the other two full-grown young still exercising their wings near the nest (MF, WM).

**Golden Eagle** A long-occupied cliff nest in a canyon near the upper Niobrara River 8 mi. SW of Harrison, Sioux Co., held a pair of 2 to 3-week-old young on 23 April 2005 (DK, WM).

An adult captured prey and delivered it to a tree nest in an old windbreak several miles S of Bridgeport, Morrill Co., on 24 April 2005. On 25 May the nest appeared to be empty and no activity was seen in the area (WM).

**Piping Plover** A male was digging scrapes on 17 May (SJD), and an adult was later banded at a nest with 2 eggs on 20 May 2005 at Lake Minatare, Scotts Bluff Co. By 24 May the nest held 4 eggs but was threatened by rising water levels. Because of continued rising water, on 27 May biologists moved the eggs to foster nests at Lake McConaughy (Keith Co.) but the move was unsuccessful due to predation by dogs and abandonment (KD).

Another nest at Lake Minatare, which held a single egg on 6 June 2005, also was moved to stay above rising water. It was moved again on 9 June 2005 to a foster nest at Lake McConaughy, as the water continued to rise, but the move was unsuccessful due to predation by a skunk (KD).

**Marbled Godwit** A biologist with the RMBO/PLJV reported a nest with 3 eggs in southern Sheridan Co. on 16 June 2005, apparently the first nest with eggs reported in the state (CK). Two other reports of nesting in Nebraska were both at Smith Lake, in central Sheridan Co.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** A flightless young bird was found below spruce trees on a ranch house lawn 8 mi. SW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 27 August 2005 (DK, WM).

**White-winged Dove** A recently-fledged young bird was found and photographed following a thunderstorm in Albion, Boone Co., on 21 June 2005. Pictures of the bird confirm its immaturity due to lack of a sub-auricular spot, brown iris, white leading edges of the primary and secondary feathers, outer primary shorter than scapulars, and longest primary only slightly longer than secondaries (Pyle 1997, Ridgway 1916, Schwertner et al. 2002). Birds had been heard calling in the area earlier in the summer, and a pair with a young bird was also noted at a neighbor's feeder. This is the first report of nesting in Nebraska (CN).

**Black-billed Cuckoo** Despite a well-deserved reputation for being inconspicuous, a nest with eggs and young was found on 4 July 2005 at Goose Lake WMA, Holt Co. (LR,RH).

**Common Barn Owl** A "nest" with 1 egg was found atop the corn in a steel grain bin ~3 mi. W of Laurel, Cedar Co., on 27 April 2005 (DS).

**Long-eared Owl** Five downy young were found in a nest 2 mi. W of Parks, Dundy Co., on 9 May 2005 (TW).

**Northern Saw-whet Owl** An old report recently made available is of a pair of adults with three fledged young on 24 June 1978. The young were reared at Hackberry Lake Headquarters, VNWR, Cherry Co., and seen only by moonlight or the aid of artificial lights (LM). Although out of the expected range, the timing is consistent with a report of young in a nest in South Dakota on 20 May 1993 (Peterson 1995).

**Lewis's Woodpecker** A pair was seen occupying a nest 15 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 23 May and 16 June 2005, but the nest was not examined (WM).

**Northern Flicker** A red-shafted flicker nest with 7 eggs was found in Sowbelly Canyon 4 mi. NE of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 22 May 2005 (WM).

A yellow-shafted flicker fed a nearly-fledged young in Dannebrog, Howard Co., on 25 June 2005 (LR, RH).

**Loggerhead Shrike** A nest in the Sandhills north of the Calamus Reservoir in Loup Co. held 5 eggs on 15 May 2005 (WM).

A nest 13 mi. S of Agate, Sioux Co., held 7 eggs on 24 May 2005. On 3 June, 2 eggs and 5 small young were present (WM).

**Clark's Nutcracker** A flock of 40-50 birds over-wintered in the area of Sowbelly and Monroe Canyons in the Pine Ridge north of Harrison, Sioux Co. They were observed on 11 occasions by several observers 28 Dec 2004 to 14 June 2005.

On 18 May, nest-building by a pair was observed for 1/2 hr in Monroe Canyon, although the nest itself was not seen (SJD). A pair was observed in East Monroe Canyon near the above nest-building site on 6 occasions 22 May to 14 June, but no further evidence of breeding was found (WM). Whether the nesting attempt was ultimately successful is unknown.

While nest-building normally occurs in mid-late March, the late activity noted on 18 May might be explained by the almost complete failure of the Ponderosa Pine cone crop for several years (possibly due to the 5-year drought) and the inability of the invading flock to find and store an adequate supply of seeds, usually a prerequisite for successful nesting (Diana F. Tomback, pers. com.).

**Horned Lark** Although a breeder statewide, there are few fully documented reports. A fledged young bird was noted 5 mi. N, 1 mi. W of Ames, Dodge Co., on 16 April 2005 (DP).

On 14 June 2005 a fledged young bird was seen with adults 5 mi. S of Harrison, Sioux Co., while nearby on the same date a nest with 3 eggs was found (WM).

**Tree Swallow** A nest with well-feathered young was found on 14 June 2005 at Smith Lake, Sheridan Co., 22 mi. S of Rushville (WM).

Adults were seen delivering food to a nest at Lake Minatare, Scotts Bluff Co., on 9 July 2005 (KD).

**Violet-green Swallow** An incubating female allowed herself to be pushed gently far enough to one side to allow sight of her eggs but refused to leave her nest in West Ash Canyon, 11 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 16 June 2005 (WM).

**Bank Swallow** Part of a dryland colony 6 mi. SSW of Harrison, Sioux Co., was abandoned this year due to partial collapse of the blowout bank, but egg-laying had just begun in some of the remaining holes by 3 June 2005 (WM).

- Barn Swallow** A pair successfully raised 2 broods 5 mi. SE of Gibbon, Buffalo Co., with young fledging on 24 June 2005 and again on 3 August (LR, RH).
- Black-capped Chickadee** Despite a decline in numbers in parts of the state, a nest with several recently-hatched young was found in Monroe Canyon, 7 mi. NNW of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 15 June 2005 (WM).
- White-breasted Nuthatch** A nest with eggs was found on the floor of West Ash Canyon, 11 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 23 May 2005 (WM).
- Pygmy Nuthatch** Nest building was noted in a pine snag beside the road in Sowbelly Canyon 4 mi. NE of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 23 April 2005. On 22 May seven eggs were being incubated and on 3 June young birds were present in the nest (WM).
- Carolina Wren** Nest building appeared to be complete by 17 March 2005 on a front-porch nest in Bellevue, Sarpy Co. The first egg appeared on 28 March (AR).
- Sedge Wren** Tallgrass prairie researchers at the WCT, Hall Co., discovered several nests from late May through July 2005, extending the known range of breeding dates in the state. Previously reported breeding dates have been in August, with only a single July date noted (SS).
- Eastern Bluebird** A clutch of 4 eggs was found in a nest box on 14 April 2005, 5 mi. N, 1 mi. W of Ames, Dodge Co. Other nearby nest boxes had young hatching on 22 May and 6 July (JP).
- Mountain Bluebird** Roadside nest boxes 3 mi. NE of Harrison, Sioux Co., held 2,3 & 4 eggs on 22 May 2005 (WM).  
Another roadside nest box 15 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., held 6 eggs on 23 May 2005 (WM).
- Swainson's Thrush** Singing, territorial birds were again present in West Ash Canyon 11 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., in mid-June 2005, but a nest search in the area was unsuccessful (WM).
- American Robin** A vigorous, multi-species defense led the observer to a nest 10 ft. up a pine in West Ash Canyon 11 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 23 May 2005. However, the newly-emptied nest had just furnished a meal to a 58-in. bull snake which was removed from the tree, measured, and released (WM).
- American Redstart** A very cooperative female put in the final nest lining while an observer snapped pictures from 8 ft. away on 23 May 2005 in West Ash Canyon, Dawes Co. On 16 June the nest held 3 eggs (WM).  
Another nearby nest was also under construction on 23 May, while a third was being completed on 16 June (WM).
- Lark Sparrow** A bird was flushed from a nest with 6 eggs on 4 June 2005, located 6 1/2 mi E, 3 mi. S of Ericson, Wheeler Co. (LR,RH).
- Grasshopper Sparrow** Dozens of nests were found during tallgrass prairie research at WCT, Hall Co. Young were noted in nests 2 June - 26 July 2005 (DHK, CW, BS, AL).
- Henslow's Sparrow** Following the first discovery of nests in the state last year (Kim, in press), several more nests were found this year at WCT, Hall Co., with eggs noted 9 July 2005, and young in the nests noted 17-28 July (DHK, AL, BS).
- McCown's Longspur** An adult fed a just-fledged young bird that was capable of 4- to 6-ft. flights in a sparsely vegetated area 4 mi. S of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 14 June 2005. Movement in the background about 40 ft. away revealed a young Swift Fox peeking out of its den (WM).

- Rose-breasted Grosbeak** A nest with 4 eggs at the edge of Ashland, Saunders Co., was being incubated by the male when first observed on 29 May 2005. The female was on incubation duty the following day (WM).
- Black-headed Grosbeak** A nest with 4 eggs and 2 just-hatched young was found in West Ash Canyon 11 mi. SE of Crawford, Dawes Co., on 16 June 2005. Another nest nearby held a clutch of 3 eggs on the same date (WM).
- Blue Grosbeak** A pair was observed feeding young in a nest ~7 mi. S of Gering, Scotts Bluff Co., on 18 July 2005. The pair was observed occupying the same nest on 1 August, and on 11 August they were again noted feeding young. Young from the second clutch fledged on 20 August (AK).
- Dickcissel** Numerous nests were found at WCT, Hall Co., with egg dates ranging from 23 June to 26 July 2005 (BS, AL, SS).
- Bobolink** Dozens of nests were found during a tallgrass prairie ecological study at WCT, Hall Co. Egg dates ranged from 27 May to 19 June 2005 (AL, BS).
- Brewer's Blackbird** A nest in a colony of 4 to 6 pairs 14 mi. S of Chadron, Dawes Co., held 6 eggs on 24 May 2005 (WM).  
Two nests 12 mi. E of Harrison, Sioux Co., held 2 & 6 eggs on 24 May 2005. There were 6 to 10 pairs in the colony (WM).  
A colony of only 2 pairs was noted 5 mi. S of Harrison, Sioux Co., on 14 June 2005. The single nest found held 6 eggs (WM).
- Great-tailed Grackle** Nest-building was underway in a new colony 3 mi. SW of Waverly, Lancaster Co., on 5 May 2005. On 9 May two nests held 2 & 3 eggs (WM).

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