


12-2005

Suggested Areas for Study

William F. Rapp Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev>

 Part of the [Ornithology Commons](#), [Poultry or Avian Science Commons](#), and the [Zoology Commons](#)

Rapp, William F. Jr., "Suggested Areas for Study" (2005). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 1131.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev/1131>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska Bird Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR STUDY

William F. Rapp, Jr.
87 South Main Street
Pittsford, NY 14534

[Editor's Note: William F. Rapp, Jr., served as editor of *The Nebraska Bird Review* from 1948 to 1955. A New Jersey native with a strong interest in birding and an educational background (Rutgers University and the University of Illinois) in entomology, geology and ecology, Bill came to Nebraska in 1947 to accept a teaching position at Doane College in Crete. He joined the NOU in 1948 and not only took on the editor's job almost immediately, but contributed many articles to the publication. In 1952, he left Doane for the Nebraska Department of Health, working there as a medical entomologist in the area of mosquito and tick control. Bill retired in 1985 and now lives in the Finger Lakes region of New York. His interest in birds continues, as does his research, most recently on spiders and terrestrial isopods.]

After 100 years of organized ornithology we have a good picture of the bird fauna of Nebraska. Yes, we will still be able to add new species to the state list, but this will become more and more difficult. What problems are left for the amateur ornithologist to solve? Nebraska is a big state with many different ecological areas, few of which have been studied in detail. Only a few areas of the state have been well studied. Not only do we need data on what species occur, but how many. This type of study can be done by amateur ornithologists. In fact many of the outstanding field studies done in this country and Canada have been done by amateur ornithologists.

What does such a study require? A good field study requires a desire to do a good job, good study design, good field notes, and time. By time, I mean that it can't be done in a hurry. A good field study requires several years so that you can get data under various conditions. It is not necessary to spend every day in the field, but spending 12 to 20 days a year in the area will yield good data.

I have selected four areas in which over the years I have done fieldwork on insects and ticks. However, these areas would be excellent for ornithological study. The data from such a study would be a major contribution to the ornithology of Nebraska.

SOUTHEAST RICHARDSON COUNTY

This area is in the extreme southeastern part of the state. The area is south of the Big Nemaha River, west of the Missouri River, and north of the Kansas-Nebraska state line. This is a very hilly area with a well-developed oak-hickory-walnut woodland. For many years this area was heavily timbered, especially during the steamboat era. Today it is good second growth woodland with a good

understory of shrubs and herbaceous plants. Very little timbering has been done in the last 60 to 70 years. Also in this area are some old field woodlands. There is a limited amount of farming, as most of the area is too hilly for modern-day agriculture. From the historical point of view this area was settled early in the Nebraska Territorial period. This area has a low population density, although more and more people are building summer homes here now. The area is easy to reach from Omaha and Lincoln. From Rulo there is a good road leading to the area and a number of dirt roads and trails leading into the woodland. A topographic map of the area is available.

What is there for the ornithologist? In the spring it is a stopover for warblers. The late William Youngworth told me that he believed that it might be a resting area during the spring hawk migration. We could also expand our knowledge of the birds which may breed in this area, such as Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler and Scarlet Tanager. I believe that a good study of this area would yield some interesting ornithological data.

BIG BLUE VALLEY BARNESTON TO SEWARD

Over the years major ecological changes have taken place in the Big Blue River Valley. This narrow river valley with its well-developed flood plain woodland is an ecological island in the tall grass prairie. It has been said that at one time the Big Blue River had more hydroelectric plants than any other river system in the United States. Starting in 1910 a series of 10 hydroelectric plants was constructed between Barneston and Seward. By the 1960s all were gone. (See Rapp & Beranek, 1984, pp. 77-83 for locations.) At many of the plants, the dams resulted in large ponds which attracted large numbers of waterfowl.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s when I was teaching ornithology at Doane College, field trips to Casteel's Dam north of Crete offered a wide variety of ducks, and one morning a large flock of American White Pelicans. Another morning we saw a large flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the cattail marsh. Today all of the dams are gone or have been bypassed except the one at Barneston where there still is a hydroelectric plant. Today the Big Blue River is a slow-moving, silt-laden stream, and there are many floodplain woodlands with a good understory of shrubs and herbaceous plants between Barneston and Seward. In some areas there are old-field woodlands. This narrow river valley has over the years developed an interesting bird fauna and supports a number of species not found in the tall grass prairies. A detailed study of this area would yield good data on the importance to bird populations of river valleys in grassland areas.

NORTHERN SIOUX COUNTY OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLAND

Approximately 16 miles north of Harrison is a large short grass prairie region of the Oglala National Grassland. This is ranching country with a very low population. There are many small streams, most of which dry up in the summer.

The area has seldom been visited by bird students. Being in the short grass prairie biome, it does not support many species, and bird populations are thought to be low. However, in this area one might find western species; the flora is similar to what one finds in eastern Wyoming. Unfortunately this area is very isolated and roads are not the best. A good study of this area could yield important data on the bird populations in the short grass prairie.

DUNDY COUNTY

Dundy County, located in the southwestern part of the state, is an ecotone between the high plains and the short grass prairie. Benkelman is the county seat, with an estimated 2003 population of 962. The county is a semi-dry area of large wheat farms and ranches.

The Republican River flows west to east across the southern part of the county. Prior to 1950 this was an uncontrolled river with large sandy flood plains. Today it is controlled and its sandbars are becoming overgrown with sandbar willow and more permanent trees. In a normal year the river discharge varies greatly, with the major discharge in the spring. During the summer the flow is very low because most of the water is diverted for irrigation.

For the ornithologist, the Republican River valley is the most interesting area in Dundy County. Several questions need to be answered: What type of bird population does the Republican support, both in winter and summer? Is this an area where some species stop over during spring or fall migration? If so, can we add to our understanding of its use by 'Western' migrants? Does the area support a breeding population, and if so, of what species and how large?

If one looks at a topographic map of the Republican River valley, one will see that there are many small creeks which flow into the river. There are many wooden bridges which should be examined for nesting phoebes. The area north of the Republican valley is mostly agricultural and does not support a high bird population. However, this area should be investigated to create a record of species and populations.

REFERENCES:

Rapp, William F. and Susan K. Beranek. *The Industrial Archeology of Nebraska*. Crete, Nebraska, J. B. Publishing Co., 1984.