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In Nebraska, Greater Sage-Grouse has been considered an uncommon casual winter visitor in the extreme northwest (Sharpe et al. 2001). This species may now be extirpated in Nebraska due to habitat loss. There have been no known Nebraska observations of Greater Sage-Grouse in the last 25 years. The only documented record accepted by the NOURC of Greater Sage-Grouse in Nebraska (Accession #243) is a description of an adult male in September 1987 in extreme northwest Sioux County by Douglas Kapke (Grenon AG. 1990).

In 2002 Wayne Mollhoff received the following record from Levi L. Mohler and submitted it to the NOURC in 2011.

As a biologist for the Game, Forestation and Parks Commission (1941-1954), I worked first with Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse, but I was curious to see if Nebraska also had Greater Sage-Grouse. On several trips to northwest Sioux County, I interviewed ranchers, some of whom had seen sage grouse farther west, in Wyoming, not in Nebraska.

Until 1951 I had failed to find Sage-Grouse in Nebraska. Then, on the early morning of Thursday, April 12, 1951, I saw a large male Sage-Grouse in full display directly in front of me on a country road in northern Sioux County. Several Sharp-tailed Grouse were nearby.

The Sage-Grouse displayed for a few minutes. Then, seeming disturbed, it took flight to the southeast, disappearing perhaps a mile away. I was driving from west to east when the Sage-Grouse was first seen. Ardmore, South Dakota, could be seen from near this location.

Besides the male Greater Sage-Grouse, I also saw twenty Sharp-tailed Grouse and over fifty antelope in northern Sioux County during the morning drive, which began and ended at Crawford. I began the morning's drive before sunrise.

Upon receiving this record from Mollhoff in 2011, I tried to contact Mohler for more information about this sighting. Unfortunately, after searching the internet, I found that he had passed away in April 2003 at the age of 94 years. During this research, I discovered that Mohler was at the forefront of studies in wildlife ecology in Nebraska and had published numerous papers on grouse, prairie-chickens, pheasants, and big game. Additionally, from his online obituary, I found that he had kept a daily diary for 65 years. Seeking possible additional information on the Sage-Grouse record, I contacted one of his two daughters regarding this diary. She contacted her sister, who had possession of the diary, and I was sent a photocopy of Mohler's hand-written April 12, 1951, diary entry which reads in part:

"Thurs. Up early + into N W Sioux County. Saw 20 sharptailed grouse, 1 sage hen, + over 50 antelope. Ate breakfast in gulch S of Ardmore, then returned to Ogallala"

The Greater Sage-Grouse record was reviewed by the 2011 Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (Accession #1431). This record was classified as Class IV, meaning the identification is probably correct but not beyond reasonable doubt. This was due to the fact that it contained no detailed description of the bird, a necessity for approval of written records (Brogie MA. 2011). Despite the submitted record lacking details, there is no doubt that Mohler was an expert in upland game birds, which, coupled with his hand-written diary account, provides tantalizing evidence to support one of the last known accounts of a Greater Sage-Grouse in Nebraska.

Literature Cited:

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- Sharpe RS, Silcock WR, Jorgensen JG. 2001. Birds of Nebraska: their distribution and temporal occurrence. Lincoln (NE): University of Nebraska Press.