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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
H. G. Gould, Acting Director, Lincoln

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NEBRASKA BIRDS

Compiled by
Nebraska State Board of Agriculture
Department of Publicity

The material for this study outline on Nebraska birds has been largely borrowed from a treatise on Nebraska birds prepared by the late Prof. Lawrence Bruner of the University of Nebraska. Grateful acknowledgment is also made for help given by Dr. Robert H. Wolcott, Professor of zoology at the University of Nebraska.

Nebraska A Good Home For Birds

As many as 430 different kinds of birds have been found within the border of the state. Of these, about 220 are definitely known to have nested in the state. During the winter months more than a hundred have been recorded. Others leave in the fall for the warmer South to return with the advent of spring.

Food Habits

There is much to be learned concerning the migration, nesting, moulting, songs and peculiar ways of living among the different birds that may be seen in our groves, along the streams, on the prairies and about the hedge rows and garden patches but the most important feature connected with their lives is their food habits. For it is by what they eat that birds can and do make themselves of so much value to us.

Family Characteristics

Of course, birds are of different colors, sizes and forms, and have their beaks, feet, wings, and tails so made as to conform to the uses for which they are intended. The woodpeckers, for example, have hard, chisel-like beaks for cutting holes in the bark and wood. At the same time their tail feathers are stiff and pointed so as to be of use as props for holding the birds in place while they are busily engaged at nest-making or digging for borers. In like manner, their long tongues are barbed so as to spear and drag forth the worms when they are reached. The short, sturdy beaks of the sparrows and their relatives are likewise suited for cracking the many kinds of seeds eaten by these birds in winter, as well as for crushing such insects as are eaten by parents or fed to their young during the winter.

Birds are Useful

They can be useful in many ways. They can carry the seeds of different plants from one place to another and aid in starting new timber in which human and domestic animals may find shelter from the cold in winter and the oppressive heat in summer. They plant seeds of shrubs by the wayside. They carry the spawn of fishes and small crustaceans on their feet into new waters. They feed on the countless millions of weed seeds that are scattered broadcast over fields, meadows, pastures and prairies. Some birds live almost entirely upon insects. Others hunt out and destroy such small animals as mice, ground squirrels and gophers. Others act as scavengers by helping to remove things that would be injurious to human health. We are further indebted to them for the cheer they provide with their gay songs, their bright plumage and pleasant manners. The birds form a carefully planned army of police that is engaged in keeping things in nature about us balanced. A great

many kinds provide humans with excellent food. Others furnish downy feathers for making soft pillows and warm coverlids.

Some Birds are Harmful

Quite a number of birds are continually doing things we call wrong. Some of them steal cherries, puncture grapes, peck apples and pull up corn. Some rob the nests of other birds and kill young birds and little chickens. The crows and the pheasants are accused of stealing grain. Some carry and distribute lice and spread hog cholera, their accusers charge. Some of these crimes are genuine and are to be regretted. Others are more imaginary than real. After all that can be said in favor of and against the usefulness of birds in general, there can be but little doubt left in the minds of thinking and observing people as to the value of these creatures. Only ignorant and thoughtless people will continue to destroy our birds indiscriminately after learning the facts about them.

Millions of Insects Destroyed

In nearly every case where the food habits of our birds have been carefully studied, it is found that the good done far exceeds the possible harm that might be inflicted by our birds. Allowing 25 insects per day as an average diet for each individual bird, and estimating that we have about one and one-half birds to the acre, or in round numbers 75,000,000 birds in Nebraska, there would be required 1,875,000 insects for each day's ration. Again, estimating the number of insects required to fill a bushel at 120,000, it would take 15,625 bushels of insects to feed our birds for a single day, or 2,343,750 bushels for 150 days. These examples are very low when we take into account the number of insects that various kinds of birds have been known to destroy in a single day. For example, the stomach of four chickadees contained 1,028 eggs of cankerworms. Four others contained about 600 eggs and 105 mature females of the same insect. The stomach of a single quail contained 101 potato-bettles and that of another upward of 500 chinch-bugs. A yellow-billed cuckoo shot at six in the morning had 43 tent caterpillars in his stomach. A robin had eaten 175 larvae of Bibio which feed upon the roots of grasses.

Natural Bird Food

Birds, like all other animals, feed upon that food which is most readily obtained, hence the insectivorous kinds destroy those insects which are the most numerous--the injurious species. Likewise, the seed-eaters subsist largely upon the seeds of our common weeds.

Explanatory: In the following outline the native birds of Nebraska are listed. With few exceptions, only those birds are listed that nest in the state.

Diving Birds

Family---Grebes. At least 15 varieties of Grebes are known in Nebraska. The best known are the Horned, Eared and Red-billed. These named breed within the state and at least two are found in large numbers in the lake regions.

Family---Gulls and Terns. There are 7 kinds of Gulls to be found at different times of the year. The Ring-billed is the only one that may breed in this state. Other varieties are more or less migrants.

There are 5 varieties of Terns. The Forster breeds abundantly in the lake region of Cherry county. The young of the least are found along the Missouri river, on basins in the interior and on sandbars of the Niobrara. The Black breeds in great number in Cherry county.

Family--Cormornats. The Double-crested is not a common migrant that has been found at West Point, Omaha, Lincoln, Nebraska City, York, Beatrice, Neligh and in Cherry county.

Family--Pelicans. Two species have been seen in the state. The White is rather common and the Brown rare. Neither breeds in the state.

Family--Ducks and Geese. There are about 39 varieties. The Hooded Merganser is common and breeds along streams and in timbered canyons. The Mallard is abundant and breeds in all places of the state. The Gadwall is found all over the state but breeds in the sandhills region. Green-winged Teal is common and has been seen the year around. Blue-winged Teal is common in all parts of the state. The Shoveller is a summer resident and quite common. The Pintail is the first to arrive in the spring and the last to leave in the fall. The Canvasback is an irregular migrant, some years abundant, other years scarce. The Ruddy is very common and rears its young in the sandhills. The Trumpeter Swan was once a breeder in the sandhills. He was never common and is now rare. The Canada Goose is found along the Platte and Missouri rivers during all ordinary winters.

Family--Herons, Bitterns, etc. The Bittern is quite common, breeding every where in suitable locations. The Least Bittern is a resident of the eastern part of the state. The Great Blue Heron is frequently seen along streams throughout the state. The Snowy Heron is rare and only a few of her nests have been found in the state. The Black-crowned Night Heron is a common migrant over the whole state.

Family--Cranes. There are three varieties of these birds. The Sandhill is the only variety known to nest in the state. It breeds sparingly in the sandhills region.

Family--Rails, Gallinules and Coots. There are 8 varieties. The King Rail is a summer resident in the eastern third of the state. At times of the year the Virginia Rail is abundant. It raises its family in the northern part of the state and in the sandhills region. It has been found breeding near Lincoln. The Carolina Rail is an abundant migrant, nesting in the eastern part of the state. The Florida Gallinule is a common but locally distributed summer resident in southeastern Nebraska. Coots are common everywhere in the state where reedy sloughs and ponds are found.

Shore Birds

Family--Phalaropes. The Wilson Phalarope is an abundant migrant throughout the state and a common breeder in the sandhills.

Family--Avocets and Stilts. The Avocet is a sandhills region breeder but as a migrant is found over the whole state. The Blacknecked Stilt is a straggler but may possibly breed in western Nebraska.

Family--Snipes, Sandpipes, etc. Twenty-seven varieties. The Woodcock is a rare migrant, breeding along the bottom lands of the Missouri river. The Solitary Sandpiper is recorded as a migrant from all parts of the state. The Western Willet was formerly rarely seen with its young about the lakes in the sandhills region. The Spotted Sandpiper is found in both northern and southern Nebraska and raises its young in both sections. The Long-billed Curlew was formerly a common breeder from the sandhills northwest and still is found there but is now rare. The Jack Snipe is common in the state but does not raise its young here.

Family--Plover. The Belted Piping Plover is found along the rivers of the state and makes its nest on sandbars. The Killdeer is an abundant migrant and breeder over a large portion of the state.

Gallinaceous Birds

Family--Grouse, Partridge, Etc. On account of the protection afforded, the Bob-white can be found over the entire state. The Ruffed Grouse is confined to the wooded portions of the state and is rare. The Prairie Shar-tailed Grouse is the common game bird of the sandhills. The Prairie Hen is found over the entire state. The Sage Grouse is rare but breeds in Sioux county.

Family--Pheasants and Turkeys. The Chinese or Ring-necked Pheasant is the bird commonly found in central and northern Nebraska. It was planted here beginning about 1910 and has become very common. The present population of these birds is estimated at a million. Wild Turkeys used to be abundant throughout the wooded portions of the state. They are now very rare if present at all.

Columbae

Family--Doves and Pigeons. The Mourning Dove is so common over all the state it is listed with the game birds. The common pigeon is not listed as a wild bird.

Birds of Prey

Family--Vultures, Falcons, Hawks, Eagles, Etc. Thirty-six varieties. The Turkey Vulture is found over the whole state but is more common westward. The Swallow-tailed Kite is common to the eastern part of the state. The Sharp-shinned Hawk is a common bird and has been known to remain here all winter. The Cooper Hawk has habits akin to the Sharp-shinned. Other hawks coming to Nebraska and breeding here are Red-tailed, Krider, Red-shouldered, Swainson, Broad-winged and Sparrow. The Golden Eagle is common westward but found in moderate numbers throughout the state in winter. The Osprey is a regular migrant, found mostly along the Missouri river. The Prairie Falcon is found over the entire state, breeds in Sioux and Dawes counties.

Family--Barn Owls. The common Barn Owls are found over the entire eastern portion of the state.

Family--Owls. There are 15 varieties. The Short-eared Owl is common in all parts of the state and is often found in flocks. The Screech Owl is the most abundant and is generally distributed over the state. Other varieties common to the state and raising their young here are Barred, Saw-whet, American Long-eared, Great Horned, Western Horned and Burrowing.

Family--Cuckoos. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is a summer resident and breeder in the eastern part of the state but specimens have been seen along the Niobrara river and in Valley, Holt and Cherry counties. The Black-billed is found over the entire state but is not a common bird here.

Family--Kingfishers. The Belted Kingfisher is common to the entire state and may be found all winter when there is open water.

Pica

Family--Woodpeckers, Etc. There are 15 varieties belonging to this family to be seen in Nebraska. The Hairy Woodpecker is a resident of the eastern part of the state. The Rocky Mountain Hairy Woodpecker is a resident in Sioux County. The Northern Downy is a common resident in the eastern third of the state. The Lewis Woodpecker lives and breeds in the pine covered canyons. The Red-bellied Woodpecker is found in southeastern Nebraska. The Red-headed is perhaps the most common of all and is found in abundance in the state. There are two varieties of the Flickers--Northern and Red-shafted. The former is common over the entire state, the later only westward.

Family--Nighthawks. The Eastern Nighthawk lives only in the extreme eastern part of the state. The Howell and Sennett Nighthawks are found only in the western part of the state and the latter raises its young in Sioux County.

Family--Swifts. The Chimney Swift is found only in the eastern part of the state. The White-throated Swift lives and raises its family in the bluffs of Sioux, Scotts Bluff and Dawes Counties.

Family--Hummingbirds. The only species known to breed in eastern Nebraska is the Ruby-throated. It is common to the ravines of the Missouri river bluffs. The Broad-tailed is a rare breeder westward.

Perching Birds

Family--Flycatchers. There are 15 varieties. The Kingbird and the Arkansas Kingbird are common to all parts of the state. The Great Crested Flycatcher is a resident and breeder along the Missouri river. The Phoebe is found from the eastern part to Cherry County. The Wood Pewee is a summer resident and breeds only in the eastern edge of the state. The Acadian is found only in eastern Nebraska but the Traill Flycatcher is found in all parts of the state. The Least Flycatcher is rare and found only in eastern Nebraska.

Family--Larks. Four varieties. The Prairie Horned is common in eastern and southeastern parts of the state. The Desert Horned is a western bird.

Family--Jays, Crows, Magpies, Etc. The Blue Jay is a resident of the entire state. A few remain all winter. Magpies were formerly present over the entire state but now are restricted to the northwest section. The Crow is a resident along the Pine Ridge and spends his winters here.

Family--Blackbirds, Orioles and Meadowlarks. Fourteen varieties. The Bobolink is found in all parts of the state but in greater numbers in the sandhills lake region. The Cowbird is abundant all over the state. The Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds are common in all parts of the state. The latter resides and raises its young in the vicinity of marsh ground, while the former is found only along the larger bodies of water. The Orchard Oriole and the Baltimore Oriole reside in great numbers in eastern Nebraska but are found as far west and north as Valentine. The Bronzed Grackle is an abundant resident and breeder over the entire state. The Western Meadowlark (Nebraska's State Bird) is abundant throughout the state.

Family--Finches, Sparrows and Grosbeaks. About 67 varieties. The Goldfinch is an abundant resident in the southeastern portion of the state. There are

at least 29 varieties called Sparrows in Nebraska. Those that breed in the state are: English, perhaps the most abundant of all; the Vesper, common to the eastern edge of the state; the Western Vesper, residing in the western part of the state; the Western Grasshopper, a resident of all the state; the Lark, Western Lark, Chipping, Clay-colored, Field, Swamp, Song. All of these except the Clay-colored and the Song raise their young in different parts of the state. There are 7 different kinds of so-called Grosbeaks. Three kinds are common and breed here--Rose-breasted in the eastern part; Black-headed, in the western part; and Western Blue, common to all the state. The Eastern Tohee lives in eastern Nebraska, the Artic Tohee in western Nebraska. There are 4 varieties in Buntings. Three kinds breed in the state. The Lark is common to the entire state. The Laxuli is common in Sioux County. The Indigo is more common in the eastern part. The Chestnut-collared Longspur and the McCown Longspur are residents of the state and raise their young here. The Cardinal is most common in the eastern and southern parts of the state. It raises its young with us and remains all winter.

Family--Tanagers. The Louisiana Tanager lives and raises its young in the Pine Ridge Country. The Scarlet Tanager is a summer visitor in the eastern section and rears its young here.

Family--Swallows. Seven varieties. The Purple Martin is common only in the eastern to central part of the state. The Cliff, Bar, Tree and Bank Swallows are common to the entire state. Their names indicate their nesting habits. The Violet-green Swallow breeds in the cliffs of Sioux County. The Rough-winged lives in the eastern part.

Family--Vireos. Ten varieties. The Red-eye is common to all the state. The Western Warbling and Plumbeous reside in Sioux County. The Warbling Yellow-throated, White-eyed and Bell are found in the eastern part.

Family--Wood Warblers. There are 48 varieties. The Oven Bird, the Water Thrush, the Yellow-throat, the Chat and Redstart all belong to the Warbler family. Eighteen varieties of Warblers have been known to make their nests and raise families in Nebraska. Along the Missouri there are Black and White, Prothonotary, Bluewinged, Nashville Cerulean, Chestnut-sided, Kentucky and Mourning. In Sioux County lives the Audubon. The Oven Bird is common to the entire state. The Grinnell Water Thrush is known to nest only westward in the state. The Louisiana Water Thrush lives only in the eastern part. The Northern Yellow-throat breeds in eastern Nebraska and the Western Yellow-throat in the western part. The Yellow-breasted Chat lives and rears its young in eastern Nebraska generally. The Long-tailed Clat is common over the western part of the state. The Redstart is an abundant breeder and a summer resident in all parts of the state.

Family--Pipits. There are two varieties, the Eastern and the Sprague. They are visitors and do not raise their young here.

Family--Thrasher and Mockers. The Brown Thrasher, whose liquid notes are a delight to the ear, is common over the state. The Sage Thrasher is rare and found only in the extreme west. The Catbird is common to all the state and so is the Mocking Bird, represented westwardly by the variety known as the Western Mocking Bird.

Family--Wrens. There are 8 varieties. The Western House Wren is the most common and is common to all sections of the state. The Rock Wren is found in the Blue Ridge country, and the Long-billed Marsh is a resident of the sandhills and of eastern Nebraska.

Family--Creepers. The Brown Creeper lives in the eastern part of the state in the winter. The Rocky Mountain is a winter resident, found in Sioux county.

Family--Nuthatches. Four varieties. Only two breed in Nebraska. The White-bellied is found in the greater part of the state and the Rocky Mountain in Sioux county.

Family--Titmice. The Chickadee and the Tufted Titmouse are the only birds of this family to breed in the state. The Longtailed Chickadee is common to the entire state.

Family--Kinglets and Gnatcatchers. The Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher is a common migrant and also lives during the summer in the eastern part of the state. It breeds only along the Missouri river but has been seen as far west and north as Neligh.

Family--Thrushes, Blue Birds and Solitaires. There are 6 birds called Thrushes that live in Nebraska but only the Wood Thrush raises its young here. It is common to the entire state. The Townsend Solitaire is a resident of northwest Nebraska.

The Robin belongs to this family and is a welcome visitor all over the state. A Robin that breeds only in Sioux county is known as the Western Robin. The Bluebird is found throughout the state. He is abundant eastward but rare westward. The Mountain Bluebird is common in Sioux and Dawes counties and breeds in the Pine Ridge country.