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# Historic Birds of Lincoln's Salt Basin Wetlands and Nine-mile Prairie

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# Historic Birds of Lincoln's Salt Basin Wetlands and Nine-mile Prairie\*

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The changes that have occurred in the bird life of the Lincoln area during the past century must certainly be great, but we have little evidence to document this point. There is, however, an annotated bird list from 1900 for the salt basin wetlands of western Lincoln, an area then gradually being developed for recreational use. This list was published by J. S. Hunter in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union* (1900, 18–21). At this time, the recently impounded but still saline lake was 2 to 3 feet deep, and it covered about two hundred acres (roughly half its present size). Hunter reported that some 84 species (by modern taxonomy) had been seen by him and other bird-club members, including such modern-day rarities as the Whooping Crane, Least Tern, Piping Plover, and Trumpeter Swan.

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That the now extremely rare Black Duck was "uncommon" and, contrariwise, that the Wood Duck was already "frequent" is surprising. Similarly surprising, the Hooded Merganser was the most common of the three merganser species. Nearly all the birds on this list are water birds and shorebirds. The recent establishment of a small wetland nature sanctuary at the east end of Capitol Beach should help restore some of the marsh-dependent species that once occurred there, such as the rails and herons.

In 1940 a list of 86 (85 by current taxonomy) species of birds reported from what is now called Nine-Mile Prairie was published by D. B. Whelen (*Nebraska Bird Review*, 8:50–55). These species, of course, are nearly all upland birds, so the two lists scarcely overlap and collectively offer an excellent idea of both upland and lowland bird species occurring in the Lincoln area prior to World War II. Missing from the list are such late-appearing species in eastern Nebraska as the European Starling and House Finch, and even the certainly already-present Rock Dove is missing. The Cliff and Tree Swallows are also missing, as is the Greater Prairie-Chicken, which by 1940 was already becoming rare in eastern Nebraska. Burrowing Owls, however, have apparently not bred in Lancaster County since the 1960s, and the Blue Grosbeak that was once seen at the prairie is now quite rare in the county. Sedge Wrens, now known to nest at Nine-mile Prairie, are lacking from the list, but were first reported nesting in Nebraska near Salt Basin as early as 1902. The American Woodcock, a fairly recent arrival in Lancaster County and a species that has sometimes been either seen or heard on the prairie, is also missing. The Sora Rail was almost certainly present but simply overlooked at the Salt Basin in 1900. The King Rail has also been found there in recent years, and the Common Moorhen has nested.

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The following list includes those species reported in either or both summaries, with notes on their relative frequency at the stated times:

Common Loon [*Gavia immer*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Pied-billed Grebe [*Podilymbus podiceps*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Horned Grebe [*Podiceps auritus*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Eared Grebe [*Podiceps nigricollis*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
American White Pelican [*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Double-crested Cormorant [*Phalacrocorax auritus*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
American Bittern [*Botaurus lentiginosus*]. Common at Salt Basin, also reported at prairie.  
Least Bittern [*Ixobrychus exilis*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Great Blue Heron [*Ardea herodias*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Snowy Egret [*Egretta thula*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Little Blue Heron [*Egretta caerulea*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Green Heron [*Butorides virescens*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Black-crowned Night-Heron [*Nycticorax nycticorax*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Greater White-fronted Goose [*Anser albifrons*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Snow Goose [*Chen caerulescens*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Canada Goose [*Branta canadensis*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Trumpeter Swan [*Cygnus buccinator*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Tundra Swan [*Cygnus columbianus*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Wood Duck [*Aix sponsa*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Gadwall [*Anas strepera*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
American Wigeon [*Anas americana*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
American Black Duck [*Anas rubripes*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Mallard [*Anas platyrhynchos*]. Common at Salt Basin.

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Blue-winged Teal [*Anas discors*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Cinnamon Teal [*Anas cyanoptera*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Northern Shoveler [*Anas clypeata*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Northern Pintail [*Anas acuta*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Green-winged Teal [*Anas crecca*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Canvasback [*Aythya valisineria*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Redhead [*Aythya americana*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Ring-necked Duck [*Aythya collaris*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Lesser Scaup [*Aythya affinis*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Surf Scoter [*Melanitta perspicillata*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
White-winged Scoter [*Melanitta fusca*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Black Scoter [*Melanitta nigra*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Bufflehead [*Bucephala albeola*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Common Goldeneye [*Bucephala clangula*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Hooded Merganser [*Lophodytes cucullatus*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Common Merganser [*Mergus merganser*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Red-breasted Merganser [*Mergus serrator*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Ruddy Duck [*Oxyura jamaicensis*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Northern Harrier [*Circus cyaneus*]. Nest found at prairie.  
Sharp-shinned Hawk [*Accipiter striatus*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Swainson's Hawk [*Buteo swainsoni*]. Seen during March and May at prairie.  
Red-tailed Hawk [*Buteo jamaicensis*]. Seen during March and May at prairie.  
American Kestrel [*Falco sparverius*]. Reported April and May at prairie.  
Ring-necked Pheasant [*Phasianus colchicus*]. Several seen at prairie.  
Northern Bobwhite [*Colinus virginianus*]. Seen in April and May at prairie.

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Virginia Rail [*Rallus limicola*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
American Coot [*Fulica americana*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Sandhill Crane [*Grus canadensis*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Whooping Crane [*Grus americana*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Black-bellied Plover [*Pluvialis squatarola*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
American Golden-Plover [*Pluvialis dominica*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Semipalmated Plover [*Charadrius semipalmatus*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Piping Plover [*Charadrius melodus*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Killdeer [*Charadrius vociferus*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
American Avocet [*Recurvirostra americana*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Greater Yellowlegs [*Tringa melanoleuca*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Lesser Yellowlegs [*Tringa flavipes*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Solitary Sandpiper [*Tringa solitaria*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Willet [*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Spotted Sandpiper [*Actitis macularia*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Upland Sandpiper [*Bartramia longicauda*]. Frequent at Salt Basin.  
Hudsonian Godwit [*Limosa haemastica*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Marbled Godwit [*Limosa fedoa*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Ruddy Turnstone [*Arenaria interpres*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Red Knot [*Calidris canutus*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Sanderling [*Calidris alba*]. Rare at Salt Basin.  
Semipalmated Sandpiper [*Calidris pusilla*]. Recorded at Salt Basin.  
White-rumped Sandpiper [*Calidris fuscicollis*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Baird's Sandpiper [*Calidris bairdii*]. Very common at Salt Basin.  
Pectoral Sandpiper [*Calidris melanotos*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Dunlin [*Calidris alpina*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.

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Stilt Sandpiper [*Calidris himantopus*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Buff-breasted Sandpiper [*Tryngites subruficollis*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Short-billed Dowitcher [*Limnodromus griseus*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Long-billed Dowitcher [*Limnodromus scolopaceus*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Common Snipe [*Gallinago gallinago*]. Infrequent at Salt Basin.  
Wilson's Phalarope [*Phalaropus tricolor*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Red-necked Phalarope [*Phalaropus lobatus*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Pomarine Jaeger [*Stercorarius pomarinus*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Franklin's Gull [*Larus pipixcan*]. Seen in May over prairie; common at Salt Basin.  
Laughing Gull [*Larus atricilla*]. Listed as "Frequent" at Salt Basin, but certainly a mis-identification, perhaps involving Franklin's Gull.  
Bonaparte's Gull [*Larus philadelphia*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Ring-billed Gull [*Larus delawarensis*]. Seen in May over prairie; uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Herring Gull [*Larus argentatus*]. Seen in May over prairie; rare at Salt Basin.  
Caspian Tern [*Sterna caspia*]. Very rare at Salt Basin.  
Forster's Tern [*Sterna forsteri*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Common Tern [*Sterna hirundo*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Least Tern [*Sterna antillarum*]. Uncommon at Salt Basin.  
Black Tern [*Chlidonias niger*]. Common at Salt Basin.  
Mourning Dove [*Zenaida macroura*]. Common at prairie.  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo [*Coccyzus americanus*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Barn Owl [*Tyto alba*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Eastern Screech-Owl [*Otus asio*]. Seen several times at prairie.

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Great Horned Owl [*Bubo virginianus*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Burrowing Owl [*Athene cunicularia*]. Seen in April at prairie.  
Long-eared Owl [*Asio otus*]. Seen several times at prairie.  
Short-eared Owl [*Asio flammeus*]. Seen in April and May at prairie.  
Chimney Swift [*Chaetura pelagica*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Red-headed Woodpecker [*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*]. Common at prairie.  
Downy Woodpecker [*Picoides pubescens*]. Seen commonly at prairie.  
Hairy Woodpecker [*Picoides villosus*]. Seen several times at prairie.  
Northern Flicker [*Colaptes auratus*]. Commonly seen at prairie.  
Olive-sided Flycatcher [*Contopus cooperi*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Least Flycatcher [*Empidonax minimus*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Eastern Phoebe [*Sayornis phoebe*]. Seen March to May at prairie.  
Great Crested Flycatcher [*Myiarchus crinitus*]. Heard during May at prairie.  
Western Kingbird [*Tyrannus verticalis*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Eastern Kingbird [*Tyrannus tyrannus*]. Seen May to August at prairie.  
Bell's Vireo [*Vireo bellii*]. Common in May at the prairie.  
Red-eyed Vireo [*Vireo olivaceus*]. Reported in May at prairie.  
Blue Jay [*Cyanocitta cristata*]. Seen spring and fall at prairie.  
Black-billed Magpie [*Pica pica*]. Seen once at prairie.  
American Crow [*Corvus brachyrhynchos*]. Commonly seen at prairie.  
Horned Lark [*Eremophila alpestris*]. Seen January to May at prairie.  
Purple Martin [*Progne subis*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow [*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*]. Seen once at prairie.  
Bank Swallow [*Riparia riparia*]. Seen April to May at prairie.  
Barn Swallow [*Hirundo rustica*]. Seen April to October at prairie.

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Black-capped Chickadee [*Poecile atricapillus*]. Commonly seen at prairie.  
Tufted Titmouse [*Baeolophus bicolor*]. Seen once at prairie.  
House Wren [*Troglodytes aedon*]. Nest found at prairie.  
Eastern Bluebird [*Sialia sialis*]. Seen March to May at prairie.  
Swainson's Thrush [*Catharus ustulatus*]. Seen once in May at prairie.  
American Robin [*Turdus migratorius*]. Few present in prairie and ravines.  
Gray Catbird [*Dumetella carolinensis*]. Common from May to September at prairie.  
Brown Thrasher [*Toxostoma rufum*]. Seen April to August at prairie.  
American Pipit [*Anthus rubescens*]. Seen September and October at prairie.  
Yellow Warbler [*Dendroica petechia*]. Common in May at prairie.  
Yellow-rumped Warbler [*Dendroica coronata*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Blackpoll Warbler [*Dendroica striata*]. Seen once in May prairie.  
American Redstart [*Setophaga ruticilla*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Common Yellowthroat [*Geothlypis trichas*]. Seen in April at prairie.  
Yellow-breasted Chat [*Icteria virens*]. Seen in May at prairie.  
Eastern Towhee [*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*]. Seen April to August at prairie.  
American Tree Sparrow [*Spizella arborea*]. Seen November to April at prairie.  
Chipping Sparrow [*Spizella passerina*]. Seen April and May at prairie.  
Clay-colored Sparrow [*Spizella pallida*]. Seen once in May at prairie.  
Field Sparrow [*Spizella pusilla*]. Seen April and May at prairie.

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Vesper Sparrow [*Pooecetes gramineus*]. Seen April and May at prairie.

Grasshopper Sparrow [*Ammodramus savannarum*]. Common nester at prairie.

Song Sparrow [*Melospiza melodia*]. Seen February to May at prairie.

White-throated Sparrow [*Zonotrichia albicollis*]. Seen in May at prairie.

Harris's Sparrow [*Zonotrichia querula*]. Common from October to May at prairie.

White-crowned Sparrow [*Zonotrichia leucophrys*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Dark-eyed Junco [*Junco hyemalis*]. Seen in November and in April at prairie.

Northern Cardinal [*Cardinalis cardinalis*]. Common in ravines at prairie.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak [*Pheucticus ludovicianus*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Blue Grosbeak [*Guiraca caerulea*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Lazuli Bunting [*Passerina amoena*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Indigo Bunting [*Passerina cyanea*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Dickcissel [*Spiza americana*]. Common from May to August at prairie.

Bobolink [*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*]. Seen once in May at prairie.

Red-winged Blackbird [*Agelaius phoeniceus*]. Seen in May at prairie.

Eastern Meadowlark [*Sturnella magna*]. Common through summer at prairie.

Western Meadowlark [*Sturnella neglecta*]. Common through summer at prairie.

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Common Grackle [*Quiscalus quiscula*]. Common in spring flying over prairie.

Brown-headed Cowbird [*Molothrus ater*]. Seen April and May at prairie.

Orchard Oriole [*Icterus spurius*]. Seen in May at prairie.

Baltimore Oriole [*Icterus galbula*]. Seen in May at prairie.

American Goldfinch [*Carduelis tristis*]. Common in ravines at prairie.

House Sparrow [*Passer domesticus*]. Seldom seen at prairie.