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Fall Roosting Sites And Flights Of
The Common Grackle And Associated Species
In Kearney, Nebraska, 1959*

by Janet R. Swanson and John C. W. Bliese

Purpose

The purpose of the investigation was to study some of the fall roosting phenomena of the Common Grackle (Quiscalus quiscula), Starling (Sturnus vulgaris), and Robin (Turdus migratorius) in the city of Kearney, Nebraska.

Procedure

The data for this paper were gathered through observation from September 16, 1959, to October 27, 1959. On the first day, a general survey was made of the vicinities in Kearney, Nebraska, that had been used as roosts in previous years, or that were considered as likely sites. This survey was conducted by driving around the various areas from 6:00 P.M. until 7:30 P.M. and listening for the characteristic calls made by the roosting grackles, starlings, and robins. Since roosting sites were found only in Harmon Park and in a shelterbelt six blocks northwest of Harmon Park near the new high school, a section in northwest Kearney, including the roosting areas, was mapped out for detailed observation. It is shown in heavy outline in Fig. 1, which is a map of the western part of Kearney. On September 30, another shelterbelt northeast of the park was also observed to be a roost. Since these shelterbelts were northeast and northwest of the park, they were labeled as NE and NW roosts respectively, and are so indicated on the map. Once a week checks were made of the other parts of the city, but they were never noted to be used for roosting purposes during the investigation.

Information was gathered at intervals of one to two days from approximately one-half to one hour before sunset to one-half to one hour after sunset. During this time the birds were observed in flight to the park and also at the roosts. The time, temperature, and approximate per cent of cloudiness were recorded for each observation day.

Results and Discussion

Each evening the flocks of birds entered Harmon Park from four different directions, as is shown in Fig. 1. Most of the birds that came to the park from any one direction flew along the same general route or "flight line." These flight lines were up to two blocks wide and doubtlessly continued far outside the city to the various feeding areas where the birds spent the day. However, as is indicated by the map, the lines were studies for only a short distance from the park.

The smaller flocks that made up the evening flights consisted mainly of one species, but large flocks frequently had mixed populations. Each species had a very characteristic way of flying together. The grackle flocks were longer than wide; the starling flocks were wider than they were long. Both species called together in a flock, but the grackles seemed to be the noisiest. However, when a lone bird came in along a flight line, it seldom called, and flew at a seem-

*This research paper was submitted to the department of biology in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the course Biology 420 at Nebraska State College, Kearney, Nebraska, January, 1960.
ingly slower rate than that of the flocks. The robins came into the park in ones and twos, and did not apparently confine themselves to any flight lines. They commonly appeared suddenly in the park and seemed to have come from nowhere.

The altitude of most of the birds was low—just a little higher than the tops of the trees. Sometimes when a flock flew over a row of trees into a wide open area, it suddenly dipped down sharply and immediately came back up to its original altitude. There was no apparent reason for this phenomenon and most of the flocks did not perform in this manner.

The birds began to arrive each evening about an hour before sunset. On warm sunny days, the majority of the flocks were large. The birds came suddenly into the park in flocks of hundreds, and in 15 to 20 minutes most of them were in the roosts. On rainy, cold, or cloudy days some of the birds came in earlier. On such days they also tended to come in smaller flocks of 10 to 20, and it was 30 to 50 minutes before most of them were in the roosts.

Of the four major flight lines that entered the park, the one from the west (Line I in Fig. 1) was the largest in both width and in the number of birds that used it. This line followed Highway 30 until it reached the college campus. It then made a curve northeastward for several blocks and turned toward the east again over an open field to enter the park. This line was from one and one-half to two blocks wide, but narrowed somewhat upon entering the park, as did all the lines.

The second largest flight line came from the south (Line II, Fig. 1). This line was two blocks wide and appeared to shift toward the west during the week of October 1 through October 8, and to expand a little. Earlier reports from bird watchers indicated that this line may have been considerably farther east during the first part of September.

The other two flight lines that entered the park (Lines IIIa and IIIb, Fig. 1) were small during the first week of observation, but in two weeks the number of birds following them had increased. Though both of these lines were less than a block wide, nearly as many birds seemed to use them as the other two lines. These two lines, it was found, were actually subdivisions of a line (Line III, Fig. 1) which split on 3rd Avenue. This parent line came from the east, north of 38th Street, and passed over a corn field to enter the NE roost (Fig. 1). From this roost, birds flew in the two directions indicated on the map. Some of them flew southward (Line IIIb) to the residential area east of the park, on 32nd Street, where they congregated into larger flocks before flying into the park for the night. Other flew westward to the NW roost near the high school and then southward (Line IIIa) to the park. The line from the NW roost to the park passed over a large wooded area two blocks square, indicated by W in Fig. 1. Although it was never used for a roost, this area would have seemed an ideal place since there were no houses there and a large number of trees provided ample cover. Only on occasion was it used as a stopping place by the birds.

The line between the high school and the park was always the scene of much activity. Birds used it as a path to the park, and birds in the park also used this same route to go to the NW roost. On a typical evening this flight line would be used by thousands of blackbirds going to and from the park.
The number of birds in Harmon Park each evening was estimated in the thousands. Hundreds of birds roosted in a single tree and at dusk gave the appearance of odd-shaped fruits growing on the trees. Roosting was concentrated in the northwest corner of the park (A in Fig. 1), primarily in the American elms (*Ulmus americana* L.), the largest of the trees present. The main part of this roost was a block long and one-half block wide. A secondary roost in the middle of the park, as indicated by B in Fig. 1, was located in a thick row of hackberry trees (*Celtis occidentalis* L.) which ran eastward and westward nearly the width of the park.

The grackles, starlings, and robins, and their associates all roosted in the same group of trees. These associates included the Red-Wing Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), but both were present only in small numbers. The robins usually went to an open area upon entering the park in evening and stayed there until dusk. They were nearly always the last birds to enter the roost for the night.

When the birds first entered the roosts, they were quite unsettled and called frequently, flew from tree to tree, and sometimes flew to another roost. Gradually the calls and flutterings became less and less until only an occasional noise could be heard. It was usually one-half hour to an hour from the time the birds were all in the roosts until they had settled down for the night.

At first the birds did not roost in the residential areas over which the flight lines passed, but used them to congregate before flying into the park to roost. Gradually, however, the birds began using some of the trees with more abundant cover in the areas east and west of the park as roost sites. By September 30, the number of birds in the northwest part of the park had decreased nearly half in favor of the residential area. The secondary roost in the hackberries in the center of the park also experienced a gradual decrease in bird population, and was completely abandoned by September 29. On September 30, the gathering place in the shelterbelt northeast of the park had become the NE roost.

In the residential areas east and west of the park, only certain streets were used, and these remained in fairly constant use until the birds were gone for the winter. The area extended two blocks or less from the park and was only a block wide. On the east side of the park, the birds roosted only on the north side of 32nd Street. This seemed to be due to the fact that the trees on the north side were much taller and provided much more cover. On the west side of the park, the birds roosted in a small area between 29th and 30th Streets, an area that provided larger trees and more cover than the residential area nearby.

After September 30, a week of colder temperatures followed, and the trees—particularly the American elms in the northwest of the park—began losing their leaves. This caused many of the birds which were still roosting in the park to shift from the park to the residential area where leaves were still more abundant.

There was a very noticeable decrease in leaves by October 6, both in the park and in the shelterbelt roosts. On October 7, the birds seemed confused, and flew in large flocks to the roosts north of the park, and then back again to the park. Previously the flocks had flown around the high school rather than over it, but on this night they flew directly
over the school. A number of the large flocks were observed to start for one of the roosts, then split in flight. Some of the birds continued in the original direction while the others headed toward another roost. The next night, October 8, the large flocks were gone from Harmon Park, and also from the NE and NW roosts. The only birds which remained in the park were a small number of robins which had been roosting with the grackles and starlings, and the only grackles that remained roosted to the west and east of the park. By October 10, the robins had also left the park and for the next several nights the only birds noted in the park were a pair of Cardinals (Richmondena cardinalis).

The roosting area in the residential area then expanded somewhat, partly because of the shift of the robins from the park to the residential area and also perhaps because of new birds coming from a northern area. However, now there were more birds on the west side of the park than on the east side, and the roosting area extended two to two and a half blocks from the park and was two blocks wide.

The leaves of the American elms in the park and in the residential area had completely fallen by October 18. The leaves on the trees east of the park had turned brown and crisp and the birds moved out of this area. By the 20th, there were only a few small flocks of 10 to 20 grackles which roosted west of the park in the Chinese elms (Ulmus pumila L.) and willows (Salix sp.), the only trees in the area that still retained their green leaves. Although many of the trees in the park were still covered with yellow or red leaves, the birds did not roost there.

In spite of the decrease in roosting populations the birds continued to present a problem because of their noise and messiness in the residential area on 30th Street between 7th and 8th Avenue. On October 22, a man was observed shooting into the trees near his house, evidently to frighten the few remaining noisy birds to another area. A period of temperatures below freezing, from October 25-29, completely removed the remaining leaves from the trees, and the last of the gregarious flocks left for the winter.

Summary

Although there are several parks and many possible roosting sites in Kearney, during the fall of 1959, the grackles and related species concentrated their roosting activities in the northwest part of the city. In their roosting, the birds tended to roost in taller trees with more cover. When the trees began to lose cover, the birds moved to another roost which provided sufficient cover. They did not roost in trees in which the leaves had changed color or in which the leaves were crisp and withered.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is due to Mr. Kent Powers, with whom the research for this paper was jointly conducted.

Fall Field Days: Ogallala, Sept. 25; Nemaha County, Oct. 8, 1960.
The Least Tern
by Ray S. Wycoff

This report covers seventeen years observation of a colony of Least Terns. Because of my profession, observations have often been irregular and brief. This is the only excuse I have for the incompleteness of the data.

The nesting area was a low, sandy island averaging not over 75 feet wide, about 200 feet long, and lying nearly a quarter-mile west of the Platte River bridge which is straight south of Lexington, Nebraska. Interestingly, a letter in 1949 from Chandler S. Robbins, Biologist in the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service, commented that “we have very few definite nesting localities on record for these three species in the State of Nebraska”, and his reference was to the Least Tern, the Piping Plover, and the Black-crowned Night Heron.

The number of birds in the colony has varied from year to year, and in recent years has been clearly less than before. The greatest number ever seen at the nesting site was 35 in 1949. Then in 1950 I saw 20 on the Fourth of July; 24 in 1953, and 25 in 1954. In contrast to this I saw only 2 birds in 1952, and noted that that had been a wet and rainy summer.

The behavior is interesting in these birds, and their screams when one approaches the nesting site is always attention-getting. The cries are most stringent when brooding is in progress, or during the days when the young remain in, or are close to, the nest. And when one is close to a nest, it is not only the screams that are noticed, but even more annoying is the diving of the parent birds at the intruder, often to within less than three feet of the visitor’s head. The calls have been strenuous even long before dawn whenever I approached the nesting site, even though I could not see the birds.

Once I watched the parents feed a young tern that was quite able to fly, but was not yet skilled in fishing. From one of the old birds it received a fingerling about three inches long, got it started down head-first, but was somewhat slow in getting the head worked through its throat. All this time the fish’s tail wiggled vigorously in protest, but without any beneficial result (at least, not beneficial to the fish).

The time of arrival in the spring has been noted irregularly, but has generally been shortly after the middle of May. In contrast to this, eleven birds were observed on April 24, 1949; some of the dates observed in other years were May 20, 1945; May 10, 1947; May 25, 1952; May 21, 1953; May 17, 1954; May 23, 1956.

The date of departure seems to vary somewhat, but irregular observation here, too, had much to do with the times noted. However, they were seen as late as September 5th, in 1947, and on August 28, 1955. In contrast to this, no birds could be found anywhere on or after July 22, 1959.

The time of nesting too has often varied a great deal, and was apparently influenced by the weather. In the earlier years, when all the nesting was done on the little sandy flat in the Platte River bed, it was always delayed until the sand was dry to a depth of several inches, but the water was never more than a few inches lower. Even with this delay, before August 6th, in 1948, the birds had nested twice and had been drowned out both times by rising water. Then on August 20th, of that
year, there were many adult birds about, but no sign of nests and no recognizable immatures.

In 1949 the river was again high, so that no nesting could be carried out on the original site until July when two nests with two eggs were found on the 17th. However, on June 29th, I had found a Tern's nest with 2 eggs — brooding in progress — on a nearby, higher pile of smooth sand which had been pumped up by a gravel outfit the year before. Here the sand was so high that it dried quickly. The nest was so much higher above the water than I had ever seen, that I ran a level on it, and found that it was almost exactly six feet above the water — quite a little difference from the usual twelve inches or less on the little island in the river bed, where they had always nested before. This was evidently a somewhat unusual response to the nesting urge, which had led them to accept such a site, even though a successful brooding, for the eggs remained unchanged for 21 known days, then disappeared.

Nesting usually began sometime early in June, but the observations of early nesting have been few, the nests usually containing the full quota of three eggs when first seen, so that the exact date of the beginning of brooding was uncertain.

Nesting has occurred as late as August 1st, when a nest was found at Kirkpatrick's sand pit in 1957. This is the year in which these birds were seen as late as September 5th.

Kirkpatrick's sand pit is an area roughly a quarter-mile east of the river bridge, and slightly north of it, or about a half-mile from the original location.

During the years which followed the building of the dams in the hills along the south side of the Platte River, thus insuring a more continuous flow of water, the sandy river bed became covered with sprouting cottonwoods, willows, and many acres of cockleburs and sweet clover. No open places were left for the Terns, but they remained near the original nesting site.

There is no information available as to how long they may have been nesting in the river bed before the sandy island was noted as their summer home; but once this observation was made there was never any apparent tendency for them to attempt nesting at any other place, and it was somewhat unusual to see one of the birds as far as one mile away from the river bridge, which still remains at the center of their activities.

Then by 1945 the lakes along the south side of the Platte River were filling, thus making the continuous flow of water in the river a certainty. This brought about a change in the river bed, because the water not only supplied vegetation with the necessary nourishment, but also brought many seeds, especially with the high waters.

On August 6, 1948, I made comment that, following a dry spring, on two successive occasions the nests of the Least Terns and their friendly neighbors, the Piping Plovers, had been drowned out by high water. Later, on August 20, Terns and Plovers were abundant, but there was no evidence of any young or immature birds.

In 1950, I found two Tern nests on June 17, one on the remaining lower part of the old island site, and the other on a neighboring island which had apparently been raised to a somewhat higher level by the rushing waters. Some nests were still occupied by young shortly after the first of August, and my records show on dates more than three weeks apart, that at least five nests were definitely
identified. This was interesting because now the entire nesting area was covered with a growth of seedling cottonwoods, together with much sweet clover and cockleburs.

My notes state that on August 14, 1951, there were six pairs of Terns at the old nesting site, and also that there had been no nesting that summer because of the high waters, and that the sand on that date was still too wet to nest.

In 1952, my notes show that on August 10th, the nesting area is fairly heavily overgrown, and one pair of Least Terns was seen. Interestingly though, courtship was still going on, the Terns fishing and presenting their prey to each other. On this same date I noted the presence of three Snowy Plovers, which are also mentioned in Bent as frequent associates of the Least Terns. This species of plover has not been seen on any other occasion.

In 1953 on June 14th, I noted that four nests of the Terns were found, and that this was the first I had been able to identify in three years. The original sandy island was now entirely broken up, and the nests were all on higher ridges of gravelly mud which had been formed by the waters. On July 16th, I could find no nests, but the action of the birds indicated that nesting was almost certainly in progress. My notes show that now the sand area was completely covered with seedling cottonwoods up to a foot high, so it seemed that nesting indicated their liking for the original home was partly overcoming their apparent fear of foliage.

My records for 1954 show that on May 28th, most of the Least Terns and Piping Plover were east of the bridge, and apparently showing some loss of affection for the original nesting site. I felt that this was probably due to the fact that the sandy islands east of the bridge were less thickly overgrown with vegetation than in the areas above the bridge. Then on June 24th, I noticed that the Terns and Plovers both acted as if they had nests or young in the old nesting area, but because of the thick vegetation, I was not able to make any positive identification of either young or nests.

As a complete surprise, on July 15, I found several young Terns on the open sand at Kirkpatrick's sandpit. These were in the pinfeather stage, running here and there over the open sandy slopes when approached. This was the first definite evidence of nesting away from the area west of the bridge in which they had first been discovered.

In 1955 the Terns appeared to have completely lost any interest in the old nesting place, and the evidence I found of nests was on the freshly-pumped sand at Kirkpatrick's sandpit. No other records were made.

In 1956 no nests were discovered, although there was no evident reason for not nesting at Kirkpatrick's sandpit as before. Actually, I never saw more than three birds at any one visit, and on the occasions they were noted, all were well west of the bridge, hanging around the old nesting site, and showing no aversion to my presence.

In 1957 at least five Tern nests were found at Kirkpatrick's sandpit, as well as some of the Piping Plover, and it then looked as if they had all made a definite shift to this area as their new summer home. This time I noted that all the nests were just above what had been the high-water line of the pit, and not over about three feet above the water line. I noticed this year that both species seemed much shyer than when they had been located at the island west of the bridge.
During the summer of 1958, at least three nests of the Terns were found at Kirpatrick's sandpit, and no evidence was noted of any tendency to be located any other place. I found one of these nests was about four feet above the water line, and this elevation was enough to seem unusual.

During 1959 I noted that a pair of Least Terns was seen as far west as the Darr Bridge, which is about six miles west of the old location. This was quite unusual, as I have no recollection of ever before seeing any of them more than about one mile away from the vicinity of the first nesting site.

This was an interesting year, too, because only one nest of Terns was ever found at Kirpatrick's sandpit. This nest never had more than one egg in it, although brooding was carried on. Nor am I certain whether this egg ever hatched, because the young was not seen, although the egg disappeared about the right time.

The principal nesting area this year (1959) was at the Luther sandpit, which is about one-fourth to one-half mile south of Kirpatrick's pit, south and east of the river bridge, and also across on the south side of the Platte River. Here there were four nests, all of which were hatched out. Several others were started, but were abandoned before brooding began, and before the usual three eggs were laid. In this area I observed the parent birds relieve each other on the nest — a spirit of cooperation which I had not before seen.

These nests were all hatched during the latter part of June, and all the eggs hatched. The young birds remained in or near the nests for about three days, but were never seen afterward; and immature birds were not in evidence during the next few weeks. A second crop was started by one pair of birds, and this nest was found on July 8th. It contained only two eggs at that time, and on July 10th, it had disappeared, apparently destroyed or abandoned.

Nesting at the Luther sandpit presented something that had not been so clearly noted before, in that all of the nests were somewhat higher above the water level than I had come to expect. One of them was so high that I ran a level on it and found it to be at least eleven feet above the water. This is especially interesting because these birds had seemed so hesitant in leaving the first nesting place where the nests would always be within a few inches of the water.

Another question was brought up by the fact that on July 22nd, no Terns could be found anywhere in the entire area, and were not seen again this year. I wonder if this had anything to do with the change of nesting location. Or were they frightened away by whatever had happened to the young? And did the elevated nesting levels enter into their actions? And if so, how?

—Lexington
Current Problems In Hawk And Owl Protection And Legislation*

Joseph R. Murphy and Donald A. Ingold
Department of Zoology, University of Nebraska

During the 1957 session of the Nebraska Legislature, the state law relative to bird protection was amended to remove the Great Horned Owl from the protected list. While conservationists interested in the welfare of predaceous birds consider this an unfortunate step, it has at least afforded an appropriate opportunity to re-evaluate the subject of raptorial bird protection in Nebraska. The purpose of this article is to call attention to what has been accomplished in other states in the way of legislation protecting predatory birds, and in this light reappraise our own state law. We will also review some of the attitudes regarding avian predation in general, and conclude with some suggested modes for action.

State Hawk and Owl Legislation

The following is a review of the various types of current state hawk and owl laws. This review indicates Nebraska’s position in this respect, the progress made thus far, and the goal that it is hoped might be achieved. For the sake of convenience, the various types of legislation will be arbitrarily divided into four categories.

The first group includes those states which offer no protection whatever to their hawks and owls. The number of states in this category has decreased in recent years to the extent that only five states—Maryland, Arkansas, Georgia, Oklahoma, and New Mexico—offer no protective legislation.

The second group consists of 32 states which offer legislation protecting only to a portion of their hawks and owls. The great majority of these states exclude the accipiters (Goshawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Cooper’s Hawk) and the Great Horned Owl from the protected list. This is the legislative pattern which Nebraska follows at present.

Three States - Virginia, Ohio and Utah - have a third type of avian predator legislation which offers full protection to all hawks and owls. However, these laws are characterized by indistinct and poorly defined restrictions. It is generally agreed that such legislation must include a provision for the legal destruction of a predator which is destroying personal property. It is this provision which is poorly defined.

The fourth group consists of those states which are said to have “model legislation.” In addition to offering blanket protection to hawks and owls, it safeguards the legitimate interests of the farmer by stating that the owner or occupant of lands, the members of his immediate household, and his employees may legally kill hawks and owls which are harassing or destroying poultry or other property on much land. Thus the law not only carefully defines people who may kill offending birds, but also the exact actions for which the birds may be killed. There are now ten states with model hawk and owl legislation: New York, New Hampshire, Connecticut, California, Illinois, Indiana, Florida, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Michigan.

Adapted from a paper presented to the Fourth Annual Mid-winter Meeting of the Nebraska Ornithologists’ Union at Lincoln, January 23, 1960.
Realization of the sound biological basis of this legislation has developed only in recent years, and is definitely on the upward trend in many additional states. Immediate action on the part of interested Nebraskans would not only benefit our own state, but would hasten the development of this progressive trend.

Attitudes Regarding Avian Predation

The contempt in which avian and other vertebrate predators are held appears to be largely a result of the failure of those who appreciate and understand the esthetic and biological value of predators to work to bring about a revision of public opinion, and the continued influencing of public opinion against predators on the part of those who are poorly informed in biological matters.

What are the virtues and “shortcomings” of our raptorial birds? Surely after many decades of food habit research, the unquestionable value of the great majority of the hawks and owls is well established. Beyond mere economic considerations lie the esthetic factors. The striking anatomical and physiological adaptations of a Peregrine Falcon or a Long-eared Owl are natural phenomena whose precision is seldom equaled elsewhere in the animal kingdom; for many people, this alone will provide sufficient reason for preservation of predatory species.

The very fact that bird students are willing to fight for the protection of bird-killing hawks and owls will negate the argument that “a service” is being done to bird lovers by continued persecution of the raptors. Many hunters sincerely feel that they are working in the best interests of upland game bird conservation and management by shooting hawks and owls but the claim that blanket killing of predators will increase game has been amply demonstrated to be unrealistic.

It is commendable that the present Nebraska law extends protection to the majority of species of raptorial birds. The unfortunate fact remains, however, that many hunters and farmers are simply not prepared to distinguish between protected and unprotected species. To a distressingly large number of people, all hawks are still “chicken hawks” and all owls “hoot owls.” A model predatory bird law would at least have the distinct advantage of preventing the unnecessary shooting of everything that remotely resembles hawks or owls.

Suggested Modes for Action

What are we in Nebraska going to do to help promote public understanding and support for predatory bird protection? The wild life resources of a state are generally conceded to belong to the people of the state; this being so, the people should determine the policies relevant to such resources. In order for proper, enlightened decisions to be reached, the people must have correct information. This in turn implies proper education along the lines of conservation of total wildlife resources. The best legislation in the world will not fully protect wildlife unless the concepts we are discussing have been adequately “sold” to the public at large. For this reason, it is imperative that conservation education begin at the primary school levels and continue upward, with the hope that this will eventually lead to an objective as well as emotional appraisal of all components of the natural community.

There are several ways in which the N.O.U. could lend active support to a program of leadership training, both as an organization and as in-
Individuals. Members already have an excellent opportunity to further the cause by lending their assistance to the conservation programs promoted by 4-H bird clubs and similar youth training organizations. A publicity campaign directed at protection of predatory birds would be a worthwhile group endeavor; this could be implemented through newspaper articles and conservation pamphlets, or in any manner that will get the message before the public. Excellent visual aids pertaining to predatory birds are available through the National Audubon Society (some materials are free for the asking). Above all, we should continually emphasize the positive approach to an understanding of predaceous birds. Should the time come when proper protective legislation is proposed and is being weighed by legislative committees, the members of the N.O.U., individually or in concert, should certainly make their voices heard in support.

The situation is by no means hopeless. Conservationists in other states were able to overcome opposition to model legislation by presenting thoughtful, objective evidence in support of predator protection. We should also be encouraged by the fact that the majority of the professional biologists working in management capacities for state and federal agencies are aware of and appreciate the biological values of predation. The efforts of these dedicated men are not always appreciated, and it is too often assumed that they are working only in the interests of the sportsman.

There is no evidence to indicate that the status of the predatory birds in Nebraska is critical at the present time. But the key to proper conservation planning is to anticipate future events and prepare for them. We are in an excellent position to ensure that the predatory birds will remain as a part of the wildlife legacy we hand down to Nebraskans of the future.

The Identification Of Birds In Flight*  
by Glenn Viehmeyer and Agnes Limbo

This paper is presented in the hope of encouraging more students to learn to identify flying birds and thus to add to their pleasure in birdwatching and increase their effectiveness as ornithologists. In it, we hope to outline some of the principals involved and give examples of how you can identify certain birds in flight.

The identification of a flying bird as opposed to the identification of a perched bird requires an entirely different technique. You generally don't have time to study the bird, you must make your decision immediately; you cannot check the specimen point by point with the book but must rely upon a sort of multiple-sense-impression that is often registered in a matter of seconds. The ability to do this is acquired only by study until the characteristics of the flying bird form a single and complete entity in your mind.

Actually, it is quite simple; a matter of observing and memorizing those characters and peculiarities to

This paper was given at one of the regular meetings of the Tout Bird Club of North Platte.
be found in the species under study. Once this is done, a flash of the bird is all you need; its size, shape, color and actions tell you its identity.

It is not intimated that you will ever be able to identify all species in flight. Some species differ so little that they are separated with difficulty even when you hold them in your hand. Other species are so distinctive that you may identify them as far as you can see them.

In identifying birds in flight there are four major considerations:
First. There is flight pattern, the manner in which the bird handles its wings and tail, the manner in which it moves through the air. Here you study the rhythm of wing beats and the flight path. Does the bird soar or not? Is the line of flight straight or is it erratic? Is it level or bouncing, swift or slow, close to the ground or high in the air?

Flight pattern is a reliable method of recognizing many birds, once you learn to use it for identification. Few would confuse the swift, straight flight of the Mourning Dove with the slower bouncing flight of a Woodpecker; or the majestic soaring of the Buteo hawks with the heavy, labored flight of the Crows.

Second. Color and color distribution is important, and most students use it almost to the exclusion of other characters in bird study. Color and particularly color placement is an important aid in identifying flying birds and unless you know what to look for you may miss a positive identifying mark.

Third. One of the most important and difficult things to learn is silhouettes; the shape of the flying bird; the totality of the contour of wings, tail, head and body brought to unity. The sum of many small differences, each of which taken alone is meaningless - but which together identify the bird without equivocations.

Fourth. Flight notes are positive identification in many cases, e.g., the Goldfinch identifies itself with every swoop it makes. The Lapland Longspur, the Crossbill, and the Killdeer are birds that tell you what they are in flight. You don't have to see them, you can identify them with your eyes shut.

If you will watch and listen and learn to recognize these things, you'll have a lot more fun with bird-watching. Flight pattern, color, silhouette and flight notes are things you must put together instantly to form a harmonious whole. This takes work but is worth it. You watch a given species, you learn its identifying characteristics—learn them as a single entity, and when you see this combination you know at once that it is this bird and no other.

Perhaps it is time to cite examples, so lets start with the ducks. A duck with a long, slender neck and a long, spiked tail is a Pintail as far as you can see it. A heavy body, light underneath with a dark head is a Mallard drake. The female is drab without distinguishing marks, but if she is with him, that's enough to identify her. A Mallard sized duck with white speculum on the wing is almost certain a Baldpate. A rather small duck with much white and rufous on the body, a slim silhouette and an outsized head is the Shoveller, or as the old-timers used to call it, a "Broad-faced Mallard."

A black and white duck with the Pintail's long neck but a short tail and very rapid wing beat is a Merganser or fish duck, but if it's black with the same long neck and short tail and a slower wing beat, it's a Cormorant. The very small
duck with a slim silhouette and very rapid wing beat is the Green-winged Teal. One about the same size but black and white with a big head is a Bufflehead. If the bird rises from the water with difficulty after a long run with feet pattering the surface and is black, it's a Coot. A duck taking off in the same manner but small and brown is a Ruddy; if you can catch the white cheek patch of the male your identification is certain.

A medium to small duck with much black and white on the body, a black head and a slim silhouette is a Golden-eye. Shut your eyes and the whistle of his wings will shout Golden-eye at you. If the cheek patch is round, it's an American Golden-eye, but if the cheek patch is crescent shaped, it's a Barrow's Golden-eye. Simple isn't it?

If you stop and check you will find that in each example given above and those that will be given below, there is a complex of characters that serve to identify the bird. About the only exception to this identification by flight notes when the note alone serves to identify the bird. Indeed it is doubtful if sight identification ever depends upon a single character. A flash of scarlet might be either a Cardinal or a Tanager but size and/or color placement will tell you which is which.

Let's move on to another group of birds and see how this business of complexes of characters for identification applies to them. Let's start with the sparrows; that group of "sparrow colored" birds that are difficult when perched and are for the most part "impossible on the wing." Difficult as they are as a group there are at least three that you should identify while flying, the English Sparrow, Lark Sparrow and the Vesper Sparrow. Each of these is distinctly marked and rather easily identified. The male English Sparrow has a dark bib. English Sparrows are for the most chubbier than other sparrows.

The Lark Sparrow is easily identified by a rather long tail, rounded on the end and tipped with a broad band of white that is conspicuous as the bird uses it as a rudder in flight.

The Vesper Sparrow is likewise easily and certainly identified by white feathers on each side of the tail. It may, however, be confused with two other birds if you depend on this alone. The Junco has the same white border but the body color of the Junco is solid and not striped as it is in the Sparrow. Further, habitat preference would help to some degree. Vesper Sparrows prefer roadides and ditchbanks while Juncos prefer thickets and woods. In separating Longspurs and Vesper Sparrows, habitat again plays an important part. Vesper Sparrows are birds of the roadsides and weed patches; Longspurs are birds of the open field. The white outside tail feathers of the Vesper Sparrow are conspicuous but those of the Longspur are white on only the outer half and are much less conspicuous. Another help is that the Vesper Sparrow has migrated before the Longspur arrives in the fall while the latter has gone north before the former arrives in the spring. There may be some overlapping in the fall with the first Longspurs arriving before the last Vesper Sparrow has moved on.

A pair of species that may cause you trouble are the Lapland Longspur and the Horned Lark, but again
you have three points of differentiation that will solve your problem. They are coloration; the tail of the Horned Lark is dark without white while the tail of the Longspur has two feathers on each side of the tail marked with white for two thirds their length. If the bird is not too distant you may see the Lark’s black throat marking and the black horn-like tufts of feathers that give him his name.

Second is flight pattern; both have bouncing flight but the bounces of the Longspur are shorter and faster with enough difference in timing to allow you to distinguish between the birds.

Third and best point of all is the chattering note of the Longspur in flight. Learn it and you will be able to identify Longspurs at a distance in mixed flocks of Larks and Longspurs. Silhouette is not a reliable character though the Longspur’s smaller size may be detected at times.

Our three commoner Blackbirds are hard to separate in flight except that the red of the male Red-wing and the striped plumage of the female will serve as identifying marks at close range, and make it possible to separate them from the Brewer’s and Rusty Blackbirds. The Red-wing’s tail is slightly less rounded than that of the Brewer’s, but you need an extra sharp eye to detect this difference in flight. Another Blackbird, the Yellow-headed, is easily separated by his bright head and greater size.

The Grackle may be identified by tail shape, instead of being spread out flat like the Blackbird’s, it forms a V in cross section and is “boat shaped.” Tail shape plus greater size identifies the Grackle. Starlings differ from the rest in having pointed, backsweppt wings and a short tail. They have the silhouette of a jet fighter plane. Further, their flight is more erratic than that of the Blackbird or Grackle.

We have no trouble in identifying woodpeckers as a group. The identifying character is the long, swinging swoops shared by all the species. Upon this background we superimpose color pattern to separate the species. The troublesome Downy-Hairy complex is separated from the others by their black and white striping and from each other by size. The Red-head stands out for his brilliant head and by his black and white patchwork coat.

The Flickers are identified by greater size and by the “flicker” of the red or yellow underwings. They often give an identifying note in flight. It is our opinion that the observer should not attempt to separate the red and yellow shafted forms. Hybridization has occurred to a degree that has erased species lines, and Flickers are best called Flickers without the modifying terms red and yellow shafted. Apparently a complete intergradation exists between the two extreme types.

Two members of the Plover tribe are easily identified on the wing; they are the Killdeer which at a short distance displays the characteristic head and throat marks and who even at a distance calls out his name to you. The other is the Upland Plover with a silhouette that reminds you of a falcon until you see the long, outstretched neck and long bill. His long falconlike wings have a very rapid, quivering beat and the whinnying flight note, used at in-
ervals certifies his identification.

Now that we have touched on waterfowl and songbirds let's move along to a group that is perhaps the most troublesome of all to many students, and where the multiple-sense-impression approach to identification may be the best one for the observer. This group is the Hawks. Here is a group of birds in which flight pattern and color distribution are the best criteria for identification, a group which is almost “impossible” when perched.

We will start with two of our rarer hawks, the Prairie Falcon and the Peregrine Falcon.* The two birds are almost identical in size and this can confuse you if you are too far away to distinguish color, the blue grey of the Peregrine Falcon or the tannish brown of the Prairie Falcon. The latter also shows black patches at the flank if you are near enough to see it. Let us assume, however, that you are too distant to distinguish color. What other means of identification have you? First, there is shape. The Peregrine Falcon is not as heaving in its body as the Prairie Falcon; the latter has a chunky look. Second, there is wing beat. Both birds are magnificent fliers but the wing beat of the Prairie Falcon seems slower than that of the Peregrine Falcon. The Prairie Falcon seems to work at flying while the Peregrine Falcon seems to play at flying, a true master of the air. Perhaps even more important is the altitudinal preference of the two birds. The Prairie Falcon, when disturbed from rest, skims along the surface of the ground following the contour of the land while the Per-

gine Falcon sweeps aloft and speeds away in his bullet-like flight. The difference between the work horse and the race horse is analogous. The differences between the two species are not great and it is only when they are considered as a single complex that they are reliable.

While on the subject, there are two other Falcons that might confuse you, the Sparrow Hawk and the Pigeon Hawk. Close up you'll have no trouble, at a distance you might. The Pigeon Hawk is the heavier bird. Even more important is the Sparrow Hawk's habit of hovering while hunting. It simply stands still in the air, and does this repeatedly. The Pigeon Hawk may hover occasionally but the Sparrow Hawk makes a regular practice of it.

The Marsh Hawk is perhaps the easiest of all to identify both in markings and in behavior. The conspicuous white splotch at the base of the tail is a certain identifying mark. This is clearly and sharply defined, much more so than the white tail base of the Rough-legged Hawk. Don't let the fact that the mature male is grey with black wingtips confuse you. You still have that sharply defined white patch to signal his identity. If the light is wrong to see the white mark, what then? First of all there is silhouette; a rather slender body, a long tail, long rather slender wings form an identifying complex. Add to this the habit of coursing back and forth across the field and his sudden drop on his prey and the picture is complete. Marsh Hawk without a doubt!

This story would be incomplete without a description of the male's antics. His rapid climb into the sky, his calling, his loops and banks as he literally falls out of the sky toward his mate coursing sedately

According to the Fifth Edition of the A. O. U. Check-list, the Duck Hawk becomes the Peregrine Falcon.
below, his sudden stop before striking the ground to climb again skyward and repeat the whole act look for all the world like a boy showing off for his best girl!

Next in line come the accipiters—the bird hawks—birds with short, rounded wings and a long rudder of a tail that enables them to speed through the trees in pursuit of their elusive prey. Well named the bird hawks, the bulk of their diet consists of birds taken on the wing. Two species are rather common in Nebraska, the sharp-shinned and the Cooper's Hawk. The Cooper's Hawk is slate on its upper parts, the Sharp-shinned is brown. Still another difference is the rounded tail of the Cooper's Hawk and the square ended tail of the Sharp-shinned.

The Buteos are the hawks that will give you your roughest time. This is because they differ within the species in coloration. This difference is often great and ranges from the “normal” to the almost black melanic. There may be forms paler than normal and even in some cases erithristic forms with lots of rufous in their coloration. Normals are not difficult, but when you encounter extreme melanism you're often in trouble. Actually, if you see large numbers of any Buteo you will find a series of individuals that range from very pale through “normal” to black. Coloration is a reliable guide only in identifying the normal phase birds. On the aberrant specimen you will have to rely upon other criteria. Fortunately, these are generally available once you learn to recognize them.

In the Rough-legged Hawk* and the Ferruginous Hawk you may see the whole gamut of variation from pale to dark. So let's start with the Rough-legged Hawk. This bird has a hunting habit that identifies it as far as you can see it, the habit of hovering while it looks for prey. All hawks may hover at times but the Rough-legged Hawk is the only Buteo that makes it a regular practice. If the bird is not hunting you'll have to be closer and depend upon underbody markings. The bird you are most likely to confuse it with is the Ferruginous Hawk. Remember that both hawks may appear in either the normal or dark phase and that it is in differences in coloration that you must depend. Let's compare the two hawks in both light and dark phase plumage.

First of all the Rough-leg is smaller than the Ferruginous, though this difference isn't great enough to be much help in the field. In the light or normal phase the Rough-leg has these positive identifying marks, LOWER ABDOMEN MARKED WITH DARK BROWN OR BLACK. The dark markings coalesce as the individual becomes darker and may be solid black in some otherwise normal phase birds. THE TAIL IS LONG AND ROUNDED WITH A WHITE BASE AND A CLEARLY DEFINED DARK BAND AT THE TIP. The white area is more extensive and less sharply defined than in the Marsh Hawk. The under side of the primaries are pale, almost white. There is often a large white patch on the upper side of the primaries. This tends to be greater in area and more round in shape than a similarly located patch on the wing of the Ferruginous Hawk.

According to the Fifth Edition of the A. O. U. Check-list, the American Rough-legged Hawk becomes the Roughlegged Hawk and. the Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk becomes the Ferruginous Hawk.
The Ferruginous Hawk is rufous above and whitish below. In the light phase, wrist marks are faint or absent. The whitish belly is unmarked but the brown legs make a V against the lower abdomen; the tail does not show the distinct dark band of the Rough-leg. Seen from above there is a small elongate patch of white at the base of the primaries, this white area is narrower than a similarly located white area on the upper surface of the Rough-leg’s wing. In the normal or light phase birds the wrist mark is faint or absent.

In the dark phase the Rough-legged Hawk differs from the Ferruginous Hawk by having the underbody and the small feathers of the underwing black and showing no wrist mark while the latter has a brown underbody and wing and usually shows a wrist mark of two dark spots separated by lighter feathers. This may be an important point in separating normal phase Rough-legs from the dark phase Ferruginous Hawks. In the former the wrist mark is a single blotch of dark feathers roughly triangular in shape; in the latter, two dark spots are separated by lighter feathers. Remember, this is a tough pair to separate unless you learn the whole complex of distinguishing marks. Even with these well in mind the complete intergradation of color phases from light to dark will often give you a bad time. Either of the two may well be confused with the dark phase Red-tailed Hawk. Here you will have to watch for the “fan-tail” of the Red-tail which usually gives a hint of rufous against the sky, and the shorter, broader wings.

The Red-tailed Hawk’s color ranges from almost white to almost black. In silhouette it is chubby with broader wings and shorter tail than most of the Buteos. The tail is widely fan-shaped and usually shows hints of rufous regardless of how light or dark it is. This alone will separate it from the Rough-legs and dark phase Swainson’s Hawk, as well as the Broad-winged Hawk which has a banded tail, but a similar silhouette.

The Swainson’s Hawk is similar to the Rough-legs and Red-tails in size but may be separated from them by not having the white underside to the primaries of the Rough-legs or the rufous tail of the Red-tail. Another important difference is that the wings are not held horizontally, but are slanted upward and outward and the tips of the primaries curve upward and are frequently separated in flight.

This, then is the story of identifying birds in flight. It has been impossible to mention many species that can be so identified but it is felt that enough examples have been given to establish the principals involved. Identification in flight is not a thing you can learn seated in an easy chair. Rather, it is learned the hard way, in the field, through constant study. It is based upon the multiple-sense-impression concept where the sum of many little differences, each meaningless in itself, make a cogent whole. It takes time and study but once learned it adds immeasurable to your enjoyment of bird watching.—North Platte.
Meetings And Reports

FIFTY-NINTH ANNUAL MEETING—The annual May meeting was held in the Recreation Hall in the Chadron State Park nine miles south of Chadron, Nebraska, May 21-22, 1960. Breakfasts and lunches were served at Camp Norwesca. Host organizations were the Chadron Audubon Society, and—from the Nebraska State College at Chadron—Beta Beta Beta and the Ornithology Class. There were 78 registrants.

At a business meeting the following officers were elected: incumbent secretary, C. W. “Bill” Huntley of Auburn; treasurer, R. G. Cortelyou of Omaha; editor, Miss Doris Gates of Chadron; and custodian, Miss Bertha Winter of Lincoln. New officers are: president, Mrs. Floyd Patton of Wymore; and vice president, Dr. Rosalind Morris of Lincoln. Mrs. John Lueshen announced that the members had voted Honorary Memberships to Dr. R. W. Dawson of Rt. 1, Box 1626, Apache Junction, Arizona; and Francis Lee Jacques, 10 E. Oaks Rd., North Oaks, St. Paul 10, Minnesota.

Tentative plans for the 1960 fall field trips are: Ogallala, Sunday, Sept. 25, and in Nemaha County Saturday, Oct. 8. The winter meeting was set for Beatrice, Jan. 21, 1961; and the annual spring meeting will be in North Platte, May 20-21, 1961.

Greetings From
The President

Everyone attending the annual meeting in Chadron was full of enthusiasm over the long list of birds and the beautiful country. It was a thrilling experience to camp in the Park—really get the atmosphere. Congratulations and sincere appreciation go to the retiring president, Mrs. John Lueshen, for her splendid leadership; to Bill Huntley for his well planned program, and to our own enthusiastic editor, Doris Gates, for the added push she gives just where it is needed.

What do our N.O.U. members think about the number of nesting reports that we have this year? I have been hearing such conflicting reports that I wish it could be confirmed one way or the other. Here we are seeing an unusual number of the Loggerhead Shrikes this month (June, 1960). Marvin Schwilling at Burwell reported an invasion of Snow Buntings last winter. I wish he could have sent a flock down this way.

I am enjoying the new Daily Field Records and am one who likes the less technical listing of the birds. It will be so nice to meet all the old and new friends at the various activities of the N.O.U. through this new year. I know I shall enjoy serving as your new president.

—Mrs. F. J. Patton, Wymore

General Notes

PAINTED BUNTING AT KEARNEY.—I would like to report the collection of a male Painted Bunting in Kearney, Nebr., on April 26, 1960. David Henley, a Kearney High School student, found the bird dead on a patio near a picture window. I contacted Mrs. (Mildred) Hansen at the college and confirmed the identification and she suggested that we have it mounted by Cy Black. He was unable to make a mount but made a skin of it. I have talked to Miss Carrie Ludden and she has seen them in Kearney in previous years.

—George W. Brown, Kearney

(This is also confirmed by John C. W. Bliese who says, "We have the specimen, dated and labelled." —Ed.)

RARE BIRDS AT BLADEN.—Spring, 1960, although arriving about on time according to the calendar, seemed slow due to the persistent winterish weather. Except for the fact that the Sandhill Cranes made a bad break for it on March 11 (and came back that evening with an up-roar), migration came along rather abruptly beginning about March 20. The "sandhillers" reappeared on the 19th and the balance of the month brought about greater numbers of waterfowl in migration than I had seen for some years—especially Snow and Blue Geese. A great number of ducks also migrated through this area during that time.

It turned out to be a season to remember as far as this birder is concerned. For several years I had scanned the flocks of cranes in hopes of sighting a "whooper." About noon on March 22 I spotted a Whistling Swan following a small group of 4 Sandhill Cranes. These were flying west where the cranes seemed to be congregating, judging from the noise. About 2:30 the same day there was a Whistling Swan in a flock of Sandhill Cranes. Strangely enough, there was also a Whooping Crane in the flock. Aside from the whiter bird with black, contrasting wing-tips the white crane was distinctly larger than the others and the swan was about that much larger than the white crane.
There was still another swan with the flock of cranes on the 26th of March, in the afternoon. It obliged by giving off a few bugle notes just after passing by, northward.

March 26th brought me another very worthwhile surprise. About noon I looked up to see a flock of about 35 geese. The small goose size, more rapid wing-beats, contrasting black and white pattern with the white neck patches on black fore-parts, and the goose-like call all combined to identify these as the Brant. Thus I was enabled to add three very delightful "firsts" to my life list of bird observations.—Harold Turner, Bladen.

LATE NESTING AT HERSEHY.

—On Sept. 19, 1960, we saw two pairs of young doves in ground nests. We only saw two or three adults during the afternoon. We came upon a pair of quail with a large family with only pin feathers in tail and wings. Later we saw two young Red-headed Woodpeckers which stayed in and near an old hawk's nest in a large cottonwood. They could fly about the tree and to branches of others nearby, but seemed to return to the hawk's nest every few minutes. No adults appeared then nor did I see any afterwards. The last ones I saw were Sept. 8. On Oct. 8 one young still remained, but this was the last time I saw it. I hope they got to warmer country safely.

Sept. 28, a bright sunny morning after a snow the day before, I came upon another quail family. They were all downy and looked as if just hatched.

In October after hunting season had started, Frank found four young doves just learning to fly.

—Mrs. Morris Cox, Hersehy

BLUE HERONS AT DR. GIFFORD'S WILDLIFE SANCTUARY.

—in 1957 there were 110 nests in two groups—38 on the east side and 72 on the west. The nests averaged two to three young. In 1959 there were 93 nests divided 48 and 45 and there were three to four young per nest. In 1959 there were 109 nests divided 98 on the east side and 11 on the west. Nests averaged two to three young. The highest number per nest was six.

When the young are ready to leave the nest, about the first of July, they climb to the top of the tree above their nests and flap their wings into the wind very clumsily for two or three days, then take off with legs kicking as if pushing, and head jerking back and forth as if grabbing the air with their bills and pulling. Sometimes the wings are not flapping in unison. For about 50 feet they look like a wet rag flopping through the air. Sometimes they are not able to fly into a 10 M.P.H. wind and go backwards until they turn and go with the wind.

In one nest a young heron became excited as I came near and it proceeded to vomit a 13 inch gar fish and a nine inch carp that was about a fourth digested. Then it very awkwardly flew away. There are always undigested fish, frogs, snakes and animals on the ground under the nests. Bushes and weeds are splattered with white excrement in a 10-foot circle. Herons bark a warning when danger threatens. It is a series of low barks—bk, bk, bk, etc.

On July 5, 1959, I saw a heron catch a three and a half pound carp and pull it 10 feet from the river's edge. It pecked out entrails and eyes, only.

When herons catch fish too large to handle, it causes a disturbance and fish make warning noises as catfish make a grinding noise with the pectoral fins, a perch makes a grinding sound, and other fish give similar warning sounds so that a
This one cottonwood tree had five nests of the Great Blue Heron. There was a total of 19 young with the nests having 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 young.

Herons will walk or fly to a new fishing spot.

Herons will fly 10 miles in search of food but one-half to two miles is usual. On returning to the nest they are about 1000 feet in the air. When nearing the nest, they will half close their wings like a hawk and make a circular dive toward the ground. When they alight on the nest, the young will try to get their heads into the parent's throat for food. There is much commotion, squawking and head-bobbing rituals at this feeding time.

Young herons stay near the nest for about a week, then the parents take them to a field first and teach them to catch bugs, etc. Later the young are taken to a lake or river and taught to catch fish, frogs, etc. After this, the young herons are taught to fish at night and become expert at catching fish at night in the muddy river water. After this, all herons are solitary fishers and hunters and only flock together again when they fly north about the first of September. They return and start south about November first.

When herons start to fly, they always fly into the wind; and when mating or fighting, they can flutter or fly backwards.

—Lawrence Dokulil, Omaha

Letters To The Editor

“Mr. Dokulil may have written you that a pair (or more) of American Egrets are nesting with the Great Blue Herons on the Gifford Farm, east of Fontenelle Forest.”—R. G. Cortelyou, Omaha

“Wanted to tell you we have had a flock of Redpolls with us this winter. Even Margaret (Jones) had not seen them for many years—if ever—and Mrs. (A. M.) Brooking had not for many years.

“I've already (date, March 15, 1960) fed 175 pounds of sunflower seeds, chopped grains, etc., to say nothing of the pounds of suet to hungry legions.” Marie Damerell, Hastings
"The Cape-May Warbler was seen on April 29, 1960, in our back yard trees."—John C. W. Bliese, Kearney

"In September I was lucky enough to see my first Scarlet Tanagers. I saw a dull green bird with black wings, and later saw another that sort of looked like he had red measles showing through tannish green plumage. I heard the calls for several days."—Mrs. Morris Cox, Hershey

"In the afternoon (Jan. 23, 1960) Ralph Harrington and I went birding into Wyuka Cemetery, Lincoln. There we found Redpolls in great numbers. At first we saw only a few, but later they seemed to come in from everywhere. They seemed to be feeding in the pine cones, and were very tame. We saw lots of Pine Siskins, Goldfinches and a few Purple Finches besides many more common kinds."—Lee Morris, Bradshaw

"On August 16, 1959, about three miles northwest of York, I discovered a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and located their nest. I am sure there were young birds in it for the old birds made such a fuss when I came near them. I am very well acquainted with these flycatchers for I was raised in Oklahoma where they are very plentiful. This is the first time I ever saw them in Nebraska.

"The other day a little flock of Redpolls lit in a bush near the house. This is the first time I ever saw them here." (Letter dated Jan. 18, 1960)

—Mrs. J. R. Armstrong, Columbus

"I disagree with Carl H. Swanson, Omaha, (Nebr. Bird Review, XXVIII, 12) regarding the classification of the Carolina Wren. Mr. Swanson made all his observations in one limited area where he knew the species could be found, ie., Fontenelle Forest. If he had visited a different area of the Missouri Valley Region each time he went out and if he then saw the species one or more times on each of his twelve trips, then should the "rare" be changed. The Missouri Valley Region covers considerable territory."—Mrs. Harold Whitmurs, Lincoln

"We have been very busy keeping the snow cleared away from the bird feeders and winter bird baths besides catching the Starlings. As fresh feed is put out so many times each day, the Starlings drop right out of the sky in great numbers and at this time of the year are much greater pests than the House Sparrows.

"Have missed the Harris' Sparrows arriving at the usual time, but around Dec. 15th (1959) one did show up. The Flickers, one Robin, Downies, Hairies, Cardinals, and White-breasted Nuthatches are year-round residents, but the little Red-breasted Nuthatches have not shown up for two years. On my farms the Prairie Chickens showed up in good numbers in December and January."

—Dana Anderson, Saint Edward