"Notes" from *Nebraska Bird Review* (Sept 1988) 56(3).
NOTES

BRANT AT FUNK LAGOON. Rick Peifer and I co-led a Bell Museum of Natural History (University of Minnesota) field trip to the Platte River in March 1988. On 21 March about 25 of us went to Funk WPA (Phelps Co.) about 14:00. We found only a few thousand waterfowl, the remainder had apparently been driven off by USFWS personnel as a preventative measure against a further outbreak of fowl cholera. We were on the N/S road between sections 1 and 2, T6N, R17W, and saw only about 1,000 to 1,500 geese (mostly Canadas, plus some White-fronted) plus a few hundred ducks. A farmer who lives in the NW1 of Sec. 1 invited us to drive onto his land for closer viewing. With my Nikkon spotting scope (20-40X) I was looking south at some of the Canada Geese, most of which were of a very small race (smaller than Snow Geese) standing on the mud flats. Suddenly I realized I was looking at the neck and head of a Brant; at that time, the body was hidden by some of the Canadas. I showed the bird to Rick, and we spent about two hours showing it to all members of the group. We had seven spotting scopes with us. The bird was frequently hidden from view by the larger Canadas, but most of us eventually got unobstructed views when the birds occasionally shifted posi-
tion. I personally had the Brant in view in my scope for a total of about 20 minutes, at distances at first of about 200 m (the group watched from this distance) to as close as 100 m, when Rick and I walked closer. He had the bird in his scope (B&L Discoverer) for at least 20-30 minutes at 40-60X. We had good lighting at the closer distance (looking SE); at the greater distance the lighting was not as good but adequate. It was sunny and warm, and relatively calm. The bird appeared fully as wild as the Canadas it was with, stretching its neck in an alert posture when I walked closer, and eventually flying with the rest of the flock to the far shore when the other members of our group tried to approach more closely. The Brant was smaller than the Canadas (which themselves were very small), about intermediate in size between these Canadas and a drake Pintail, and much smaller than White-fronted Geese (we had direct size comparison with all these species within a few feet of each other). Rick and I estimated the Brant to be somewhat larger than a large male Mallard (no Mallards nearby for comparison). The bill was even stubbler than those of the Canadas, and somewhat differently shaped. The entire head, neck, and breast were black, with the exception of a rather faint patch of white streaking on each side of the throat (upper neck) just below the head. Coloration of the back and sides was similar to that of the Canadas and there was a sharp demarcation between the black breast and brownish sides (this feature and the rather indistinct throat patch permit distinction from the Pacific or Black subspecies). The tail appeared all white, with a thin (half inch) black terminal band. Later, upon reading several field guides, we learned that Brants do not actually have a white tail, but rather the white upper tail coverts are very long and cover most of the tail (except the very tip), giving the appearance of a white tail. This feature permitted us to distinguish the Brant from the tiny Canadas, even when it was facing away from us. None of us had ever seen a Brant before, but over the two hours we repeatedly saw all field marks, and there was no question that it was a Brant (Atlantic race).

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WHOOPING CRANE REPORT. The Fish and Wildlife Service office in Grand Island reported ten confirmed sightings (two of the same pair) of Whooping Cranes in Nebraska in spring 1988:

Two adults 24-26 March in Buffalo Co., .5 mi. W of N10 bridge on the Platte River, T8N, R15W, S1, 14. From 26 March to 7 April they were in Buffalo and Phelps counties, 3 mi. W of the Odessa bridge on the Platte River, T8N, R18W, S12, 13, and T8N, R17W, S18, 18. These two were the first Cranes to leave Aransas, about 15 March.

One adult in Hall Co., 1 to 11 April, 3 mi. W of Wood River bridge on the Platte River, T9N, R12W, S7.

One adult in Hall Co., 4 April, 1 mi. W of Alda bridge on the Platte River, T9N, R11W, S1.

Two adults in Custer Co., 10 to 11 April, .5 mi. N and 1 mi. W of Merna, T18N, R21W, S30, SW1.

Three adults in Custer Co., 10 to 11 April, 3 mi. W and 1.5 mi. N of Broken Bow, T17N, R21W, S22, NE4.

Three adults in Custer Co., 11 April, Middle Loup River, 400 yds. E of Milburn bridge, T20N, R21W, S10 or 15. These are not the same birds listed
above, because the Broken Bow birds didn't leave until about 1 PM, while these birds were seen between 9 and 10 AM.

Two adults and a juvenile in Perkins Co. 18 to 19 April, 9 mi. S of Paxton, T12N, R35W, S30.


A juvenile in Cherry Co., 14 to 28 May, 19 mi. NW of Brownlee, T29N, R31W, S35. This was the last spring sighting of a migrant Whooping Crane.

There were eight probable sightings in Nebraska:
Two adults in Hall Co., 13 March, 2.5-3 mi. W of Alda Road, just S of the Platte River.
Two adults in Buffalo Co., 21 March, 2.5 mi. E of N10 bridge, just N of the middle channel of the Platte River. (It is possible that these two sightings were of the same pair listed first under confirmed sightings. -- Ed.)
Three adults in Hall Co., 1 April, .75 mi. W of Wood River I-80 interchange, S side of I-80.
Four adults in Merrick Co., 2 April, flying 4 mi. W and 4 N of Central City.
Five adults flying in Harlan Co., 11 April, 2 mi. W of Huntley.
Six adults flying in Lincoln Co., 12 April, SW corner of North Platte.
Three adults flying in Cherry Co., 17 April, 10 mi. NW of Elsmere, T26N, R26W, S3, NW1.
One adult in York Co., 28 April, 2 mi. E and 2 S of McCool Junction, T9N, R2W, S33, E1, NW1.

There were four unconfirmed sightings:
One adult flying in Hall Co., 20 March, north pasture of Mormon Island.
Four adults in Keith Co., 21 March, 9 mi. S and 2.5 E of Ogallala I-80 interchange.
Four adults in Buffalo Co., 3 April, mile marker 337 on N2, T12N, R13W, S23.
Four adults flying in Clay Co., 24 April, near Edgar.

The definitions of the classes of sightings are:

Confirmed Sighting. Observation made by a State or Federal Biologist or officer or by other known qualified observer (trained ornithologist or birder with experience in identification of Whooping Cranes). A photograph may also be used to confirm sightings.

Probable Sighting. No confirmation made by State or Federal Biologist or officer or by other known qualified observer, yet details of sighting seem to identify the birds as Whooping Cranes. To be classified as a probable sighting each of the following factors must be met: (1) location of sighting is within normal migration corridor and is an appropriate site for Whooping Cranes; (2) date of sighting is within period of migration; (3) accurate physical description; (4) number of birds is reasonable; (5) behavior of the birds does not eliminate Whooping Cranes; and (6) good probability that observer would provide reliable report.

Unconfirmed Sighting. Details of sighting meet some, but not all, of the six factors listed for a probable sighting.

Grua Americana (27, (2), 1) reported: "A rare event occurred three times this spring, according to Tom Stehn of the Aransas refuge. Three whooper pairs started migration, leaving their chicks behind. The chicks quickly joined other subadult groups, and two of the orphaned chicks apparently migrated together. In North Dakota, another pair left their chick behind. The same thing was documented in Saskatchewan. Perhaps the rapid growth of the chicks last summer in Wood Buffalo led to a crop of precocious juveniles that were feeling their independence."
LEAST TERNS IN LANCASTER CO. On 16 May 1988, while birding Oak Lake Park in Lincoln, Alan Grenon and I observed a single adult Least Tern flying over the lake from the southwest. Both of us are familiar with the species, and identified the bird easily by its small size, rapid wingbeat, white forehead, yellow bill, and wholly black outermost primaries. This individual flew, without calling, across the lake to the east and out of sight. A short time later we found two Least Terns in the marsh east of Capitol Beach Lake, less than a mile southwest of Oak Lake. These birds, both adults, were seen loafing on a mudflat, and in flight they reacted violently to the presence of an adult Forster's Tern, chasing the much larger bird across the pool with characteristic squealing chip calls. Both Least Terns were still present on the mud when we left about two hours later. There was no indication that these birds were at a nesting site. The species has likely bred at Capitol Beach, however (NBR 53: 33), and conscientious monitoring of the marsh through the summer might have produced a record of attempted nesting. Unfortunately, the chances of success are quite slim, as there appeared to be no suitable island habitat available and the mud and salt flats are dangerously accessible to a wide variety of mammalian predators. At any rate, the presence of this decreasing species at a historical breeding area underscores yet again the significance of the Lancaster Co. salt marshes to many of Nebraska's rarest birds.

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LEAST TERNS IN DOUGLAS CO. On 8 June, 1988, while I was canoeing on the Elkhorn River, I found two pairs and possibly two more individual Least Terns. This was about halfway between highways 36 and 64 in western Douglas Co. The two pairs centered their activities on two island sandbars, and one bird may have been on a nest. As part of channelization and bank stabilization work in progress by the Papio Natural Resources District, a dam was being built across the top of the large meander which included the areas in use by the two pairs. A few days later a representative of the Nongame Wildlife program of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission confirmed the presence in this area of at least one Tern nest with eggs. This is an area where Least Terns probably have not nested for many years. On 18 June I again canoeed this area, and this part of the river had been cut off at its upper end, leaving no current and much lower water levels within it. A search of the area revealed no Terns. When I reported this information I was told by a representative of the Nongame program that no corrective or restorative actions were anticipated in that area to favor this endangered species. On all birds reported I saw the black crown, nape, and outer primaries; white forehead and underparts; thin yellow bill; and long, slender wings and body. These birds were smaller than Killdeer available for comparison.

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SUMMER TANAGERS IN VALLEY CO. On 7 May 1988, after a high wind, a Summer Tanager spent all day in my back yard, where three other people saw him. I assumed he had been buffeted by the winds of the previous day, and was resting on his migration. He was quite unconcerned by our presence, and often alighted within five feet of us. Then on 19 May, at North Loup, a similar bird appeared at the birdbath of one of the people who had observed the bird in my yard earlier.

I have lived in the county for nearly all of my eighty years and have always been interested in birds. Though I have seen Scarlet Tanagers a time or two I have never before seen a Summer Tanager nor heard anyone else in this area seeing such a bird.

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BAIRD'S SPARROWS IN LANCASTER CO. On 25 March 1988 I was southeast of Raymond, walking along a small wooded stream adjacent to the east side of the Oak Creek Cemetery. The time was about 10 AM and there were gusty winds from the southwest. The weather was mild, with a low in the 30s and a high later that day in the 40s. I saw a bird fly into a tall tree along the creek-cemetery interface, and I knew it was a species I had not seen before. It had the Grasshopper Sparrow's flattened head profile, and it also looked
like a Savannah Sparrow. It was shortly joined by another of its kind. They sat together, about 40 feet off the ground and approximately 70 feet from where I stood, so close together I could see them both in the binoculars. They sat there, buffeted by the strong wind, for about 45 seconds and then flew a short distance to another tree. There they were harassed by a Robin that flew into the same tree. The two sparrows promptly flew away. By this time I had determined that they were Baird's Sparrows. Johnsgard's A Revised List of the Birds of Nebraska and Adjacent Plains States states that they are an uncommon spring migrant, less common eastwardly, and spring sightings range from 24 March to 8 June, and the migrants are associated with prairies and other natural grasslands. There was an open fallow field to the east of the creek. I spent another 30 minutes along the stream trying to find the birds but I did not see them again.

I hypothesized that they were migrating and they were forced by the strong, gusty, southwesterly winds to take a short rest in the trees. The early sighting could have been attributed to the warm, dry weather we had in the late winter and early spring, and to the strong wind on the 25th. The birds had well defined, narrow bands of fine black stripes on mostly white bellies and breasts. Fine black streaks on the sides of the crowns and on the napes were also seen. Two dark stripes bordered each side of the throat. The sides of the heads were light buffy; however, the rich buffy crowns were not seen. The crown looked whitish when viewed on one of the birds, whereas the rest of the head was light to medium buff. In certain light, with the sun behind me, the head of the other sparrow looked like a golden rust; however, when it briefly bent its head toward me all that I could see was a finely dark-streaked crown pattern with a lighter pattern in between. These were both pale birds. They did not have the yellow lores or the eye streaks of a Savannah, which has broader bands of streaks on the breast and sides, usually much darker. The Savannah's streaking is not as "crisp" as that of a Baird's. The combination of patterns observed did not fit any of the other grass-inhabiting sparrows, which as juveniles have breast streaks but do not have them the following spring. In The Birds of Canada W. E. Godfrey states that the females are somewhat duller than the males and that the breast of the Baird's are often white and not as buffy as the rest of the head and nape. The heads are streaked black mostly on the sides of the crown, leaving rich buffy median stripes which are less obvious in females. Bent's Life Histories states the "ocherish patches on Baird's Sparrow's head and neck are not apparent, even through good glasses, unless the bird is at close range" and "these birds and other grass-inhabiting birds migrate in small groups or as single individuals".

Peregrine Falcon Project in Omaha. Six young captive-raised Peregrine Falcons were introduced in Omaha via a hack box on Woodmen Tower in 1988. One died while still using the hack box; one died when it flew into a radio tower. A non-captive raised female was added in September. The five remaining birds were catching their own food, and left on migration. The last one seen was in a tree at Lake Manawa (Iowa) in early October (identified by red paint on its back, placed there when it was put in the hack box). Jerry Toll, in A Bird's Eye View, said of the last bird received: "Both parents were from breeding programs and nested their first year after release (peregrines were not previously known to nest until 2-3 years of age). They bred at a hacksite in Milwaukee but ran into problems with a dominant male falcon that killed their mate and drove the female to the ground. We received her after a month of rehabilitation."

Sandhill Cranes in Platte Co. On 2 April 1988 a flock of Sandhill Cranes came down into the swampy area at Lake North, Columbus, about 4:30 PM.

Food-carrying Louisiana Waterthrushes. On 7 July 1988 I observed a Louisiana Waterthrush foraging along the south bank of Rock Creek, just upstream of Raccoon Hollow in Neale Woods Nature Center, southeastern Washington Co. The bird soon had a number of invertebrates in its beak, and then continued
to flit along the bank, giving chipping notes and making occasional stops to reposition its mouthful of prey. A few times it left the stream to visit one small area of woods along the bank, but quickly returned to the bank near me, chipping, and still carrying the invertebrates. When I left the area the bird had been carrying the same food items for almost 25 minutes. I did not see the nest or young, but this behavior almost certainly indicates their presence. This is probably the northernmost nesting record for this species in Nebraska. The Waterthrush was subsequently seen or heard chipping in the same area 9, 13, and 14 July by a total of eight observers.

The bird was slightly smaller than nearby Eastern Phoebes, was brown above, mostly white below, with dark streaks on the breast and flanks. A broad white eye-line extended far behind each eye, and there was a pale post-temporal area on a mostly dark face. The base color of the flanks was buffy, contrasting with the white of the breast and crissum. The throat could not be seen clearly because of the prey hanging from the bird’s beak. The bill was long and stout, with light areas near the base, and the legs and feet were large and pink. The bird frequently bobbed the rear half of its body. Northern Waterthrush was eliminated by the length and whiteness of the eye-lines, contrasting buffy flanks, obviously pink legs, and large bill. I saw many Northern Waterthrushes this spring, and I observed the Louisiana Waterthrushes nesting in Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co., in 1982 (NBR 50: 88-89).

During a Xerces Society butterfly count and work on the Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas in Indian Cave State Park on 25 July 1988, confirming evidence of breeding Louisiana Waterthrush in Richardson Co., was found. We glimpsed an adult Waterthrush along a stream near the southeastern edge of the park, and Tanya Bray and Babs Padelford noted a broad white eye-line. Soon afterwards, I saw a juvenile Waterthrush with partially grown tail feathers and possibly some downy tips on the upper back and breast feathers. It was brownish above, white below, with a clear white throat and somewhat diffuse streaks on the breast, but not on the flanks, belly, or crissum, which were all white. A broad white eye-line began above the eye and extended rearward. The bird did bob the rear portion of its body. A few minutes later, this juvenile had moved into thick shrubs and an adult flew in, giving chipping notes and carrying probable food items in its beak, pausing momentarily before entering the thicket. On the adult I saw the whitish eye-line, dark-streaked whitish underparts, and brownish upperparts.

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HOUSE FINCHES NESTING IN SARPY CO. On 16 April 1988 I heard a House Finch song, and found the singer in a tree about a half-block away. The bright red male was joined by a brown female, and they both flew to a nearby yard and began picking up grass and twigs. Then they flew another half-block, to a tall spruce tree and carried the material to an almost completed nest and began working on it. On 4 June Bill Benner, who is at Cornell University researching House Finches, and I saw a male House Finch feeding two juveniles. Another bird was with them, which could have been the female or another young bird. They were perched on top of Central Elementary School in Bellevue, just a few feet away from the spruce tree in which the nest was located. I believe this to be the first documented record of nesting for this species in Sarpy Co. and eastern Nebraska.

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LESSEER GOLDFINCH IN SCOTTS BLUFF CO. On 9 July 1988 a group from the Wildcat Audubon Society was in Carter Canyon, southwest of Gering, when I saw a very bright bird fly from my right into a tree directly in front of me. Except for the very small size it made me think of an oriole because of the bright color with black and white markings. The bird perched facing me, and moved from branch to branch, but never did perch with its back to me. But it finally flew away from me. The bright yellow body, bill size, and shape were that of an American Goldfinch. It had the typical black cap extending from the bill back to the top of the head, but the sides of the head appeared darker than an American Goldfinch. The lower cheeks and head were bright yellow, but an area between this yellow and the black of the cap
was a grayish color. In the very brief look I had of the back of the bird I could tell it was not yellow, but was maybe gray - it was not black. As soon as the bird flew I realized I had been looking at a Lesser Goldfinch. Checking with Peterson's western guide and then with Robbins and National Geographic field guides confirmed it was a Lesser Goldfinch, green-backed race.

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