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SPRING FIELD REPORT, March-May 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Extremes of weather conditions and resulting variation in water conditions were noteworthy this spring. The west was very dry, but the Rainwater Basin had ample rains resulting in excellent breeding conditions for various waterbirds, notably Eared Grebe and American Coot. Shorebird numbers were unremarkable, although there was plenty of variation between species. Indeed, Dunlin, with record numbers, and Ruddy Turnstones were numerous. Arrival dates were pushing early, but not record early. Species earlier than average were American Golden-Plover, Mountain Plover, Black-necked Stilt, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Stilt Sandpiper.

Increasingly associated with wetlands, albeit unrelated to water levels, Greater Prairie-Chicken continued to use grassy margins of wetlands in the Rainwater Basin for lek sites. Leks were also noted in agricultural fields. Use of these habitats suggests ability to adapt and bodes well for the future of this species in southeast Nebraska, where it is also doing very well in its traditional native grassland habitats.

Red-shouldered Hawks are being reported away from the traditional breeding site at Fontenelle Forest, the only site known in the state. Other species continuing range expansions and increasing in numbers are Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Summer Tanager.

It was a fun spring for rarity-seekers, with a putative first state record Zone-tailed Hawk, one of fewer than 5 records on the Great Plains north of the breeding range, a state 7th record Curve-billed Thrasher, found, appropriately, by the state's Non-game Bird Program Manager, and a 9th state record Golden-crowned Sparrow. Lesser highlights, but still major zooties, were Common Crane, Prairie Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, and Cape May Warbler.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADF: Arbor Day Farm, Nebraska City;
BOL: Branched Oak L SRA, Lancaster Co;
Cem: Cemetery;
FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co;
GPD: Gavins Point Dam, Cedar/Knox Cos;
HCR: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co;
ICSP: Indian Cave SP, Nemaha/Richardson Cos;
L: Lake;
LM: L McConaughy SRA, Keith Co;
LNB: Lakes North and Babcock, Platte Co;
LO: L Ogallala SRA, Keith Co;
m.ob.: many observers;
NC: Nature Center;
NOURC: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee;

NWR: National Wildlife Refuge;
PL: Pawnee L SRA, Lancaster Co;
Res: Reservoir;
RWB: Rainwater Basin; eastern RWB mostly Fillmore, Clay and surrounding counties, western RWB mostly Phelps Co;
SCP: Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co;
SHP: State Historical Park;
SL: Sewage Lagoon(s);
SP: State Park;
SRA: State Recreation Area;
WMA: Wildlife Management Area (State);
WPA: Waterfowl Production Area (Federal);
WSR: Wind Springs Ranch, s. Sioux Co.

GAZETTEER:

Boyer Chute: NWR, Washington Co;
Harvard Marsh: WPA, Clay Co;
Jack Sinn: Memorial WMA, Lancaster and Saunders Cos;
Kiowa: WMA, Scotts Bluff Co;
Rowe Sanctuary: Lillian Annette Rowe Bird Sanctuary, Buffalo Co;
Sandhills: large area of sand prairie and wetlands in central Nebraska;
Tamora: WMA, Seward Co;
Valentine NWR: Cherry Co;
Waco-Spikerush: Waco WPA and Spikerush WMA, York Co;

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