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Notes- Nebraska Bird Review June 1987

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NOTES

PELICAN WITH SANDHILL CRANES. On 17 October 1986, about 1:30 PM, I took a call from Mrs. Darrol Sukraw from Stapleton, who reported a

flock of Sandhill Cranes (approximately 100 birds) that contained a single Whooping Crane. After questioning her about the description of the white bird, I felt her observation might be valid and asked her which direction the birds were traveling.

She informed me that the flock had just passed over Stapleton and was flying directly south down highway 83, toward North Platte. This is a distance of about 30 miles. Hoping that I could verify the Whooping Crane sighting, I finished a project on my desk and drove across town to the north side of North Platte. As I crossed the North Platte River I observed a large flock of Sandhill Cranes riding the thermals over highway 83 and slowly moving south. The flock was flying at an altitude of approximately 1,000 to 1,500 feet, but a single white bird stood out vividly from the rest of the flock. I radioed back to the North Platte office that I had located the flock with the single white bird, and it appeared to be a Whooping Crane.

I had no binoculars, but the snow white color of the bird's body and the black wing tips were very apparent, even at the high altitude. It was impossible to see the bird's legs or the shape of its neck, but it did seem to be larger than the Sandhill Cranes in the flock. The white bird flew in perfect unison with the others of the flock. When they would glide, it would glide. When they rode the thermals over the river and soared, it would soar. And when they would line out and fly south, it too would fall into formation and fly with the flock.

Since I did not have binoculars to make a positive identification I radioed conservation officer Dwight Allbery, who was working south of town. I told him the birds were starting to pass over town, and I was afraid that I would lose them in the process. I did lose sight of the flock, and started looking for them on the south side of town. I finally found the flock near Lake Maloney. They were headed southwesterly. I again radioed Allbery, who caught up with me and the flock. We put his spotting scope on the white bird, which was now flying in about 12 birds from the end of the line. It was a White Pelican, and we last observed it, still in formation, flying south with the Sandhill Cranes at about 1,500 feet altitude.

--- Rocky Hoffman, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Route 4, Box 36, North Platte Neb. 69101

SNOWY EGRET IN DAKOTA COUNTY, NEBRASKA. On 31 May 1987 Ed M. Brogie, Ellen Brogie, Jim Landon, and I observed a Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) in Dakota Co. on a small pond along the north side of Highway 20, immediately west of the Missouri River bridge.

The bird was in the company of two Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) and its smaller size, black bill, black legs with bright yellow feet were clearly noted.

--- Mark A. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, Neb. 68729

MINDEN NOTES About 10 May my brother Elwin, who lives in Adams Co., near Holstein, heard a clicking noise as his dog stalked something in the grass. The dog jumped and caught it, but Elwin was able to get it before it was harmed. It was a Black Rail - very small, purplish color, yellow legs. The bird ran away into the uncut grass when it was released. Earlier in the year my cousin, Robert Spicknall, had a Northern Shrike and an American Bittern near Holstein. On 10 May I heard a Lesser Yellowlegs, and saw Upland Sandpipers and Grasshopper Sparrows. Elwin saw a Bobolink around mid-April and a Snowy Heron about 1 and 4 May.

--- Harold Turner, Box 333, Minden, Neb. 68959.

TRUMPETER SWANS. Two Trumpeter Swans, identified by their neckband numbers 33NC and 58NA, arrived at Schilling Waterfowl Refuge, Plattsmouth, Nebraska, on 5 December 1986 and stayed until 11 December, when they moved to a more secluded farm pond in Iowa, where they were fed and protected by the farmer.

33NC is a 3-year-old female who has migrated before. Last year she and her mate wintered 40 miles west of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Last spring they were seen north of Lincoln, Nebraska, while on their way back, but somewhere between Lincoln and Gordon, Wisconsin, where she summered, the male disappeared. She stayed in Gordon until October, and was not reported again until this sighting in our area.

58NA was originally sexed as a female, but personnel in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources now believe "she" is a "he". Whatever, 58NA is a 4-year-old from Sibley County, Minnesota, who has never migrated before. Personnel in the Hennepin County Trumpeter Swan Restoration Project say there are at least 11 other swans which have recently disappeared: four collared adults, five cygnets traveling with them, and two uncollared subadults. Some other unmarked birds may have left, also.

--- Ruth C. Green, 506 W. 31st Avenue, Bellevue, Neb. 68006

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE IN KEITH COUNTY, NEBRASKA. On 19 April 1987 we identified and photographed a male Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) at Keystone Lake, Keith Co. The bird was first seen frequenting the effluent area of Kingsley Dam and was approached to a distance of approximately 50 yards.

The bird exhibited a large white facial crescent on a purplish head. The forehead was very abrupt and the black bill appeared quite small in relation to the head size. The bird's white breast and white sides were separated by a black narrowing line extending forward from the back. The black back contained a row of white spots running from the shoulder of the wing to the middle part of the back. A white wing patch was also clearly visible.



Three other Goldeneyes were also present, although they were not identified as our attention was drawn on the aforementioned bird and the task of photographing it. Several photographs were taken before all four birds were frightened away by a passing boat.

The photograph is the first photographic evidence of this species for Nebraska. Identifiable photographs are in possession of the authors and others have been sent to the Nebraska Records Committee.

--- Mark A. and Ellen L. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, Neb. 68728

BALD EAGLE STRIKES SANDHILL CRANE. Around 7 AM 22 March 1987 I was SE of Kearney, watching Sandhill Cranes coming from the river to the fields. There had been a heavy rain, and the fields were wet and muddy, there was an overcast, and it probably was in the 40s. A man, woman, and child were in a pickup, and the man called to me as I started to leave, to say that he had lived there all his life and just saw something he had never seen before - a Bald Eagle had struck a Crane in flight. Both of the observers were used to Sandhill Cranes, and she had seen the Whooping Crane near her folks house. The Eagle was circling about 30 or 40 feet above the Crane, which was on the ground. Unfortunately, I got out of the car to see better, and caused the Eagle, a fully mature bird with white head and tail, to fly over to the trees along the river. While I talked to the family the Crane got to its feet and began to peck at the ground, but it was obviously injured. The other Cranes had all gone on their way, but this one made no effort to fly. The Eagle sat and watched, the farmer went on his way, and I had to go on my way before I saw the outcome of this event.

- Naomi Brill, 4625 South St., Lincoln, Neb. 68506

Efforts to identify the observers of the strike have not been successful. Mr. George W. Brown, Kearney, canvassed the area of the observation but no one could identify the observers, who apparently were not residents of the immediate area.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION MIDWINTER EAGLE SURVEY. The 1987 total of 994 Bald Eagles represents the highest estimate of the state's wintering population since systematic surveys began. The 1987 figure is 33% greater than the previous high of 746 birds observed in 1985. Undoubtedly, a majority of the increase can be attributed to the very mild winter we've experienced. Most rivers across the state remained ice-free, and ice cover on the major reservoirs and lakes was less than usual. As a result, favorable foraging conditions were found in several areas that do not accommodate many

eagles in most years. Hopefully, a portion of the increase in wintering eagles is a reflection of an increasing breeding population. It is nice to think that maybe conservation and restoration efforts are paying off.

--- Greg Wingfield, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
 Route 4, Box 36, North Platte, Neb. 69101

The 1987 count, with figures from 64 sites, is summarized below. (River sites are stretches of the river.) 1986 survey results are given at NBR 54:61.

	No. of Sites	Adults	Bald Eagles Im- matures	Un- known	Golden Eagles Adults	Im- matures	Total
North Platte River	6	82	46	-	4	2	134
Platte River	9	162	52	5	1	-	220
South Platte River	1	21	9	-	-	2	32
Republican River	3	137	75	14	-	-	226
Middle Loup River	1	17	3	-	-	-	20
North Loup River	1	2	-	-	-	-	2
Loup River	1	49	12	-	-	-	61
Snake River	1	6	-	-	-	-	6
Niobrara River	5	76	11	-	1	2	90
Missouri River	4	128	33	1	-	-	162
Kimball/Cheyenne counties	3	1	-	-	2	-	3
Garden	1	-	-	-	2	-	2
Dawes	3	-	2	-	3	-	5
Sheridan	4	1	-	-	3	2	6
Wood Lake/Valentine NWR	2	-	-	-	3	-	3
Brown Co.	2	1	1	-	2	-	4
Holt	1	-	-	-	1	-	1
Loup/Wheeler	2	3	-	-	2	-	5
Boone/Nance	2	2	1	-	3	-	6
Cass	1	-	-	-	2	-	2
Clay	1	7	4	-	-	-	11
Furnas/Frontier /Red Willow	4	5	2	-	-	-	7
Dundy/Chase	6	14	9	-	1	3	27
Total	64	714	260	20	30	11	1,035

FALL 1986 WHOOPING CRANE REPORT. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Grand Island, reported the following confirmed Whooping Crane sightings in Nebraska for the fall of 1986:

14 October, 2 flying over Pressey State Special Use Area, T14N, R21W, Sec. 9, 4 mi. northeast of Oconto, Custer Co.

29 October to 8 November, 2 adults and an immature, T6N, R13W, Sec. 17 and 20, 7 mi. east of Minden, Kearney Co.

2 November, 2 flying 4 mi. n. and ½ e. of Cairo, Howard Co.

3 November, 2, 3 mi. e. of Rockville, on the Middle Loup River, Sherman Co.

5 November, 3, T8N, R15W, Sec. 18, 2 mi. e. of Kearney bridge, Platte River, Buffalo Co.

7 November, 3, T8N, R15W, Sec. 19 and 20, 2 mi. s. of I-80 on Hwy 44, 2 mi. e. and ½ n., Kearney Co.

NOVEMBER WOODCOCK SIGHTING - HALL COUNTY, NEBRASKA. We sighted an American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) on 20 November 1986, on the St. Augustine Boy Scout Camp, on the Platte River south of Grand Island. The legal description of the site is T10N, R9W, NE¼SE¼ Sec. 16. The bird was observed about 2:00 PM. Weather conditions were clear, sunny, and relatively calm, approximately 50° F.

The lone Woodcock was flushed from riparian woodland immediately adjacent to the Platte River. Overstory trees consisted of eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) and eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). Average height of the overstory was 14.2 m, with an average canopy cover of 94.3%. Understory

trees and shrubs included downed cottonwood, roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*) and young red cedar, with a mean height of 2.1 m and canopy cover of 67.7%. Leaf litter was abundant. Soil was Wann deep fine sandy loam (range site, subirrigated; woodland site, moderately wet). These data were taken as part of a habitat investigation of riparian woodlands and other cover types of the central Platte River floodplain.

This observation appears especially significant because of the record low temperatures experienced in the area during the previous week. The lowest official temperature during that period reached -8° F at Grand Island.

--- Jerry Brabander and Kim Hanson, US Fish and Wildlife Service,
2604 St. Patrick, Suite 7, Grand Island, Neb. 68803

NIORARA NOTES. On 6 June 1987 the students of Willie and John Lueshen's Norfolk bird class, with their families - a total of 21 - made a field trip to Schreier's River Acres, near Bohemia Prairie, 10 miles from Verdigre. Highlights of the trip were: several Tree Swallows, a Cedar Waxwing on a nest in a deciduous tree, a Song Sparrow, a Willow Flycatcher building a nest of spiderwebs, and two Least Terns on the Niobrara River near a sandbar.

-- Lona Schreier, Box G, Verdigre, Neb. 68783

SHORT-EARED OWLS IN LANCASTER CO. Five to seven Short-eared Owls were observed on 10 January 1986, during a controlled burn on the Jack Sinn Memorial WMA, Lancaster Co. Two to five birds were observed on nearly a daily basis from early October through the end of November in 1983, 1984, and 1985, and seven or eight birds were observed 25 November 1985. The observer was in the field five days a week during this time, in each of the three years. One Owl was seen in November 1985 at Wildwood WMA.

All observations were by Game and Parks Commission personnel.

--- Ross Lock, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission,
PO Box 30370, Lincoln, Neb. 68503

THE FATE OF THE HALSEY POORWILL. I delivered the Common Poorwill present at the 1986 Fall Field Day (NBR 54:79) to the Wildlife Rescue Team, Inc., in Lincoln 5 October. The bird had been found a week or so earlier, west of Grand Island, Hall Co., and turned over to Gary Lingle, who brought it to the meeting. Mrs. Diane Chrisman, Bird Team Leader for WRT, who cared for the bird after its arrival in Lincoln, believed it to be a young bird, based on plumage description. It survived to get to Lincoln because Common Poorwills go into a torpor when food becomes scarce, and this prevented it from starving. It had a possible broken radius and a dislocated shoulder. The broken bone was no problem, but the shoulder led to several unexpected complications. It is very rare to have Common Poorwills in captivity and little is known about their requirements. The Poorwill gave WRT people valuable experience in dealing with odd birds. WRT made contact with an avian nutritionist at University of California-Davis for future help. The bird ate well and gained weight on its special diet. It was given regular physical therapy sessions and was doing well for the most part. It enjoyed dust baths, preening, and sitting on a log. But the wing healed improperly, so that it could not be released back in the wild. Mrs. Chrisman convinced other members of WRT to keep the bird for educational display, and for that it would have to become accustomed to people, and the wing would have to be removed to allow proper motility on the ground. Before the wing was removed the bird was allowed to waddle around the Chrisman home, and it became a favorite pet of Mrs. Chrisman's son. But the Poorwill's cryptic coloring worked all too well on the Chrisman's carpet, and the bird was accidentally stepped on and killed. The bird will be deposited at the Nebraska State Museum.

--- Thomas E. Labadz, 1241 Starview Lane, Lincoln, Neb. 68511

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER. On the morning of 10 September 1986 Nick Lyman and George Nason, both of the North Platte office of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, observed a single Clark's Nutcracker in central Lincoln Co. The bird was observed by Lyman several more times during the following week. All observations were made in the South Beach area of Lake Maloney, approximately 6 miles south of North Platte. Characteristics used

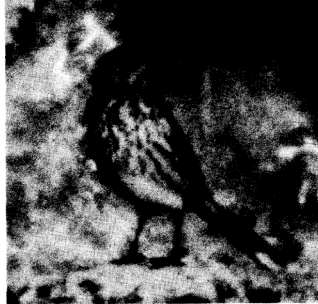
to identify the bird included the dark wings against the light gray body, white wing and tail patches, and the long, heavy bill. Both Lyman and Nason have seen Clark's Nutcrackers on several occasions while traveling through the western mountain states.

--- Greg Wingfield, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission,
Route 4, Box 36, North Platte, Neb. 69101

SAGE THRASHER IN SIOUX COUNTY, NEBRASKA. On 18 April 1987 Larry Roper, Ellen Brogie, and I observed a Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) in Sioux Co., The bird was found frequenting a sandstone outcropping along the road going into Sowbelly Canyon from Harrison.

The bird exhibited the streaked breast, slightly curved bill, white wing bars, light yellowish eye, and white cornered tail characteristic of the species.

We first saw the bird at approximately 8:00 AM, but observed it in the same area several hours later and again in mid-afternoon. Identification photos are in possession of the author and others have been sent to the Nebraska Records Committee.



--- Mark A. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, Neb. 68729

PICTURES SUPPLIED. Recently (NBR 54:41, June 1986) Silcock, Bray, and



Padelford commented on the lack of Nebraska pictures of the Cattle Egret and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (they supplied one of it). The Cattle Egret picture is supplied by Wayne Mollhoff and was taken 7 May 1983 near Albion. The unusual Scissor-tailed Flycatcher picture is supplied by Ruth C. Green, Bellevue. It is one she netted in July 1979, just south of Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co. The Mississippi Kite was photographed by Paul Kaufman 11 May 1986 on Old Cheney Road, Wilderness Park, Lincoln. It was reported in NBR 54:48.



A COMMON YELLOWTHROAT SENIOR CITIZEN. On 28 June 1986 I re-netted a male Common Yellowthroat that I had banded as an after hatching year male on 20 June 1981. This bird was at least six years old.

--- Ruth C. Green, 506 W. 31st Avenue, Bellevue, Neb. 68004

HAND FEEDING (ALMOST). I stepped out on my patio 14 March 1984 to refill empty suet feeders. Two Red-breasted Nuthatches, who had been emptying a plastic feeder on my kitchen window, came flitting around my head. I took a piece of suet and held it in my open hand. One of the Nuthatches lit on my finger. As soon as it was aware that my finger was different it hurried off without pecking the suet.

--- Gladys Johnson, Hoe Hill, RFD 1, Box 226, Elkhorn, Nebraska 68021

CORRECTION TO 1986 INDEX. The last entry for Whooping Crane in the 1986 Index should be 66, not 64.

THE XX INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS will take place in Christchurch, New Zealand, from 2-9 December 1990. Requests for the First Circular and suggestions regarding Congress organization should be addressed to: Dr. Ben D. Bell, Secretary-General, XX International Ornithological Congress, Department of Zoology, Victoria University of Wellington, Private Bag, Wellington, New Zealand.

1987 FALL FIELD DAY, 4-H CAMP, HALSEY FOREST, 3 AND 4 OCTOBER