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Notes [June 1981]

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NOTES

MISSISSIPPI KITE. At 3:30 p.m. 7 September 1980 Alan Grenon and I observed a Mississippi Kite from the back porch of our house, which is several meters south of Fontenelle Forest and about 1 km. west of the Missouri River, overlooking the flood plain. The bird was coming from the east, about 5 m. above the trees. The flight was extremely buoyant and smooth, rather like that of a light-bodied gull or swallow. When it was above us it began to glide in circles, just above the trees. From time to time it reached with its head for its feet, eating what apparently were butterflies. Not once did the bird flap. After less than 5 minutes of this the bird flew swiftly towards the southwest. The Kite was under observation with 7 × 35 and 7 × 50 binoculars at a

distance of about 25 m., under such conditions that most field marks were easily visible. Both wing and tail were long, the latter distinctly squared at the end. The bird was dark gray above, with the very pale head contrasting greatly. The underparts were light gray, the breast faintly but noticeably streaked brown. The remiges were slaty; the wing linings were generously flecked with buff. The tail from below was barred in brown and light gray. The feet were orange.

— *Rick Wright, 401 Kountze, Bellevue, Nebraska 68005.*

TURKEY. Lee Morris, Norris Alfred, and I saw a wild tom Turkey in the Platte River area north of Hordville while birding Easter Sunday (19 April 1981) afternoon. It was the first one seen in this area by any one of us for a few years, although they were believed to be in the area. We also saw Wood Ducks, Magpies, and lots of Cedar Waxwings.

— *Ralph Harrington, 4248 Vine St., Lincoln, Nebraska 68503*

HAWK CONCENTRATION. On 24 September 1980, about 16 miles south of Hyannis, we saw an amazing spectacle. We spotted hawks sitting on the ground in an old hay field. Upon further inspection it was discovered that this flock was spread out over the entire field, with the hawks hopping about on the ground catching something (we assumed mice, but on consulting Bent decided it was probably grasshoppers). Swainson's Hawks probably constituted 95% or

more of the flock, with what may have been a few Red-shouldered Hawks scattered in with them. Hawks seemed to be everywhere: on the ground, on the stacks, and on fence posts. I conservatively counted 147 hawks in the main field, and we estimated the entire flock at over 200 birds. This was early morning. We stopped again on the way home later in the day, but the hawks were gone.

— *Don Sejkora, Box 566, Grant, Nebraska 69140*

(Similar concentrations of Swainson's Hawks, near Albion and near Ewing, were reported in *NBR* 47:66. These also were in late September.)

BARN OWLS. On 20 February 1981 two Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) were found dead along Highway 15 in Colfax Co., Nebraska. The first was found 4.5 miles south of the intersection of Highways 15 and 91; the other was found 10 miles south of the same intersection. Both Owls were estimated to have been dead for 2 to 3 days. No postmortem examination of the Owls was attempted, but it appeared that both had been struck by moving vehicles.

— *Kirk L. Peters and Robert H. Schmidt, Department of Forestry,
Fisheries, and Wildlife, University of Nebraska, Lincoln,
Nebraska 68583*

COMMON NIGHTHAWK. On 17 June 1980 I was driving a tractor along the end of one of our corn fields. I noticed a Nighthawk fly a short distance ahead of the tractor and then light again. I slowed the tractor as I approached this time, and when I was a short distance from the bird I stopped. The bird seemed to pay no attention, so I dismounted and walked slowly toward it. It was watching me but still didn't fly. At that point I decided to try to get as close as I could before it flew, so I started to circle it, walking slowly, at first in a fairly large circle but getting closer on each succeeding one. I keep my eyes on it, and it kept watching me. It didn't seem unduly alarmed as the circle got smaller and smaller and I leaned toward it. When I got close enough so I could, I just reached out quickly and picked it up. It didn't seem too happy about that situation and struggled for its freedom. After I had a good close up look and decided it was alright I released it and it flew off as if nothing had happened.

— *Lee Morris, Rt. 1, Box 14, Benedict, Nebraska 68316.*

COMMON NIGHTHAWK MIGRATION. I observed migrating Nighthawks 28 and 30 August 1980. On the latter date over 300 were counted in Trendwood Park, Lincoln, from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. A great deal of vertical activity was noted among large groups. These moved off to the southeast and were immediately replaced by others, which engaged in similar activity.

— *Dr. Esther V. Bennett, 1641 Devoe Drive, Lincoln, Nebraska 68506*

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER. On 14 July 1980 I found a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on Olive Creek State Recreation Area, 20 miles southwest of Lincoln, near Kramer. The bird was sitting atop a wooden fence post near the county road. I speculate that the bird was a juvenile, as the tail was about 3 inches shorter than it should be.

— *Bill White, Resource Services Division, Game Commission,
P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503*

NESTING SAY'S PHOEBES. Mr. and Mrs. Alex Kasha, who live about four miles southeast of North Platte, have had a pair of Say's Phoebes nesting on their front porch for the past 13 or 14 years. Although the porch has four posts and the birds appear to try out all of them, they always build on the post at the southeast corner. The location is protected by house structures on the south and east sides, and the bottom is a flat piece of metal.

The deep, firm nest is made of long fine grass and it is moveable, not fastened to a base. Several little loose pieces of concrete are around the nest, carried there by the birds. Perhaps they help keep nesting material in place. The Phoebes have two broods a year, averaging between three and six young, but usually having four. This year (23 June 1980) there are six. The first brood is "shoved out of the nest by the parents", according to Mrs. Kasha, and the nest is immediately repaired in preparation for the second clutch. One year the Kashas removed the

first nest, and the birds failed to re-build, resulting in a single brood that year. In the fall the Kashas clean everything away and spray the area with a pesticide to kill parasites, including mites. Among the identifiable items fed the young are moths (millers) and dragonflies, whose wings are scraped off by the parents. This is particularly true for the very young birds. Both adults feed the young, and the male has been observed feeding the female on the nest. The Kashas have seen the Phoebe's drink at their bird bath, but never have seen them take a bath. The Say's Phoebe's usually arrive the last of March, but this year, 1980, they did not return until 11 April. The birds can be heard calling in the area before they come to the porch.

— *Doris Gates, R.R. 1, Box 25, Chadron, Nebraska 69337*

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLES. On 11 April 1981 my son, Michael, and I were at the man-made lake and park about 3 or 4 miles north of Columbus, Nebraska. There we observed what I believe was a pair of nesting Great-tailed Grackles. We heard them, and later listened to tapes of Boat-tailed Grackle calls, and they were not the same.

— *Robert E. Holtz, Biology Dept. Concordia College,
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104*

PERKINS COUNTY. The shorebird migration seemed to have peaked around 4 September 1980, when we saw Baird's, Least, Semipalmated, Pectoral, and Solitary Sandpipers; both Dowitchers (most probably Long-billed); both Yellowlegs (in about equal numbers, and quite common, with perhaps 80 to 100 present at the sewage pond near Grant); Killdeer, and Wilson's Phalarope. Other migrants included large numbers of Wilson's Warblers, a few Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, and individual American Redstart, Yellow-breasted Chat, and an *Oporonis* warbler (either MacGillivray's or an immature Mourning). The day before I saw (and heard) a Western Wood Pewee. Wilson's and Yellow-rumped Warblers were still present 27 September, when I also saw an immature Chestnut-sided Warbler and a Field Sparrow. On 20 October we saw 3 or 4 dozen Sandhill Cranes, with about 50 going over on 1 November and 250 or so, in 2 flocks, on 3 November. We saw 8 Eastern Bluebirds on 29 October. We have seen them here only once or twice before. On 3 October we saw an enormous flock of Longspurs (all species except Laplands) and Water Pipits near Grant. On 12 November I saw a Prairie Falcon, 2 Purple Finches, and 2 Bobwhites, and on 14 November an immature Goshawk.

Barn Owls have nested at my parent's (Jerry Sejkora) farm now for at least 5 years, using a pigeon coop. Great Horned Owls have nested here for at least 10 years, with a successful brood

of 3 last season. Yellow-billed Cuckoos spent the summer and may have nested.

— *Don Sejkora, Box 566, Grant, Nebraska 69140*

YORK COUNTY NOTES. On 12 December 1980 Norris Alfred and I saw a Bald Eagle. We have lots of Pine Siskins, but not many Robins. We have quite a few Mountain Bluebirds again, in the same area along the Platte as they were the last time. I saw a Townsend's Solitaire and a Mockingbird last week, and I have seen eight Prairie Falcons so far this winter. I have seen several Bald Eagles around the Platte since November. I haven't seen as many Rough-legged Hawks as usual.

— *Lee Morris, Rt. 1, Box 14, Benedict, Nebraska 68316*

DEAD TIMBERS RECREATION AREA. Because of the mild winter of 1979-80 a few White-throated Sparrows overwintered at Dead Timbers, north of Scribner. Two White-throats were seen there 31 December 1979 and one 15 March 1980. I have never seen these birds so early; normally they migrate through the area toward the end of April. A substantial number (several hundred) of American Robins overwintered in the area, too, as did some Belted Kingfishers. Several were observed where patches of open water persisted throughout most of the mild winter. An Osprey was sighted, perched on a dead tree along the lake, on 26 April 1980.

— *Larry L. Einemann, Rt. 3, Box 205, West Point, Nebraska 68788.*