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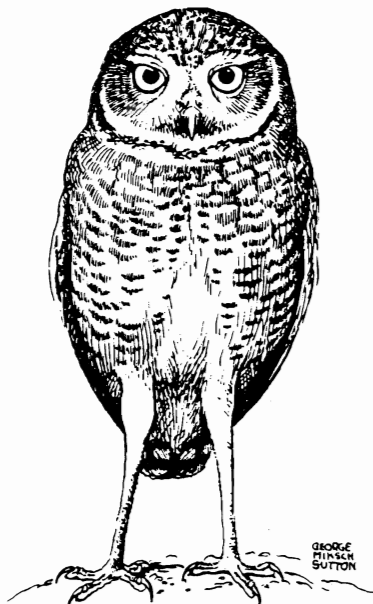
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# *The Nebraska Bird Review*

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SUMMER FIELD REPORT, June-July 2002

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INTRODUCTION

The big news this summer was the drought which affected most of southern and western Nebraska. Conditions were particularly severe in the southern Panhandle and in the southwest. As one observer (DP) wryly noted: "The cool, cloudy weather in the sixties this morning was a welcome contrast to the stinkin' hot dirt blowing blast furnace in the low one hundreds that was in south central Nebraska Sunday afternoon [June 3]." Some comments from western Kansas by birder-rancher Scott Seltman are pertinent: "I think there's no question that because of the ongoing drought most farmers delayed their fieldwork this spring, perhaps in an unprecedented way. There are still fields in this area that will be planted to winter wheat in September [using a conventional drill] that have still not been worked even once at this very late date. So this has provided lots of ground nesting birds, like Horned Larks, an excellent opportunity to go through the entire breeding cycle without any disturbance..... I think you have to be a farmer to really appreciate the huge number of birds that attempt to nest in cropland fields every year. Sometimes they pull it off, but usually they don't."

Observations that may reflect dry conditions this summer included an absence of Mountain Plovers in the southern Panhandle (possibly a direct result of the absence of Steve Dinsmore); very low numbers of Upland Sandpipers in the southern Panhandle and southwest; a new site for Cassin's Sparrows near Wellfleet; an apparent shift of Lark Buntings northeastward away from the southwest and southern Panhandle; a decrease in numbers of Chestnut-collared Longspurs and an increase in McCown's on a BBS route in Kimball Co; and the appearance of 2 Brewer's Blackbirds as far east as Valentine. Read the Species Accounts for further details.

Some habitat modification at BOL of likely significance was pointed out by LE: "Big changes coming to BOL with management strategies--many Austrian pine, red cedar, and autumn and Russian Olive windbreaks to be bulldozed out to make room for improved pheasant habitat. See Sunday LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR, June 9, 2002 for details." Some of our modifications are of some help, as HW pointed out regarding use of nest boxes at Wildcat Hills this summer: "Out of 100 total boxes, 75 were in good repair, with 47 in use: 20 House Wren nests with a total of 25 eggs

and 49 hatchlings; 7 Eastern Bluebird nests with a total of 11 eggs and 4 hatchlings; 6 Mountain Bluebird nests with a total of 8 eggs and 6 hatchlings; 11 Unidentified Bluebird nests (adult not present) with a total of 13 eggs and 13 hatchlings; 3 Violet-Green Swallow nests (2 in Scottsbluff Co, 1 in Banner Co.) with a total of 14 eggs."

In general, this report reflects a big increase in reports of breeding activity; these data are important and severely lacking for Nebraska, as has been pointed out by Wayne Mollhoff and in "Birds of Nebraska." Regarding breeding activity, in the "what's going on here?" category were the following items: a Mallard nest in a stump and a Red-tailed Hawk nest on a telephone pole; a Swainson's Hawk summering in north Lincoln; a Swainson's Thrush in lush woodland near Orleans for the 2nd time in 3 years; a possible small breeding population of Blue-winged Warbler in northcentral and northeast Nebraska; and a pair of Louisiana Waterthrushes in the northeast again.

There was a variety of record early and late dates, mainly for shorebirds; whether this change was drought related is hard to say (for me, anyway). Significant rarities were lacking, but a 5th Nebraska record Brown Pelican led the list, followed by a Painted Bunting. Other significant records included a Red-necked Grebe in Scotts Bluff Co; summering Ring-necked Ducks; the 11th summer record Common Goldeneye; a few fall White-rumped Sandpipers; the 15th record White-winged Dove and possible hybrids of this species and Eurasian Collared-Dove; possible breeding of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; the 3rd spring record for Townsend's Warbler; and the 5th Panhandle record for Summer Tanager. Read on!

### ABBREVIATIONS

ADF: Arbor Day Farm, Otoe Co;  
BBS: Breeding Bird Survey;  
BOL: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co;  
CCM: Clear Creek Marshes, Keith-Garden Cos;  
CLNWR: Crescent L NWR, Garden Co;  
FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co;  
FL: Funk Lagoon, Phelps Co;  
HCR: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co;  
LM: L McConaughy, Keith Co;  
LO: L Ogallala, Keith Co;  
m.ob.: many observers;  
NC: Nature Center;  
NM: National Monument;  
NWR: National Wildlife Refuge;  
PL: Pawnee L, Lancaster Co,  
Res: Reservoir;

RWB: Rainwater Basin, southcentral and southeastern Nebraska;  
SCP: Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co;  
SHP: State Historical Park;  
SL: SewageLagoon(s);  
SP: State Park;  
WSR: Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co.

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### GAZETTEER

Kiowa Springs: Scotts Bluff Co;  
Medicine Creek Res: Frontier Co;  
Merritt Res: Cherry Co;  
Niobrara Marsh: Knox Co;  
Red Willow Res: Frontier Co;  
Summit L: Burt Co;  
Sowbelly Canyon: Sioux Co;  
Sutherland Res: Lincoln Co;  
Valentine NWR: Cherry Co;  
Whitehead (formerly Cracker Barrel) Marsh: Lincoln, Lancaster Co;  
Wildcat Hills NC: Scotts Bluff-Banner Cos.

**OBSERVERS**

**AK**: Alice Kenitz, Gering;  
**B**: Birdline;  
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**BP**: Babs Padelford, Bellevue;  
**CF**: Carol Falk, Nebraska City;  
**CG**: Carlos Grande, Geneva;  
**CH**: Carolyn Hall, Bassett;  
**CNK**: Clem N. Klaphake, Bellevue;  
**CWH**: C.W. Huntley, Ogallala;  
**DB**: Duane Bright, Bellevue;  
**DD**: Dean Drawbaugh, Scottsbluff;  
**DP**: Don Paseka, Ames;  
**DSt**: Dave Stage, Lincoln;  
**GH**: Glen Hoge, Alma;  
**GHa**: Gerard Harbison;  
**HKH**: Helen K. Hughson, Mitchell;  
**HW**: Harley Winfrey, Gering;  
**JC**: Jay Carlisle, South Dakota;  
**JG**: Joe Gubanyi, Seward;  
**JGJ**: Joel G. Jorgensen, Blair;  
**JJ**: Jan Johnson, Wakefield;  
**JLL**: Jeanine L. Lackey, Lincoln;  
**JM**: Jim Meyer, Omaha;  
**JP**: Jan Paseka, Ames;  
**JSt**: Jon Strong, Omaha;  
**JT**: Jerry Toll, Omaha;  
**KCR**: Kathleen Crawford-Rose, Bellevue;  
**KD**: Kathy DeLara, Mitchell;  
**KN**: Kay Niyo, Evergreen, CO;  
**KP**: Kevin Poague, Lincoln;  
**LE**: Larry Einemann, Lincoln;  
**LF**: Laurence Falk, Nebraska City;  
**LP**: Loren Padelford, Bellevue;  
**LR**: Lanny Randolph, Gibbon;  
**LS**: Lona Shrier, Verdigre;  
**MB**: Mark Brogie, Creighton;  
**MUs**: Moni Usasz, Lincon;  
**NR**: Neal Ratzlaff, Omaha;  
**PD**: Phyllis Drawbaugh, Scottsbluff;  
**RG**: Ruth Green, Bellevue;  
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**SJD**: Stephen J. Dinsmore, Starkville, MS;  
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**SMc**: Steve McIlree, Omaha;

TEL: Thomas E. Labedz, Lincoln;  
TH: Thomas Hoffman, Omaha;  
WH: Wanda Hoge, Alma;  
WM: Wayne Mollhoff, Ashland;  
WRS: W. Ross Silcock, Tabor, IA;  
ZU: Zee Uridil, Chadron.

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Common Loon: The usual summering loons, probably immatures, were found in the western part of the state: 2 were spotted at LO between 13 and 23 June (SJD, m.ob.), and one was identified at Merritt Res between 13 and 14 June (MB). A bit more unusual for the east, one was found at Burchard L, Pawnee Co, on 22 June (B).

Pied-billed Grebe: An adult with 2 young was located at Alma East SL on 21 July (GH, WH); breeding may occur anywhere given suitable habitat.

Red-necked Grebe: An immature was found at Schmidt Pond, Scotts Bluff Co, on 2 June (KD, details; AK); like immature loons, immature grebes sometimes wander about rather than migrating into the breeding range.

Eared Grebe: This species is abundant on Sandhills lakes; counts of 100+ made at CLNWR on 16 June (JSt) and 105+ from Alliance to Lakeside on 23 June (WRS) were examples. The 13 birds spotted at Sutherland Res on 13 June (SJD) and the 1 seen at Alma South SL (GH, WH) were late migrants.

Western Grebe: The best counts reached 91 at LM on 13 June (SJD), where the species breeds, and 33 at Merritt Res on 13 June (MB), where breeding is not known. The latter birds--along with one found a bit far east at Niobrara Marsh on 19 June (MB) and the 4 seen at Oliver Res, Kimball Co, on 22 June (WRS)--may have been immatures and non-breeders.

Clark's Grebe: The best count was the 8 found at LM and LO on 13 June (SJD); singles were seen at Sutherland Res on 13 June (SJD) and Oliver Res, Kimball Co, on 22 June (WRS), presumably non-breeders.

American White Pelican: The best count of summering non-breeders totaled an excellent 420 at LM on 23 June (WRS). The 85 tallied at BOL on 15 June (LE) was a good easterly summer count.

Brown Pelican: Only the 5th documented record for Nebraska was an "atlantic race adult" bird seen below Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar Co, and in flight over Lewis and Clark L, Knox Co, between 27 June and 2 July (Doug Backlund fide Ricky Olson, JC, MB, BFH, JG--photos).

Double-crested Cormorant: A nesting colony at Sutherland Res continues with 6 nests and 13 birds counted there on 13 June (SJD); but a relatively new colony located at the western end of HCR, where as many

as 26+ nests had been counted since inception in 1995, had no birds present after 10 June (GH, WH). A rookery at Mayhew L, central Cherry Co, included this species and Great Blue Herons on 22 June (CNK).

American Bittern: The only report was of a bird seen at Niobrara Marsh on 20 June (MB), where it probably breeds.

Least Bittern: Probably desperate for water, one flushed at Willy L, Sheridan Co, on 23 June (WM) was rather far west. There are few reports from the Panhandle.

Great Blue Heron: The largest late summer gathering was the 50 found at HCR on 18 July (LR, RH). Four birds on 2 nests were noted at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH). In addition to the previously-mentioned rookery at Mayhew L, Cherry Co (see Double-crested Cormorant), another rookery was located along Highway 97 at Gordon Creek, Cherry Co, on 22 June (CNK). One wonders how many rookeries are scattered throughout the Sandhills!

Great Egret: Numbers built up at HCR throughout the period, from one seen on 6 June (GH, WH) and 3 spotted on 13 June (SJD), peaking at 72 counted on 30 July (GH, WH). Only 3 singles were reported elsewhere: in the eastern RWB on 15 June (JGJ); at Niobrara Marsh on 16 June (MB); and at PL on 16 July (JG).

Snowy Egret: The only report was of an immature located at HCR on 30 July (GH, WH).

Little Blue Heron: Two were reported, about as expected: A calico at PL on 9 June (LE) and a juvenile at HCR between 18 and 30 July (LR, RH, GH, WH).

Cattle Egret: Few were reported. Two were identified at HCR on 20 June, 3 on 23 June, and one on 11 July (GH, WH); and singles were seen 2 miles east of Ogallala on 22 June (LR, RH) and at LO on 23 June (WRS).

Green Heron: Becoming rarer towards the north and west, the 3 spotted at Niobrara Marsh on 8 June and the one seen there 19 June (MB); another identified on the Brown-Keya Paha Cos boundary on 14 June (MB); and the 3 found at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH) roughed out the expected western limits of summer occurrence.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: The best count was the 15 tallied at FL, mostly adults, on 16 June (LR, RH). Few were reported.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron: None was reported; dry conditions in the eastern RWB probably had something to do with this absence.

White-faced Ibis: The 16 seen at Kiowa Springs on 2 June (AK) were presumably migrants; the 3 pink-faced immatures spotted at Hancock L, west of Lakeside, on 23 June (WRS) and the single noted at CLNWR on 16 June (DSt) were probably non-breeders, while the dark ibis identified at HCR on 7 July (GH, WH) may have been an immature from the south.

Turkey Vulture: The best count was 48, made at Summit L on 4 July (JGJ). Such summer aggregations usually consist of non-breeders and immatures.



**Greater White-fronted Goose:** The usual couple of stragglers were found: 2 spotted near Harvard Marsh, Clay Co, on 15 June (JGJ) and one observed at HCR on 28 July (LR, RH).

**Snow Goose:** As with the preceding species, several Snow Geese usually linger through the summer. A total of about 12 was reported, scattered statewide, with the best count the 4 seen at BOL on 9 June (LE).

**Canada Goose:** Some tidbits about summer populations came to light (it is interesting to know where these birds summer and the approximate flock size): 2 family groups occupied the Arbor Links Golf Course in Nebraska City (LF, CF); the "local goose flock" at Alma numbers at least 50 (GH, WH); and at Wolf L, Saunders Co, none summered; the last birds in spring were seen on 16 June and first in fall on 16 August (TH). At FL, the 6 present on 8 June were "large form" (LR, RH). Taking the prize this summer, however, was the summering flock found at BOL, numbering some 640 birds on 15 June (LE).

**Trumpeter Swan:** Wayne Mollhoff bravely guessed that there are "several dozen" breeding pairs in the state; several are noted every summer due to their setting up next to highways. Among these are a pair located just east of Hyannis (un-named wetland between road and railroad) that had 4 young by 12 July (TEL, DSt, MB), and a pair seen "a few miles east of Hyannis," probably the pair seen on Doc L, just west of Whitman, on 12 July (TEL). A little further afield were a pair spotted on North Marsh L, Valentine NWR, on 14 July (Gha); 2 birds observed 10 miles north and 5 east of Arthur (Sand Puddin L?) on 27 July (DSt); and 3 birds identified 3 miles west of Stapleton (un-named small reservoir) (DSt).

**Wood Duck:** About 20 broods were reported, in the period between 2 June and 27 July; average number of ducklings was 5 for the 8 broods with a count of young reported.

**Gadwall:** Routine reports.

**American Wigeon:** Lingered a bit were 2 spotted at LO on 13 June (SJD) and a male identified at PL on 15 June (LE); breeding would be unexpected at either location. There are few records in midsummer (from 10 June to 15 August) for this species away from known breeding locations.

**Mallard:** About 16 broods were reported, in the period between 9 June and 11 July, with an average number of ducklings reported at about 6.3. Unusual was a hen discovered nesting 7 feet up in a tree stump at WSR; the nest had 7 eggs on 7 July and was later seen with its brood on a nearby stream (HKH). The observer (facetiously, I think!) wondered if the bird was a Mallard X Wood Duck; maybe all those 7s were affecting her!

**Blue-winged Teal:** Surprisingly, the only brood reported was a hen seen with 10 "fuzzies" in Scotts Bluff Co on 13 June (PD, DD).

**Cinnamon Teal:** A male hung around at FL until 9 June (LR, RH), rather easterly; it may have had a nesting mate, although only one bird had been reported there since mid-April. None was reported from the

rather dry eastern RWB this summer. Farther west, 3 pairs observed at CLNWR on 16 June (JSt) were at a known summer location; and a male noted at Scottsbluff SL on 23 June may have had a mate nesting nearby (WRS).

**Northern Shoveler:** The only brood reported was of 7 young located at Alma East SL on 30 June (GH, WH).

**Northern Pintail:** Routine reports.

**Green-winged Teal:** This species is a only a rare breeder in Nebraska, but small groups are often seen during June and July; males leave the females and move south on molt migration while the females are still incubating; thus, most June birds seen in Nebraska are males; 19 birds, including 18 males, were located at FL on 2 June, dwindling to 2 males by 16 June (LR, RH). Molt takes place in July; birds often are inconspicuous at this time, as well as being in dull eclipse plumage. A sizeable aggregation is found each summer at LM; and 49 birds were counted there on 13 June (SJD). The pair spotted at Alma East SL on 21 July (GH, WH) were probably failed breeders; females accompany males in such cases.

**Canvasback:** The only report was of a male observed at Hancock L, 1 mile west of Lakeside on 23 June (WRS); this species is a rare to locally uncommon breeder in the Sandhills.

**Redhead:** Sizeable aggregations of apparent non-breeders were found in the second half of June; it was suggested (WM) that this situation was a result of drying potholes in the Western Sandhills and reduced breeding habitat. As many as 238 were found at LM and LO on 13 June (SJD); 66 were discovered as far south as Alma SL on 13 June, of which 5 remained until 30 July (GH, WH); 47 were located at North Platte SL on 22 June (WRS); 29 were counted at Gering SL the same day (WRS); and 30 were noted at Kiowa Springs on 25 June (HW). Also unusual for the southeast were a male and 5 females seen at BOL on 15 June (LE) and a male found at PL between 29 June and 14 July (LE). The 33 located in the eastern RWB on 15 June (JGJ) were unusual, but breeding has occurred there.

**Ring-necked Duck:** A pair seen at Schmidt Pond, Scotts Bluff Co, on 2 June was rather late (AK); but single males observed at LO on 13 June (SJD) and at North Hultine Basin, Clay Co, on 15 June (JGJ), were unexpected. The species is only casual in the summer months, and there are no breeding records.

**Lesser Scaup:** The only report was of 3 spotted at Scottsbluff SL on 23 June (WRS, KN). Such birds may be failed breeders or possibly molt migrants.

**Bufflehead:** The only report was of a male found on Merritt Res on 14 June (MB). There are few summer records.

**Common Goldeneye:** Yet another report of a straggling summer male: one was spotted at LO on 13 and again on 22 June (SJD, AK, LR, RH, details). This sighting marks only the 11th summer report (between 3 June and 22 September) for the species.

Hooded Merganser: The usual female/immature-plumaged birds were reported, presumably most if not all immatures: one was found roadkilled at Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 2 June (LR, RH) and 1-2 were seen at Summit L from 2 to 8 June (JGJ).

Common Merganser: The male reported from BOL in spring remained through at least 14 July (LE); a single was spotted at Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar Co, on 3 July (MB); a male was observed at HCR on 7 July (GH, WH); and an alternate male was seen at Red Willow Res on 21 July (LR, RH). Males spotted at these locations on these dates are likely injured or otherwise impaired. Two males found at LO 23 June (WRS) were at a regular summering location for small numbers, although most do not arrive until mid-July.

Ruddy Duck: Sizeable numbers remained at locations that are not obvious breeding sites well into June: 96, in all plumages, were seen at North Platte SL on 22 June (WRS); 17 were counted at the Hoskins SL on 14 June (MB); and 13 were observed at Alma South SL on 13 June (GH, WH, SJD). The 14 located in the eastern RWB on 15 June (JGJ) may have been part of a small breeding population there (12 of them were spotted at Sinninger Basin); one was found at FL on 16 June (LR, RH).

Osprey: The one identified at SCP's pond on 5 June (KP) must have been a late migrant, as was likely the one seen at Grove L, Antelope Co, on 12 June (MB). There are, however, only about 24 prior reports between 17 June and 7 August, most probably immatures.

Mississippi Kite: A pair was seen using the same nest tree as last year in Ogallala--adults appeared on 22 May; 2 eggs were found on 21 June; and on 22 July, two adults and 2 juveniles were spotted at the site (Jim Parker fide CWH, AK). Note: Jim Parker wrote the account for this species in "Birds of North America."

Bald Eagle: The nesting pair found at DeSoto NWR had fledged 2 young, which were still near the nest on 2 July (SMc). Singles were seen near Gibbon on 9 June; an adult was spotted (LR, RH), near Nenzel on 13 June; and an immature (MB) was reported in western Dodge Co on 29 June, no age given (B). Adults range widely while nesting.

Northern Harrier: Encouraging were nesting birds found at various locations away from the Sandhills: a pair with 3 small young in a nest were seen near LM on 13 June (SJD); and a male was observed carrying food near Hoskins, Wayne Co, on 4 July (MB). Adult males seen in summer are indicative of breeding: males were noted near HCR on 3 June (GH, WH); near Naponee, Franklin Co, on 25 June (GH, WH); at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH); and at Alma on 12 July (GH, WH).

Cooper's Hawk: This species is being reported more often in summer; probably always a reasonably common breeder, but rather secretive unless the nest is approached, numbers must be rather high to cause the number of reports received. About 13 birds were found during the period, although no evidence of breeding was reported, except for a

possible family group of 2 juveniles and an adult observed in Seward Co on 30 July (JG).

Red-shouldered Hawk: The only report was of an adult seen soaring near FF in late July (JM, SM); this tenuous population (one pair?) is hanging on.

Broad-winged Hawk: Only casual in summer, but possibly a regular breeder at least in the Missouri Valley, only one was reported, a flyover spotted at FF on 28 June (BP, LP).

Swainson's Hawk: An adult seen during the period in north Lincoln (JLL) was east of the expected range in Nebraska; apparently only one bird was present. Rare in the eastern RWB, the only regular summering area is located to the south of Smith Basin, Clay Co, where one was seen on 15 June (JGJ). Breeding reports included a nest with young discovered in central Cherry Co on 22 June (CNK) and an adult observed protecting fledged young in Arthur Co on 27 July (DSt).

Red-tailed Hawk: A nest with an incubating bird (identified by the red tail of the nearby mate) discovered on a telephone pole crossbar in Lancaster Co on 15 and on 29 June was considered unusual for this species (LE). Bent ("Life Histories") does not mention nest sites other than in trees for Eastern Red-tailed Hawks.

Ferruginous Hawk: The only report was of 2 birds spotted along Highway 20 in Sioux Co near the Wyoming border on 6 July (MB).

Golden Eagle: Unusual east of the Panhandle in summer, an adult was seen 20 miles north of Whitman on 27 July (DSt). Two immatures, not as unusual east of the Panhandle, were noted soaring near Nenzel on 22 June (CNK), and another immature was identified near Nenzel on 13 June (MB), possibly one of the previously-mentioned birds.

American Kestrel: Routine reports.

Prairie Falcon: The only report was of an adult seen on the Kimball BBS on 22 June (WRS, KN).

Peregrine Falcon: The only report was a juvenile observed at HCR on the record early fall date of 18 July (LR, RH; details). These birds tend to follow shorebird migration through Nebraska, but this one was right up with the vanguard!

Gray Partridge: Currently this species is being reported more often at the western edge of its traditional northeast Nebraska range: two were found east of O'Neill, a mile from Knox Co, on 14 June (MB). Interesting is the presence in Sioux Co and adjacent Wyoming of a couple of populations: two flew from Nebraska into Wyoming near Highway 20 on 6 July (MB), and 3 were seen in west-central Sioux Co, where they were a year ago, on 31 May (HKH). These birds, along with those reported from western Scottsbluff Co in previous summers, may be part of a single population in western Sioux and Scotts Bluff Cos derived from Wyoming Game and Fish releases and/or from private releases in Sioux Co ("Birds of Nebraska").

Ring-necked Pheasant: Seven broods were reported between 7 and 27 July in Lancaster and Scotts Bluff Cos, with a total of 49 young (LE, AK).

Sharp-tailed Grouse: Perhaps because of the terribly dry conditions in Sioux Co this summer, a hen and 6 chicks took up residence in a weedpatch by the barn at WSR (HKH). Whether the unusual absence of this species on a BBS route in McPherson Co on 9 June (JT) was also weather related is unclear.

Greater Prairie-Chicken: One lonely bird was still booming on a lek near Winnetoon on 8 June (MB), but another observed at SCP apparently was more successful, providing exciting news: the first documented breeding at SCP, which involved a hen with 7 half-grown chicks seen on 24 July (KP).

Wild Turkey: A female brought 7+ young into the observers' yard near Gibbon on 5 July (LR, RH).

Northern Bobwhite: Routine reports.

Virginia Rail: The only reports were of singles seen at Niobrara Marsh on 8 and again on 27 June (MB). Because of dry conditions, breeding may have been limited to the Sandhills and such areas as Niobrara Marsh in northern Nebraska where drought was minimal.

Sora: The one spotted at Agate Springs Ranch in central Sioux Co on 8 June (AK) was unexpected; there is a nice (small) marsh there, however. No others were reported; see comment under Virginia Rail.

American Coot: Routine reports.

Black-bellied Plover: A basic-plumaged bird hung around Summit L until 9 June (JGJ), but did not threaten the late date of 21 June. The first back was one spotted at HCR on 28 July, a bit on the early side (GH, WH).

American Golden-Plover: None was reported; early fall dates occur in mid-July.

Semipalmated Plover: The one identified at PL on 15 June (LE) signifies a new late spring date. Fall returnees appeared on 16 July, one at PL (LE) and on 18 July, one at HCR (LR, RH).

Piping Plover: One was seen at Summit L on 22 June (JGJ), a strange date for a non-breeding location; the observer gave no indication of any suspicious activities taking place. Other reports came from breeding locations: "a few chicks were running around" (presumably the feathered kind) at LM on 22 June (LR, RH); and 3 birds were seen along the Platte River in Cass Co on 28 July (BP, LP).

Killdeer: The best count reached 193 at PL on 20 July, with 46 more tallied at BOL, for an excellent total of 239 (LE). Flocks begin to form in July.

Mountain Plover: None was reported, for the first summer in several years; the Kimball BBS missed this species for the first time since 1994 (WRS).

Black-necked Stilt: Reports came from 3 locations, with the most interesting a possible breeding report: 4-5 chicks, apparently of two

sizes, were present with 2 Black-necked Stilts and avocets at a pond near Kiowa Springs between 20 and 22 July (AK, KD). The identity of the chicks could not be established with certainty, but a single adult stilt was seen there on 2 June (AK); perhaps the other was incubating? Other reports were of 2 seen at FL on 2 June (DP, JP), only the 22nd report in spring away from the Panhandle; and of one observed "dive-bombing" a Great Blue Heron near Lakeside on 7 July (MB).

American Avocet: The only easterly report was of 5 fall migrants found at BOL on 28 July (JGJ). The best count totaled 50+ between Lakeside and Antioch on 23 June (WRS).

Greater Yellowlegs: First for fall were 2 seen at Summit L on 4 July (JGJ); this species departs by the end of May in spring, returning as early as mid-June in fall.

Lesser Yellowlegs: The last for spring were 5 birds spotted at FL on 8 June (LR, RH); and the first for fall were 8 seen at Summit L on 4 July (JGJ).

Solitary Sandpiper: The two noted at Summit L on 2 June (JGJ) were record late for spring. The first for fall were singles found in Holt and Pierce Cos on 16 July (MB) and the 3 located at PL the same day (LE).

Willet: The best count hit 27+ between Lakeside and Antioch on 23 June (WRS). Three migrants were seen at PL on 26 July (LE), where the species is rare in fall.

Spotted Sandpiper: Two young juveniles were identified at FL on 11 July (LR, RH).

Upland Sandpiper: Dry conditions probably reduced numbers in the south and west: in Franklin and Harlan Cos, few have been seen the last 2 years (GH, WH); and in Kimball Co, none was found on the BBS route there (WRS). On the other hand, a new high for a Morrill Co BBS route was the 18 counted on 28 June (HW), and numbers were good in northern Nebraska, where 37 were found in Holt Co on 16 July (JJ).

Long-billed Curlew: An excellent count of 23 was made southwest of CLNWR on 16 June (DSt). A pair with young was spotted in central Cherry Co on 22 June (CNK), and a pair with a fully grown juvenile was observed near Lakeside on 23 June (WRS). "[M]ore than normal" were found on a McPherson Co BBS route on 9 June (JT). The only other report was of one seen in Sioux Co on 8 June (AK). All reports occurred within the expected breeding range.

Marbled Godwit: The only report was of one located at LM on 13 June (SJD); fall migrants appear in mid-June, but this sighting is the record earliest date by one day. This species is not known to breed in Nebraska.

Sanderling: The one spotted at LM on 13 June (SJD) was apparently a late spring migrant; there is only one other report in the period between 5 and 30 June. Plumage was not described; spring birds (all adults, of course) generally have not molted and are in basic (non-breeding) plumage (some may have started to molt), while fall arrivals (adults first, in July) are still in alternate (breeding) plumage.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper:** One of the latest spring migrants, good numbers still move through in June: 80+ were found at Summit L on 2 June (JGJ), and 23 were located at LM on 13 June (SJD), the latter rather late. The last for spring were 3 birds seen at FL on 13 June (SJD) and 9 sighted in Lancaster Co on 15 June (LE). These latter three dates represent the 2nd and 3rd latest for spring. The first fall bird appeared on 14 July at BOL (LE).

**Western Sandpiper:** More common in fall than spring, there were only 2 reports within the period: singles were spotted in McPherson Co on 27 July (DSt) and at PL 28 on July (LE).

**Least Sandpiper:** The last for spring were 3 identified at Summit L on 5 June (JGJ). This species can appear early in fall; 3 were record early by a day at Summit L on 22 June (JGJ); 1 was seen there on 4 July (JGJ); and one was noted at PL on 7 July (LE). There are prior early records for 23 and 30 June. The best count reached 102 at PL on 26 July (JG).

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** Our latest spring migrant, as many as 261 were counted as late as 13 June at LM (SJD) and 500 were tallied at FL on 8 June (LR, RH). The last were record late by 2 days on 23 June: 3 found at LM (WRS) and 3 identified at BOL (LE). There is a specimen for 20 June. This species is only casual in fall, although there seem to have been a few reported in neighboring states this fall. There were 2 Nebraska reports by experienced observers: 6 were spotted in McPherson Co on 27 July (DSt; details) and 1+ were seen at HCR on 30 July (GH, WH; details).

**Baird's Sandpiper:** The one seen at LM on 13 June (SJD) was the 2nd latest ever for spring by 2 days. The first for fall was one located in Holt Co on 16 July (JJ). At the period's end, numbers had increased markedly: 500 were counted at HCR on 28 July (LR, RH).

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** Continuing a trend of late spring migrants, 7 were identified at LM on 13 June (SJD); 2 were seen at FL the same day (SJD); and 2 were found at PL on 15 June (LE). There are only 5 later reports. The first for fall was one reported record early at Summit L on 4 July (JGJ); next were 2 spotted at PL on 14 July (LE).

**Stilt Sandpiper:** A molting adult found at LM on 13 June (SJD) was the 4th latest for spring, and a single discovered at FL on 8 June (LR, RH) was 6th latest. First for fall was one seen at PL on 14 July (LE).

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** The only reports were of 5 spotted in Sarpy Co on 28 July (B); 2 identified at PL on 30 July (JG); and one observed near Waco on 31 July (CG). The fall migration corridor is wider than in spring, and numbers are lower.

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** A few appeared at the end of the period; singles were spotted at PL between 26 and 30 July (JG) and at Niobrara Marsh on 27 July (MB, adult); and 3 were observed at Harvard Marsh, Clay Co, on 28 July (JGJ). The earliest documented record is for 9 July; thus, the one spotted at PL on 7 July (LE; details) was significant. The

three seen on 16 July, the 10 on 20 July, and the 30 on 21 July at HCR were "probably Short-billed Dowitchers, but were not heard" (GH, WH). These dates are indeed suggestive of Short-billeds, even though the earliest documented Long-billed Dowitcher record is for 15 July ("Birds of Nebraska"). Observers should try to hear July-August (mostly adult) dowitchers to be sure of identification, but another good clue is molt, as Short-billeds generally do not molt on migration while Long-billeds do. The presence of darker (basic) feathers in the coverts as well as gaps in the flight feathers should be fairly easy to see on molting Long-billeds in July-August.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** One with a broken leg lingered at FL until 8 June (LR, RH), the 3rd latest for spring. Fall migrants appeared on schedule, with 15 spotted at PL on 26 July (JG).

**Common Snipe:** Routine reports.

**American Woodcock:** None was reported.

**Wilson's Phalarope:** The best count was the 40 tallied at Facus Springs, Morrill Co, on 1 June (PD, DD); and as many as 25 were still at FL on 8 June (LR, RH); breeding may occur at either location, and virtually anywhere if conditions are right. Others at dates suggestive of breeding were singles spotted at Cracker Barrel Marsh (now Whitehead Marsh) on 9 June and 7 July (LE) and in Pierce Co on 14 June (MB); and 6 identified in the eRWB on 15 June (JGJ); breeding is known to occur at the latter location. A fall migrant appeared at HCR on 13 July (GH, WH), a rather early date.

**Franklin's Gull:** The usual few non-breeders and immatures were found at major reservoirs; as many as 29 were still at LM on 13 June (SJD). Unexpected, however, was an adult identified at LO on 22 June (LR, RH), probably a failed breeder.

**Ring-billed Gull:** Another species of which immatures often summer south of the breeding range, sometimes in numbers: 250+ were tallied at LM on 23 June (WRS). The first for fall at HCR were the 50 encountered on 13 July; none had been seen since May (GH, WH).

**California Gull:** Summer (between 1 June and 23 July for this species) reports are few, and so the 10 spotted at LM on 13 June (SJD) were a good find. Even better, however, was the "near adult" observed at BOL on 15 June (JGJ; details); its mantle was only slightly darker than adjacent Ring-billed Gulls, suggesting that it was of the prairie race *albertainensis* (JGJ). Birds breeding in eastern Colorado are of the nominate race *californicus*, which is slightly smaller and darker than *albertainensis*. It may be that the few June California Gulls recorded in Nebraska may all be *albertainensis*, considering the usual pattern in northerly-breeding gulls of immatures summering south of the breeding range, or at least straggling in their migration. Previous records that are most likely *albertainensis* include a mixed-age flock found at LM on 15 June 1991 and another mixed-age flock of 23 spotted flying north at



Harrison on 16 June 1996. The several records of summering birds discovered at LM in recent years may also pertain to *albertaensis*.

Herring Gull: The only report was of a 1st summer bird, spotted at LM on 13 June (SJD). A few immatures, usually one-year-old birds, occur around major reservoirs each summer.

Caspian Tern: The only reports were of 2 seen at LM on 22 June (AK, LR, RH) and 2 fall migrants found at BOL on 30 July (JG). There are now about 10 records for mid-June and later from LM in recent years, suggesting use of the area by non-breeders or immatures.

Forster's Tern: Unexpected in the southeast at the date seen were the 4 observed at BOL on 15 June (JGJ).

Least Tern: This species was noted in good numbers, possibly a result of extensive exposed sandbars on all river systems where they occur in the state. The best count at LM, the westernmost known Nebraska breeding location, was 10+, including incubating birds, on 22 June (AK, LR, RH). Other good counts included the 12 seen on Platte River sandbars in Sarpy/Cass Cos on 22 July (BP, LP) and a single found near Louisville on 28 July (BP, LP); and about 8 observed on a Missouri River sandbar near Niobrara on 18 June (MB). Other sightings from expected locations were an adult and 2 young found on a Missouri River sandbar near Plattsmouth on 28 July (BP, LP); 3 birds spotted 1-2 miles south of Pilger along the Elkhorn River on 2 July (JG); and 2 identified at Hormel Park, Fremont, near the Platte River on 15 July (BP, LP). Unexpected, and the observer's first for Lancaster Co, was one seen at PL on 16 July (LE).

Black Tern: The last migrants for spring were 8 seen at Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar Co, on 22 June (MB), and first for fall were two birds spotted at PL on 20 July (LE). Few were reported.

Rock Dove: A good single-location count was the 85 tallied at a McCook elevator on 21 July (LR, RH). How large can a single colony get?

Eurasian Collared-Dove: A juvenile was seen at Bassett, Rock Co, on 11 July (CH), a new breeding location. Birds continue to fill in gaps across the state. One was identified at Creighton on 6 June (MB); one at Niobrara on 27 July (MB); two at 2nd and Clay in O'Neill on 27 July (Dst); one was spotted at Hampton on 10 June (JG); and 3 were observed at 132nd and Maple in Omaha on 14 June (B), the latter one of surprisingly few to date from Omaha. The populations at Kimball and Culbertson continue to do well: the Kimball birds were recorded for the first time on the BBS there (WRS), and "a bunch" continued at Culbertson (JSt). A note regarding the possibility of breeding at Kearney as discussed in the Spring Seasonal Report: 3 apparent juveniles, at least one of whose parents was clearly a White-winged Dove, appeared there and a single adult White-winged Dove had been present sporadically for some time. The possibility of hybridization between White-winged and Eurasian Collared-Doves is strong; such hybrids have been observed recently near Houston, TX.

**White-winged Dove:** See comments under Eurasian Collared-Dove. Nebraska's 15th record was of one observed in Ogallala between 3 and 10 June (CWH). Of the 15 records, 5 are from the Eurasian-Collared Dove area in Kearney (possibly all of the same bird), and all but one have come since 1994, a trend following that of this species' northward march on the Great Plains.

**Mourning Dove:** Routine reports.

**Black-billed Cuckoo:** A few more than usual were reported, but still only a few: at least one summered at ADF (LF, CF); singles (same bird or one of a pair?) were found in the observer's yard in southwestern Dixon Co on 1 and again on 20 June and on 5 July (JJ); one was seen in Cedar Co on 5 July (JJ); and one was discovered at Ashford Scout Camp, Thurston Co, on 20 July (BFH).

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** Routine reports.

**Barn Owl:** This species is reasonably common in the southwest and in the Panhandle. Probably the same bird was seen at the well-known CCM site on 13 and on 23 June (SJD, WRS); one was located in a rock crevice near Agate NM, Sioux Co, on 15 June (NR); and one was seen along the Vogl Loop Road, Sioux Co, on 6 July (MB).

**Eastern Screech-Owl:** Routine reports.

**Great Horned Owl:** Two or three juveniles were found on the ground under trees at Ft Kearny SHP, Kearney Co, on 17 July (LR, RH).

**Burrowing Owl:** All reports came from the Panhandle, with best counts of 17 near Kiowa Springs on 25 June (B) and 10+ at a large prairie dog town south of Lyman on 20 July (AK). On 25 June at the latter location, 2 pairs with 5 juveniles were seen; one of the adults was observed chasing a coyote (HW).

**Barred Owl:** Routine reports.

**Short-eared Owl:** The only report was of an immature spotted 16 miles north of Whitman on 27 July (DSt); the Sandhills are probably the only area where regular breeding currently occurs.

**Common Nighthawk:** The best counts were of 40, south of Gering on 23 July (AK) and in Scottsbluff Co on 30 July (PD, DD).

**Common Poorwill:** This species probably summers throughout the Niobrara Valley; one was seen along the Niobrara River in Brown Co on 15 July (MB). The only other report came from an expected location, south of Gering on 23 July (AK).

**Chuck-will's-widow:** The only reports were from a regular location at Wolf L, Saunders Co, where at least 3 were heard throughout the period until 27 July (TH).

**Whip-poor-will:** The only reports were from the northeast: an excellent count of 7 was made at St James, Cedar Co, on 2 July (BFH), and 3 were tallied at Ponca SP on 6 July (BFH).

**Chimney Swift:** Routine reports.

White-throated Swift: An excellent count was the 35-40 tallied at Scotts Bluff NM on 2 July (PD, DD); 20 were found there on 30 July (AK). No others were reported.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: Routine reports.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird: The earliest on record by one day was one spotted at WSR on 17 July (HKH), and at least one was seen in Scotts Bluff Co from 31 July to 1 August (KD). A report of one seen in Bassett on the unusual date of 20 June by an observer familiar with the species (CH; minimal details) was intriguing; there are only about 6 other spring records (between 2 and 15 June, all in the northwest Panhandle), none documented, even though the species breeds in the Colorado and Wyoming front ranges. There is also a Black Hills, South Dakota, record for mid-June.

Rufous Hummingbird: Only 3 were reported within the period, with the earliest one seen rather early at Mitchell on 12 July (KD), followed by singles observed at WSR on 23 July (HKH) and at Wildcat Hills NC on 29 July (KD).

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Downy Woodpecker: An adult with a dependent young bird was seen at Mitchell on 2 July (KD).

Hairy Woodpecker: A female with a young bird was observed at Mitchell on 11 July (KD).

Northern Flicker: A flicker which was seemingly phenotypically yellow-shafted was associating with an apparent pair of salmon-shafted flickers in Box Butte Co on 22 June (WRS, KN). Flickers with yellow wing coloration are rare in summer in the Panhandle; their presence in the hybrid zone is suggestive that some assortative mating may be occurring.

Pileated Woodpecker: An excellent count was the 4 tallied south of Gifford Road in FF on 28 June (B); this may have been a family group, but no details were provided. Singles were reported on 28 June (BP, LP) and on 13 July (GST). The small population at FF appears to be doing well.

Western Wood-Pewee: One was spotted rather far east at Snake River Falls, Cherry Co, on 13 June (MB); both species of pewee occur west of Valentine, but there are few records of either species between Valentine and the Panhandle in the Niobrara Valley. At the eastern edge of the range in the Platte Valley were the 2 observed singing at CCM on 22 June (LR, RH, AK); the species is known to breed in this area.

Eastern Wood-Pewee: Westernmost was the one found near Valentine on 13 June (KP); see comments under Western Wood-Pewee. The one identified near Orleans along the Republican River on 23 June (GH, WH) was near the western limit for that drainage.

Acadian Flycatcher: Following two reports from FF this spring, one was observed in Child's Hollow at FF on 24 June (DB); there were no reports of 2 birds seen together at FF that might have suggested breeding.

Alder Flycatcher: The last for spring were 2 seen and heard in the observer's yard in southwestern Dixon Co on 1 June (JJ).

Willow Flycatcher: Reports of low numbers were statewide, with best counts 3 birds singing throughout the period near Wakefield (JJ) and 3 located at Capitol Beach, Lincoln, on 7 July (LE).

Least Flycatcher: The last for spring was one spotted in the observer's yard in southwestern Dixon Co on 4 June (JJ).

Cordilleran Flycatcher: The only reports came from the breeding range: one in Monroe Canyon, Sioux Co, on 8 June (AK), and 2 in neighboring Sowbelly Canyon on 6 July (MB).

Eastern Phoebe: Nearly full-grown young were seen in Seward Co on 7 July (LE).

Say's Phoebe: Routine reports.

Great Crested Flycatcher: Only the 5th report for the Panhandle away from the Pine Ridge was one found on a Morrill Co BBS route on 28 June (HW). This species is fairly common in Pine Ridge canyons.

Cassin's Kingbird: Not quite routine (but almost; depends who reports them) were 6 seen south of I-80 Exit 1 on 22 June (WRS); but the 4+ spotted in Smiley Canyon, Sioux Co, on 6 July (MB) were in a fairly new location, first report there in 1996.

Western Kingbird: Reported numbers were high: excellent was the 150 tallied in the LM area on 22 June (LR, RH); a new route high was the 34 found on a Morrill Co route on 28 June (HW); and as far east as Lancaster Co, 14 were counted on 27 July (LE). A nest with 3 nestlings was noted in the observer's Chadron yard (ZU) on 12 June.

Eastern Kingbird: Routine reports.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: A letter-carrier reported an immature 7 miles south of Hildreth on 19 June and an adult there on 21 June (fide LR, RH). If breeding indeed occurred, this sighting would be about the 10th record for the state.

Loggerhead Shrike: Adults were feeding 2 young near Creighton on 18 June (MB).

Bell's Vireo: This species is doing well in central Nebraska: good counts were the 10 tallied at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH) and the 9+ totaled near Wellfleet on 6 July (LR, RH). Only 3 were reported from the east (CNK, JGJ, BFH).

Yellow-throated Vireo: One was spotted near Niobrara on 8 June (MB): this species is essentially restricted to the Missouri Valley and lower extremes of the Platte and Elkhorn Valleys as a breeding bird, with very few records in recent years located in the Niobrara Valley.

Plumbeous Vireo: Only 2 were reported, both from Sowbelly Canyon, a regular location (AK, MB).

Warbling Vireo: Routine reports.

Red-eyed Vireo: An excellent count of 14 made at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH) suggests that numbers are increasing in the southwest; as a summering bird, this species is least numerous in that part of the state. Wayne Mollhoff's "Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas" shows only 3 records from south of the Platte River and west of Grand Island between 1984 and 1989, including, significantly, confirmed breeding in the area of Medicine Creek Res.

Blue Jay: Adults were "tending young" in FF on 1 July (GSt).

Pinyon Jay: The only report was of 2 observed in Smiley Canyon, Sioux Co, on 6 July (MB). These birds are not easy to locate in summer.

Black-billed Magpie: Singles found in Hamilton Co on 11 and again on 18 July (MB) were pushing the southeastern edge of the summer range.

American Crow: Routine reports.

Horned Lark: Routine reports.

Purple Martin: Now breeding regularly in Alma, 4 pairs there fledged their last young on 20 July (GH, WH). One seen at Valentine NWR between 13 and 14 June (MB) was west of the known breeding range in the Sandhills, currently thought of as being in the Ainsworth area ("Birds of Nebraska"); this sighting appears to be the only summer record west of Ainsworth.

Tree Swallow: This species now commonly uses nest boxes statewide. The best count reached 100 at BOL on 14 July (LE), where it breeds.

Violet-green Swallow: Two nests in boxes at Wildcat Hills NC first seen on 16 June each had 5 eggs and had 2-3 day-old nestlings on 2 July, indicating incubation of 14+ days (HW). The only other confirmed nesting in the Wildcat Hills was shown by Mollhoff for the period from 198 to 1989 ("Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas").

Northern Rough-winged Swallow: The best count totaled 300 in Lincoln Co on 6 July, of which 185 were found at Wellfleet Wildlife Area (LR, RH).

Bank Swallow: The best count was 300 at BOL on 20 July (LE), presumably fall migrants.

Cliff Swallow: The best count was the 900-1000 tallied in western Scotts Bluff Co on 18 July (PD, DD), presumably migrants. The large summering population in the LM area is probably only hinted at by an estimate of 850 found there on 22 June (LR, RH).

Barn Swallow: Flocking of fledged birds begins in July; 65 mostly young birds were counted on a wire in northeastern Phelps Co on 11 July (LR, RH).

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports.

Tufted Titmouse: Routine reports.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Routine reports.

White-breasted Nuthatch: Routine reports.

Pygmy Nuthatch: None was reported.

Brown Creeper: None was reported.

Rock Wren: Breeding reports have been few in recent years from the southwest. A group of 4-5 observed using dirt banks 3 miles west and one half mile south of Wellfleet on 6 July included one bird carrying food (LR, RH). Two birds were seen on rip-rap at Red Willow Res on 21 July (LR, RH).

Carolina Wren: Numbers are slowly returning after the severe winter of 2000-2001: the first spotted since that winter was noted at ADF on 25 July (LF, CF), and a "population explosion" was detected in Bellevue when 5 were banded in a single yard in July: 4 adults, including 2 brooding females, and a hatching year young (RG, fide KCR). The only other report was of one located at FF on 24 June (DB).

House Wren: Good counts included 63 at Red Willow Res on 30 June (LR, RH) and 47 at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, on 29 June (LE).

Sedge Wren: Numbers are lowest in June-July; only 2 were reported, singles spotted at Whitehead Marsh on 9 June (LE) and in a wet meadow near Creighton on 19 June (MB). The largest numbers occur in late July-August, when breeding usually occurs.

Marsh Wren: The only report was of one identified at Whitehead Marsh between 9 and 15 June (LE), a part of the state where few occur in summer.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: The Panhandle population continues to expand, with 2 birds seen along the Sowbelly Canyon-Pants Butte Road in Sioux Co on 6 July (MB). Others were seen in Kimball (WRS) and Scotts Bluff (KD, AK) Cos at previously known locations. At the other end of the state, an adult was observed feeding a "very young" bird on the ground at Platte River SP, Cass Co, on 26 June (BP, LP), and one was seen at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, on 29 June (LE), where it is uncommon.

Eastern Bluebird: Soon this species will go the way of the Purple Martin, with little or no breeding in natural cavities! Nest boxes have been very successful: 71 fledglings had been produced at ADF throughout the period (LF, CF); and as far west as Wildcat Hills NC, where the species has used boxes for several years, 7 nests were counted on 16 June (HW).

Mountain Bluebird: Six nests in boxes were counted at Wildcat Hills NC on 16 June (HW).

Swainson's Thrush: The last migrants were singles spotted at FL on 2 June (LR, RH) and in Dixon Co on 3 June (JJ). Intriguing was one identified in high quality Republican River riparian forest near Orleans on 23 June; this bird was in the same place one was heard singing on 6 July 2000 (GH, WH; details).

Wood Thrush: A good count totaled 5 in southeastern Otoe Co on 28 June (LF, CF).

American Robin: Routine reports.

Gray Catbird: Routine reports.

Northern Mockingbird: This species is increasing in numbers, especially in the west, where 7 were counted south of I-80 Exit 1 on 22 June (WRS, KN). Reports were statewide, with about 21 birds in all.

Brown Thrasher: Adults with 3 dependent young were spotted in a Scotts Bluff Co yard on 2 July (KD).

European Starling: Routine reports.

Cedar Waxwing: This species is becoming more widely reported in summer; a pair was seen carrying nest material and another bird was incubating on 30 June at Medicine Creek Res (LR, RH); and an adult was observed feeding "fluffy young" at Wildcat Hills NC on 20 July (KD, AK). Westerly summer reports are few. A count of 11 in made Lancaster Co on 15 June (LE) may have been of late migrants, although waxwings were seen throughout the summer in Lancaster Co (LE).

Blue-winged Warbler: The one heard singing in "perfect breeding habitat" 4 miles south of Verdigre along the Verdigre Creek on 8 June (MB) was significant by itself, but, as pointed out by Joel Jorgensen, it may indicate a small or scattered breeding population in the lower Niobrara River drainage. Singing birds were found in Cherry Co in 1999 and 2000; and the only summer records for South Dakota are very recent, for 1998, 1999, and 2001 in the period between 2 and 20 June in Lincoln Co, southeast South Dakota ("Birds of South Dakota").

Tennessee Warbler: The only report was the last for spring, a bird spotted on 4 June at Creighton (MB).

Northern Parula: The only report was of one found at FF on 1 July (GSt), where it summers.

Yellow Warbler: The best counts were the 9 tallied in Lincoln on 23 June (LE) and 8 found at Wellfleet on 6 July (LR, RH).

Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler: A pair, one of which was carrying food, was seen along Pants Butte Road, Sioux Co, on 6 July (MB). There are fewer than 10 documented breeding records.

Townsend's Warbler: Only the 3rd spring record with any details was one seen at WSR from 11 to 12 June (HKH). Although fairly common as a fall migrant in the Panhandle, in spring it migrates to the west of Nebraska.

Yellow-throated Warbler: None was reported; this species is a locally uncommon breeder in the east.

Cerulean Warbler: None was reported; this species is rare but regular in summer in the east.

Black-and-white Warbler: The only report came from a regular summer location, Sowbelly Canyon, where one was seen on 8 June (AK).

American Redstart: Reports came from expected locations in the north and the Missouri Valley (JGJ, AK, DB, LS), including a report of "lots" observed at Fort Niobrara, Cherry Co, on 13 June (KP).

Prothonotary Warbler: Only two were reported: one each spotted at Neale Woods, Washington Co, on 21 June (NR) and at FF on 28 June (BP,

LP); both were singing. The summer range extends north to the Neale Woods area.

Ovenbird: Singles identified at Sowbelly Canyon on 8 June (AK), Grove Lake Area, Antelope Co, on 12 June (MB), and at ADF on 14 June (LF, CF) were within the summer range; but the one spotted in Merrick Co on 19 June (MB) marks only the 3rd summer record between Keith Co and the Missouri Valley.

Louisiana Waterthrush: The presence of a pair at Ashford Scout Camp, Thurston Co, on 20 July (BFH), where a single was seen in 1999, is suggestive of breeding there, but no evidence was noted. The only other report came from a regular summer location, FF, where one was seen on 24 June (DB).

Kentucky Warbler: The 3 reports came from the known summer range in the lower Missouri Valley: singles spotted at ADF on 13 June (LF,CF); in Neale Woods, Douglas Co, on 20 June (NR); in southeastern Otoe Co on 28 June (LF, CF). And 2 birds were observed singing at Platte River SP, Cass Co, on 26 June (BP, LP). This species has increased in numbers in recent years.

Mourning Warbler: The female seen from 10 feet at ADF on 13 June (LF, CF) represents the 2nd latest on record for spring.

MacGillivray's Warbler: Two females spotted in the WSR yard on 31 May (HKH) appeared at a usual date, although belatedly reported.

Common Yellowthroat: A nest with an female incubating one egg and 2 cowbird eggs was found at Whitehead Marsh on 29 June; the nest appeared to be abandoned by 7 July, although the eggs were still present (LE). An excellent count was the 37 tallied at FL on 2 June (LR, RH).

Yellow-breasted Chat: This species was widely reported in the west and central, with best counts of "lots" along the Niobrara River in Cherry Co on 13 June (KP) and of 5 at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH). The one heard singing along the Verdigre Creek 4.5 miles south of Verdigre was farthest east; the observer noted that chats are "now rare" in Knox Co (MB).

Summer Tanager: Only the 5th Panhandle record for spring (belatedly reported) was a first-year male observed feeding on moths at WSR on 31 May (HKH; details).

Scarlet Tanager: Seven were reported from the Missouri Valley between 12 June and 6 July (m.ob.); but the two singing males identified at Grove Lake Area, Antelope Co, on 12 June (MB) were unexpected, although within the known north-central and eastern Nebraska breeding range.

Western Tanager: Routine reports.

Spotted Towhee: Routine reports.

Eastern Towhee: One was spotted at the western edge of the Platte Valley range near Gibbon on 8 June (LR, RH). There is a good population at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, where 4 were counted on 29 June (LE). A belated report of 2 found at Verdigre on 1 July 2001 (LS) was received;



small numbers of phenotypic Easterns occur in Knox Co, but most probably possess some "Spotted" genes.

Cassin's Sparrow: A significant discovery was a new location for this species 6 miles west and 1.5 miles south of Wellfleet (0.5 miles east of the intersection of Ingham and Wagon Trail Roads); a group of 5-8 birds was frequenting a newly planted pine/cedar windbreak in Sandhills Prairie on 6 July (LR, RH; details). The nearest sage prairie was within about 2 miles. Two birds were still there on 21 July (LR, RH). This is the easternmost summer location known for the species; in 1974 the species was reported from "Wellfleet," but no further details were provided. The only other report was of 2 birds identified on a Morrill Co BBS route on 28 June; the species had been reported on this route once before (HW).

Chipping Sparrow: At the southwest edge of the summer range, numbers are increasing in Alma, with more reported there than in any prior summer (GH, WH). Adults were spotted feeding young in Kearney by 1 July (LR, RH).

Brewer's Sparrow: The only report was from the breeding range: 5 were observed along the Henry Road in Sioux Co on 6 July (MB).

Field Sparrow: Fairly common throughout the part of Nebraska south of the Platte-South Platte system, a good count reached 27 at Medicine Creek Res on 30 June (LR, RH).

Vesper Sparrow: Numbers are low in the lower Missouri Valley; one observed singing in Cass Co on 29 July (BP, LP) was of interest. In the north, numbers are much greater, as indicated by a count of 21 made in Holt Co on 17 July (JJ).

Lark Sparrow: The best count was an excellent 130 made in the LM area on 22 June (LR, RH).

Lark Bunting: Several observers running BBS routes noted that numbers were higher this summer than in recent years, most notably routes in Cherry (NR), Sheridan (CNK), Dawson-Phelps (TEL), and Buffalo Cos (DP, JP). In contrast, a route in Kimball Co showed much reduced numbers, presumably due to extremely dry conditions there (WRS). The center of abundance apparently moved northeastward into the southwest Sandhills. Farthest to the northeast were 15 found at a regular location in Holt Co on 16 July (JJ).

Grasshopper Sparrow: A new high for a Morrill Co BBS route reached 22 on 28 June (HW). Least numerous in the southeast, a good count was the 19 tallied in Lancaster Co on 27 July (LE); a single was spotted on the Gifford Farm, adjacent to FF, on 28 June (BP, LP).

Henslow's Sparrow: The only report was of a singing bird observed at SCP on 13 June (KP). This species is a rare regular breeder in the southeast.

Song Sparrow: The population at FL continues to increase: 23 were counted on 2 June (LR, RH), but, on the other hand, Song Sparrows were

heard only twice at Wolf L, Saunders Co, where there are usually 6+ pairs summering (TH).

Swamp Sparrow: The only reports came from FL, where the best count for the population there was 11, made on 11 July (LR, RH). This group and a small population found at Jack Sinn Area in Lancaster Co are the only known (at least to me) breeding populations south of the Platte Valley.

White-crowned Sparrow: The only report was of a record late migrant discovered in Banner Co on 16 June (HW); the previous latest date was 15 June.

Dark-eyed (White-winged) Junco: None was reported. This species is a regular summer resident in the Pine Ridge.

McCown's Longspur: A BBS route in Kimball Co reported 13 on 22 June, significantly higher than in prior years; the observers attributed this increase to the extremely dry conditions (WRS, KN; see Chestnut-collared Longspur).

Chestnut-collared Longspur: The previously mentioned BBS route in Kimball Co found only 4 on 22 June, lower than usual (WRS, KN). One spotted in Sioux Co on 8 June (AK) was at an expected location, as were 4 noted northeast of O'Neill in Holt Co on 16 July (JJ), probably the northeasternmost regular location in Nebraska. Four birds identified at 3 locations around Springview on 14 July (MB) were about 60 miles west of the Holt Co location.

Northern Cardinal: Routine reports.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: At the western edge of the summer range in the Platte Valley, a pair was seen in the observers' yard just east of Gibbon on 2 June, and 3 immatures were seen there on 29 July (LR, RH). The latter may have been migrants, but the species summers at that location regularly.

Black-headed Grosbeak: At the same Gibbon-area yard mentioned previously, a male appeared on 13 June and again on 12 July; this species summers here also, at the eastern edge of its summer range in the Platte Valley. More usual was the appearance at the observer's feeder in Mitchell of 2 adult males and a juvenile male on 17 July (KD).

Blue Grosbeak: Reports occurred statewide (m.ob.), with best count of 4 tallied near Wellfleet on 6 July (LR, RH). A female was observed feeding 2+ young in a nest south of Gering on 22 July (AK).

Lazuli Bunting: Three singles were reported from Banner and Scotts Bluff Cos on 16 June (HW, AK), as expected; but the one spotted at Smith Falls SP, Cherry Co, on 13 June (KP) was at the eastern edge of its range in the Niobrara Valley. Indigo Buntings far outnumber Lazulis in summer in this area.

Indigo Bunting: Routine reports.

Painted Bunting: A surprise was a female that appeared in a southwestern Dixon Co yard on 2 June (JJ, details). There are now 13

reports, all in the period between 26 April and 4 June, with 8 documented.

Dickcissel: One was seen carrying nest material at Arbor L, Lancaster Co, on 15 June (LE).

Bobolink: A pair of adults with 3 young were found at Nine Mile Prairie, Lincoln, on 10 July (MUs).

Red-winged Blackbird: Flocking had begun by mid-July: 600 were located in northeastern Phelps Co on 11 July (LR, RH) and a mixed-age flock was seen in Otoe Co on 31 July (LF, CF).

Eastern Meadowlark: Routine reports.

Western Meadowlark: An indication of the abundance of this species in the Panhandle was that the total of 129 for a Morrill Co BBS route on 28 June represents a new low (HW).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Southeasterly were 3 males and a female spotted at Whitehead Marsh between 9 and 15 June (LE). Presumably migrants were the 25 found near Alma on 21 July (GH, WH).

Brewer's Blackbird: The two birds spotted east of Valentine on 13 June (MB; details) were a surprise; there are about 50 reports but no documented records of summer birds east of the Panhandle, and no breeding records.

Common Grackle: A flock of starlings and Common Grackles observed in Lancaster Co contained 480 and 320 of each species respectively on 27 July (LE), another indication that fall flocking had begun.

Great-tailed Grackle: This species is established in the central Platte Valley south to HCR and eastward, including the RWB and Lancaster Co, and at a few sites in the Panhandle, mostly along the North Platte Valley. It is well established at FL, but the presence of 4 adults all summer at Alma and a pair with 2 begging young on 13 July there (GH, WH) indicates a new breeding location. In Lincoln, an excellent count was the 21 tallied at Whitehead Marsh on 29 June (LE). In the Kiowa Springs area, a small population summers; large young were seen begging from an adult female south of Morrill on 20 July (AK).

Brown-headed Cowbird: Routine reports.

Orchard Oriole: The best counts included 85 in the LM area on 22 June (LR, RH) and 40 at Wellfleet Wildlife Area, Lincoln Co, on 6 July (LR, RH).

Baltimore Oriole: An adult was spotted feeding young at FF on 1 July (GSt).

Bullock's Oriole: An easterly "pure male" was identified at LM on 13 June (SJD).

House Finch: Routine reports.

Red Crossbill: The three that flew over the observer at Valentine NWR on 14 June (MB) were a bit far east for the date. The best count was only 10, those 3 adult females and 7 juveniles located at Wildcat Hills NC on 22 June, where species probably breeds (WRS,KN).

White-winged Crossbill: The remarkable winter influx persisted into the summer period, with one seen in Omaha--the last at the observer's feeders--on 1 June (NR), and a female identified as late as 20 June at a Bassett feeder where none had showed since 9 June (CH). These sightings signify record late spring dates (although there are a few isolated summer records); both locations had hosted significant wintering flocks.

Pine Siskin: Routine reports.

American Goldfinch: Routine reports.

House Sparrow: Routine reports.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### HERMIT WARBLER IN KNOX COUNTY: FIRST ACCEPTED RECORD FOR NEBRASKA

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The 2002 Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Record Committee has reviewed the following record and accepted it as a Class III. This Knox County sighting constitutes the first confirmed record of Hermit Warbler in Nebraska.

On 15 May, 2002, while birding with Ben Brogie, we stopped at an isolated planting of mixed hardwoods and Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) on a high hill 5.5 miles north (Road 530) of Creighton. We noticed several birds moving among the branches along the roadside and upon "spishing" for just a few seconds we attracted a female Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*) and then an adult male Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*). I instantly recognized the second bird as a Hermit Warbler, having seen the species in California; but immediately got out a National Geographic Field Guide to show Ben the major characteristics of the species. We went over major field marks with the bird in view.

The male Hermit appeared slightly larger than the nearby Cape May and had a head which was completely yellow, except for a black throat and black on nape of neck which narrowed as it extended up to back of the crown. The eye was black and the bill dark. The upper chest was black while the lower chest, belly, and flanks were white. The upper back appeared grayish. The wings also were grayish, with two very noticeable white wing bars, the wing tips looking at times to have a bluish-green shine. The under tail coverts were white, as were the outer tail feathers.

The tail of the bird showed a bit of black at the lower end of the upper surface. The birds legs were dark.

The bird was in view for about five minutes, feeding among the branches of Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*) before flying back into the pines. We walked back into the pine grove and spotted the bird as it fed near the top of a pine. Once again it flew, and after failing to find the bird in the next few minutes I drove home to get my camera and CD player. I returned within 30 minutes and played a recording of a Hermit Warbler song. Within a minute or two, the bird was back in view. I heard the bird vocalize once, in response to the CD, and its call matched the Hermit Warbler song of Track 29b--song 6CA of Stokes--Field Guide to Bird Song--Western. I was able to approach the bird to within 20 feet with the light directly behind me. The colors of the bird stood out perfectly at times as it moved to the outer branches of different trees. The bird stayed in view for ten minutes or more, and I was able to take several photographs.

Unfortunately, after processing only two photographs turned out, both at some distance; they are therefore questionable as to stand-alone documentation. I returned to the site for the next several days; and although the female Cape May Warbler continued to be present, we could not relocate the Hermit Warbler.

Sharpe et al. (2001) list Hermit Warbler as hypothetical in Nebraska; with the only published report of two birds seen on 21 September, 1973 (Bassett 1974). Bray et al. (1986) also evaluated this report and stated the description of these birds "is not diagnostic."

Several states bordering Nebraska have documentation of Hermit Warbler.

Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming each have a single record:

Kansas: one collected near Holcomb, Finney County, on 7 May, 1964 (Thompson & Ely 1992)

Missouri: an immature male specimen from Nodaway County, 20 December, 1969 (Robbins & Easterla 1992)

Wyoming: one seen in Fontenelle Trap (Lincoln County), 26 May, 1990 (Scott 1993).

Colorado has multiple records for Hermit Warbler; seven of those from the Colorado plains with dates ranging from 27 April to 17 May (Andrews & Righter 1992). It is absent from the state lists of Iowa and South Dakota.

The Hermit Warbler is a species that could be expected again in Nebraska. It would most likely be encountered in western Nebraska conifers in May.

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## The Changing Status of Sandhill Crane Breeding in the Eastern Rainwater Basin

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### Introduction

Prior to extirpation as a breeder before 1900, the Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) formerly bred throughout Nebraska (Bruner et al. 1904; Ducey 1988; Sharpe et al. 2001). During the 1990s, several summer observations of Sandhill Crane in the Eastern Rainwater Basin region of south-central Nebraska suggested the probability of breeding. In 1999, I discovered direct breeding evidence at Harvard Waterfowl Production Area, Clay County. This breeding record, along with another by different observers in the same county during the same season are the first modern breeding records for Nebraska. In this note, I describe my observations, summarize all modern summer records, and discuss the species status in the Eastern Rainwater Basin.

### Evidence of breeding

The Eastern Rainwater Basin (eRWB) is a region of gently rolling loess plains with scattered wetlands in south-central Nebraska. The region occurs primarily in Clay, Fillmore, Hamilton and York counties and also adjacent portions of Adams, Polk, Thayer, Seward, and Webster counties. In modern times, the Sandhill Crane has been essentially an uncommon migrant in the eRWB (pers. obs.), becoming more common to the west. The species is abundant in the northwest portion of the region where the eRWB abuts the Platte River drainage in Hamilton County.

During the mid-1990s, there were a few summer observations of Sandhill Cranes in the eRWB. At first, these were considered merely wandering birds. However, additional observations clearly pointed to a pattern and suggested the possibility of breeding, even though this seemed unlikely at the time. I made a conscious effort in 1999 to search what I presumed were potential breeding areas. During May, I observed a pair of cranes at Harvard Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) in Clay County on several occasions.

On 23 May, the pair was foraging in moist meadow southeast of the main basin. I observed the birds through a scope from the north-south road on the east border of the WPA. The pair's behavior, one bird deliberately walking behind the other maintaining the same distance, suggested that they might have had young. However, vegetation made it impossible to see any chicks from such a distance. On 29 May, I once again observed the pair through a scope from the same distance. This time, two chicks, or colts, were clearly seen. Later in the day, Gerald Jorgensen also observed the family group. It is not known if either colt fledged.

Also, in late May, 1999, personnel from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) observed a pair at Kissinger Basin Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Clay County, that were acting territorial. In early June, Mark Humpert observed the pair with one chick (Hoffman 1999, J. Dinan pers. comm.). Successful fledging of young was not confirmed.

#### Might Breeding Have Occurred Before 1999?

As stated previously, confirmation of breeding in 1999 was preceded by and has also been followed by additional breeding season observations; these data are summarized (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Breeding season observations of Sandhill Cranes in the Eastern Rainwater Basin, Nebraska 1992-2001

Date	Location	Number of Birds	Source
14 June 1992	Clay Co	Unknown	<u>Nebraska Bird Review</u> 60: 145
20 August 1994	Basin #79, Clay Co	2 ads, 2 juvs.	Pers. obs. w/ Gerald Jorgensen
3 September	1 mile n of Mallard Haven WPA Filmore Co	2 ads, 2 immature birds	Silcock (1995)
14, 21, 28 July 1996	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	2 adults	Pers. obs.
25 June-9 July 1996	Krause WPA, Filmore Co	2 ads behavior suggested possibility of breeding	Sharpe et al. (2001)



Date	Location	Number of Birds	Source
16 May 1997	Pintail WMA, Hamilton Co	1 adult	Pers. obs.
13 July 1997	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	1 adult	Silcock and Jorgensen (1997)
25 April-9 May 1998	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	2 adults	Pers. obs.
16, 22 August 1998	Basin #79, Clay Co	2 ads, 2 juvs	Pers. obs.
May 1999	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	2 ads, 2 chicks	Pers. obs.
May 1999	Kissinger WMA, Clay Co	2 ads, one chick	Hoffman (1999)
30 April, 7, 13-15 May 2000	Hupp WMA, Thayer Co	1 adult	Pers. obs.
15, 20, 28 May 2000	Massie WPA, Clay Co	1 adult	Pers. obs.
21, 28 May 2000	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	1 adult	Pers. obs.
20 August 2000	South of Massie WPA, Clay Co	2 adults flying	Pers. obs.
24 June, 1 July 2001	Krause WPA, Fillmore Co	2 adults	Pers. obs.
14-17 July 2001	Harvard WPA, Clay Co	1 adult	Pers. obs.

Although direct breeding evidence was not found prior to 1999, circumstantial evidence suggests that breeding likely occurred as early as 1994, as well as in 1998. In both years, I observed two juvenile cranes accompanied by a pair of adults in August in a heavily grazed pasture/basin located five miles north of Ong in the southeast quarter of Section 13 in Clay County. It is designated as basin #79 and is listed as consisting of 94 acres (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 1971).

Lanny Randolph and Robin Harding observed a family group on 3 September 1995 at a basin a mile north of Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore County (Silcock 1995). Presumably, this is the basin located in the southern portion of Section 22. It is designated as Basin #30-11 and presently consists of 85 acres (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 1971). This site is similar to #79 in that it is also a heavily grazed pasture and basin. Although this observation occurred in September, it would be exceptionally early for genuine migrants (Tacha et al. 1992).

Young cranes remain with their parents for less than a year, usually for 9 to 10 months (Tacha and others 1992). Thus it can be deduced that the juveniles observed in August and early September were hatched only a few months earlier. It could be suggested that nesting occurred elsewhere and the family groups wandered into the eRWB in late summer. This possibility seems very unlikely since the nearest known breeding locale outside of the eRWB is Tama County, Iowa (Kent and Dinsmore 1996), approximately 350 miles away.

Breeding likely did not occur, however, at either of the smaller basins where the family groups were observed. Both basins are rather small and are bordered by county roads. It is my supposition that these heavily grazed basins became attractive to the family groups for foraging at a time of year when many other sites, possibly including the nesting site, are grown over with dense vegetation. Sandhill Cranes require large and expansive wetland habitat, far from human habitation, for nesting (Tacha and others 1992). Both confirmed breeding sites are large: Harvard WPA totals 1,484 acres and Kissinger WMA totals 421 acres. Both sites possess an array of wetland and grassland habitats. It is possible that these family groups originated in Krause WPA, Fillmore County, which is less than 2 miles from either Basin #79 or #30-11. Krause is also a large WPA, totaling 527 acres, and is the site of several summer observations (see Table 1).

### Regional trends

Six subspecies of Sandhill Crane are currently recognized. Three subspecies are nonmigratory populations that occur in Cuba, Florida, and Mississippi (Tacha et al. 1992). Migratory races breed from the central United States northward to northern Canada, Alaska, and Siberia (Tacha et al. 1992). The southern-breeding, migratory race, *C.g. tabida*, is also known as the "Greater" Sandhill Crane. This race breeds in valleys of the intermountain west and in the Great Lakes region. In recent decades, numbers around the Great Lakes have increased (Tacha et al. 1992). Recent expansion and increases in Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana are chronicled by Brock (Brock 1994, 1997, 2000, 2001). Breeding first occurred in Iowa in 1992 in Tama County, and there have been additional breeding records since (Kent and Dinsmore 1996).

It is logical that breeding and breeding-season observations in the eRWB of Nebraska are the result of continued westward range expansion from the upper Midwest. What is most surprising is the fact that breeding and/or summering has occurred in an isolated and extralimital fashion. Expansion has not followed a slow, east to west, progression from the assumed source, nor has breeding been detected at other, perhaps larger and more pristine, wetland complexes to the north and east. If breeding did occur as early as 1994, as it likely did, it essentially occurred concurrently with range expansion in eastern Iowa.

#### Outlook and Conclusions

Confirmed breeding has occurred at large, isolated eRWB basins that possess a variety of wetland and grassland habitats. There currently exist only a handful of similar sites in the eRWB. Approximately 65% of the original total wetland acres in the eRWB have been destroyed (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 1971). However, continued purchases, renovations, and restorations by government agencies and private interests continue to increase the amount of wetland and grassland habitat in the region. Kissinger WMA, for example, where breeding occurred in 1999, is a site that was purchased and renovated as recently as the 1990s.

While potential habitat may continue to increase in the eRWB, habitat conditions will remain directly linked to localized precipitation, and thus will be highly variable. This situation perhaps translates into either "boom or bust" years for potential breeding Sandhill Cranes, and recent events illustrate this possibility. No breeding activity was observed, for instance, during the very dry years of 2000 or 2002, nor does it seem likely to have occurred. The observation of 2 juveniles, rather than one, in both 1994 and 1998 may suggest ideal conditions were present in both of those years. Sandhill Cranes rarely fledge more than one young, and usually only in years of abundant food (Tacha et al. 1992).

Since breeding has likely taken place in multiple years in the eRWB, breeding is expected to occur in the future at larger basins where suitable habitat is present during years when favorable water conditions exist. Expectations aside, variable conditions in the region make it questionable if the species will be a regular breeder in the eRWB, despite continuing increases of habitat. Recent breeding by Sandhill Cranes in the eRWB is likely a component of continued increases and range expansion from the upper Midwest. Only future events will reveal if the Sandhill Crane will consolidate its range on the central Great Plains by re-colonizing other wetland complexes in Nebraska and surrounding states or if breeding in eRWB during the 1990s will remain spatially and temporally isolated.

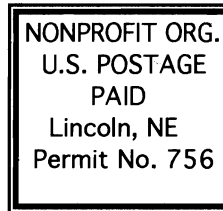
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