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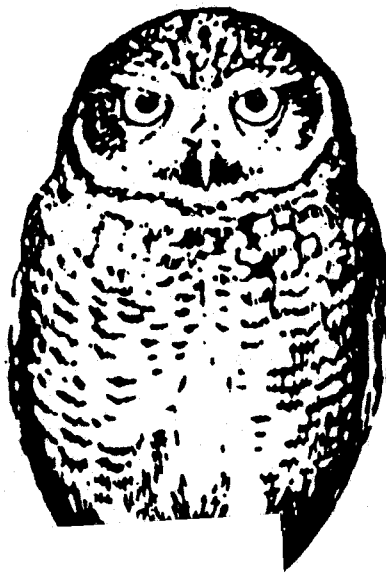
# ***Nebraska Bird Review***

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## WHOOPING CRANE SIGHTINGS, AUGUST 1997-January 1998

Compiled from Information Provided by  
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Cooperation throughout the Whooping Crane flyway continues to be excellent, and special thanks go out to each participant. Between 1977 and 1988, 132 juvenile birds were color-marked on the breeding grounds, and 40 were accounted for during the winter of 1997-98. Fourteen color-marked Whooping Cranes were observed during the fall migration. All sightings of color-marked birds are maintained at the Grand Island office. The importance of observers looking closely for the colored leg bands cannot be overemphasized.

Based on observations of the breeding grounds during the summer of 1997, about 192 Whooping Cranes were expected to arrive at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas during the fall. The first arrival was confirmed on 21 October. A record 181 Whooping Cranes are believed to have reached Aransas, including 29 young birds, also a record number. On 22 January 1998, a juvenile Whooping Crane was confirmed to be wintering with Sandhill Cranes near San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, Brazoria County, Texas. Thus, a total of 182 Whooping Cranes (152 adults/subadults and 30 young) were wintering at Aransas and in Brazoria County, Texas. Two sets of twins were observed in Saskatchewan, Canada during the fall migration, but only one set arrived at Aransas, the first to reach there since the winter of 1964-65. As of 29 January 1998, eight adult/subadult cranes, of the number anticipated, had not arrived at Aransas. The only confirmed mortality was a subadult found dead under a powerline in Saskatchewan on 13 October 1997.

The first dates for confirmed observations of migrating Whooping Cranes were 11 August in Canada and 14 September in the United States. The last sighting date was 7 December in Texas. Confirmed sightings were reported from Saskatchewan (46); North Dakota (14); South Dakota (13); Nebraska (6); Kansas (11); Oklahoma (3); and Texas (1). The 13 confirmed sightings reported in South Dakota set a fall migration record for the state. The combined total of 94 confirmed sightings in Canada and the United States established a new fall migration record.

The weather during September through mid-October was mild. The only major storm during the fall migration occurred on 24-25 October when heavy snow fell over parts of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Aided by low-pressure systems, which reached the Texas coast on 1 and 5 November, 122 birds arrived at Aransas between 31 October and 6 November. Temperatures during November and December were normal or above normal with no major storms.

In addition to the confirmed and probable sightings in Nebraska shown in the following table, there were several unconfirmed sightings, including 2 adults flying over the west edge of Grand Island, Hall Co. on 27 October, 20-25 adults flying near Johnson Lake in Dawson Co. on 26-27 October, and the following sightings in Custer Co.: 1 adult flying 1 mi. east of Callaway on 14 October, 2 adults flying over Comstock on 23 October, and 1 adult flying 6 mi. east and 2 mi. north of Broken Bow on 30 October.

Legal descriptions of locations by township and range, and information for other states can be obtained from the NBR Editor or from Mr. Wally Jobman at the address given under the title.

Sighting Dates  
8/97-1/98No. Cranes  
adults/youngLocationConfirmed Sightings:

|          |       |  |
|----------|-------|--|
| 10/21-23 | 5     | Brown Co., 3 mi. west, 3 mi. south of Ainsworth.   |
| 10/23    | 2     | Garfield Co., 6 mi. northwest of Burwell, Calamus Reservoir.   |
| 10/22-31 | 4 / 2 | Blaine Co., Middle Loup River, 0.75 mi. downstream from Milburn Diversion Dam, 2 mi. northwest of Milburn. |
| 10/23-24 | 2     | Lincoln Co., Lake Maloney, 6 mi. south, 2 west of North Platte.  |
| 10/24-31 | 5 / 2 | Buffalo Co., 9 mi west of Pleasanton.  |
| 10/30-31 | 2     | Custer Co., 0.5 mi. north of Milburn.  |

Probable Sightings:

|          |       |                                       |
|----------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 10/21    | 1     | Cherry Co., 6 mi. north of Valentine. |
| 10/25-26 | 2 / 1 | Custer Co., 9 mi. south of Comstock.  |
| 10/29-30 | 2     | Custer Co. near Victoria Springs.     |

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A PROBABLE NESTING OF CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) IN  
NEBRASKA

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This report provides details on the probable nesting of Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) in Morrill, Scotts Bluff Co., Nebraska, in 1997. It also corrects an erroneous report of nesting in the Pine Ridge area of Nebraska (Silcock & Jorgensen 1997b).

A single Clark's Nutcracker was first noted coming to a suet feeder at the home of Ms. Edna C. Thomas in Morrill 8-9 Jan 1997. It came to the feeder at least weekly and was often seen daily. A second Clark's Nutcracker appeared during the second week of Feb. Initially, the bird already present was antagonistic towards it and tried to drive it away. Over a period of several days the agonistic behavior decreased and by the end of the week the two were coming to the feeder together. Thereafter, they came to feed together regularly, usually daily, through the rest of Feb. and all of March. By early April only one bird came to the feeder, still usually daily. On 27 April this nutcracker was noted carrying off

a large chunk of suet toward a row of large cottonwoods several hundred meters away, arousing suspicion that it was carrying food to young. The trees were searched unsuccessfully for a nest.

On 7 May the adult bird came to the feeder accompanied by what appeared to be a juvenile bird, which hung back from the feeder, sitting in the shadows of a branch and begging for food (begging call, lowered body, fluttering wings, open mouth), but the adult did not feed it, nor did the begging bird feed itself. On 8 May the two birds returned to the feeder. This time the juvenile was in direct sunlight and Ms. Thomas noted the following plumage characteristics: a tannish-gray cast to the facial feathers around the beak and eyes; gray body feathers were dull colored with a slight tannish cast, rather than a clean gray like the adult's; the dark flight feathers in the wings had a definite brownish tinge rather than pure black like the adult's. Overall, she reported that the plumage was "softer appearing" than the adult's. Most of the color differences were subtle, noticeable only in direct sunlight at close range (she was able to approach to within 3 meters without alarming the young bird). On this occasion, after the adult fed itself and flew away, the young bird remained and eventually began to feed itself.

The adult continued to bring the young bird to the feeder for about a week. During this time, the adult would eat and then fly away, leaving the young one to feed itself. The adult was never seen feeding the young bird and was last seen at the feeder on 18 May. The young bird continued to come to the feeder almost daily and was last seen there on 3 June. Initially, it was remarkably tame and tolerated the presence of humans, cats, and noises. By 30 May, however, it had become more wary, scolding at cats and squirrels, and human activity would frighten it away.

Ms. Thomas had fairly extensive previous experience with Clark's Nutcrackers in Colorado over a 25-year period and was aided in her observations by information from friends still there. Her own previous experience, coupled with guidance from knowledgeable contacts and information from Bent's Life Histories, combined to allow her to search for and recognize the correct behavioral and plumage clues to adequately establish the age of the bird as a juvenile.

The timing and sequence of events fit with what would be expected for a nesting in this area. In the nearest recorded nesting, in the southern Black Hills of South Dakota, well-developed young were found in the nest on 16 April 1987, as well as young just out of the nest on 9 April 1987; in addition, recently fledged young were found on 29 April 1985 (Peterson 1985, 1988). The only other reported possible nesting in Nebraska was of a begging young bird being fed that "...was probably out of the nest not more than a few weeks..." when seen on 17 May 1987 (Tomback 1995). Based on the above, one would expect egg laying in this area to occur about mid- to late March, with the young leaving the nest in April.

There are several aspects of this report that are at variance with expected "normal" nesting. One is the disappearance of one of the adults about the time of hatching. Since both sexes normally care for the young, thus making abandonment unlikely, this might be explained by the death of one of the pair. The failure of the adult to feed the begging young bird also seems odd, especially since the young are normally dependent on the adults for food until late July or later (Diana F. Tomback, pers. comm.)

Perhaps the biggest anomaly is the nesting habitat. All reported breeding activities of the species on record have taken place in coniferous forest, usually with one or more pine species

to provide seeds for food. Nesting nutcrackers usually feed young with seeds stored the previous fall, although available alternative foods have been used when no seeds were produced (Diana F. Tomback, pers. comm.). Contrast this with Morrill, NE, which is surrounded by short- and mid-grass prairie, a limited amount of farmland, and widely scattered, planted trees, mostly deciduous. Within the town, there are a few ornamental conifers but probably not in enough numbers nor of the right species to support the usual caching of pine seeds, which is a prerequisite to normal breeding. Thus, the habitat would appear to be totally "wrong" for nutcrackers to attempt breeding. This may be the first-ever documented report of extralimital breeding, away from both "normal" habitat and range (Davis and Williams 1964). However, the birds were in Morrill when they would normally be expected to be establishing a breeding territory. This followed a widespread cone-crop failure the previous fall in the Front Range of the Rockies in Colorado (Diana F. Tomback, pers. comm.) and the presence of a normal or somewhat less than normal cone crop in northwest Nebraska (Mike Watts, pers. comm.).

Other nutcrackers were noted in the western Pine Ridge at the end of December 1996 (Silcock & Jorgensen 1997a). I saw a single bird in West Ash Creek Canyon, Dawes Co., on 3 May 1997; a flock of at least 6 was noted near Chadron State Park, Dawes Co., on 15 May 1997 (Russ Benedict, pers. comm.); and two small flocks were in Sowbelly Canyon, Sioux Co., on 22-23 May (Silcock & Jorgensen 1997b). Finally, I saw 4-6 birds in West Ash Creek Canyon on 30 May. This last group seems to be the source of the erroneous report, apparently due to a misunderstanding, of "Two additional nestings ... reported in the Pine Ridge..." (Silcock & Jorgensen 1997b). On 30 May a family-sized group of the birds was noted and there were some indications of the presence of young birds, but further review of the plumage and the observed behavior failed to demonstrate the conclusive evidence needed to prove breeding. A nest found in the immediate area that was suspected to be a nutcracker nest, also remains unidentified after comparison with museum specimens and written descriptions.

Thus, we have some evidence for successful breeding by a pair of Clark's Nutcrackers, which appeared to be occupying a territory through the season of courtship, nesting, hatching, and fledging. One of the pair was seen repeatedly with a recently-fledged young bird at the proper time. Because the habitat for miles in every direction from Morrill is almost treeless and inhospitable to the species, the most logical interpretation seems to be that the bird was indeed hatched there. However, because we did not actually find the birds with their nest, nesting by the species in this state has not been conclusively demonstrated.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to thank Ms. Edna Claire Thomas for so readily sharing her careful observations and so patiently answering my many questions via telephone, on site, and through a series of written exchanges. Without her astute observations and willing assistance, this report could not exist.

I also wish to thank the following people: Dr. Diana F. Tomback, University of Colorado, for her comments and insight at various stages of this study; Richard Peterson, Coordinator of the South Dakota Bird Atlas Project, for details on his observations of Clark's Nutcracker in that state; Hugh Kingery for making arrangements for me to view nests in the collection at the Denver Museum of Natural History; Mike Watts, forestry technician with the U.S. Forest Service at Chadron, NE for sharing his observations on

the pine-cone crop; and Russ Benedict for sharing his observations. Special appreciation is extended to Gary and Nancy Fisher of the Ash Creek Guest Ranch, and to Jeff and Sami Guest, all of them Crawford-area ranchers, who extended their hospitality during a 48-hour snowbound period during an April blizzard.

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#### NOTES ON THE NESTING BIOLOGY OF PYGMY NUTHATCHES IN NEBRASKA

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#### INTRODUCTION

Pygmy Nuthatches (*Sitta pygmaea*) were considered to be no more than casual or rare winter visitors to the northwest part of Nebraska by previous investigators (Bruner et al. 1904; Swenk 1918; Haecker et al. 1945; Rapp et al. 1958, 1971). I.S. Trostler's earlier comment that the species was "a rare resident, breeds in Omaha" (Bruner 1896) was later felt to be in error, as evidenced by Bruner's later comment that it was, "A fall and winter visitor.....not breeding in the state." (Bruner et al. 1904.)

The first evidence of breeding was the collection of a juvenile male by Dr. Harrison Tordoff for the University of Kansas on 18 July 1957, 5 miles north of Harrison, Sioux Co. (Ford 1959). A note on nesting in Dawes Co. by Doris Gates was included in the annual nesting report for 1961, but there were no details of date, location, or visual evidence of breeding (Wensien 1962). Unfortunately, I could not locate further details of the report. The next indication of breeding was a report of a pair of adults carrying food to young in a nest in 1970 at Ft. Robinson State Park, Sioux Co. (Rosche 1972). A report of an adult carrying food in 1981 in either Dawes or Sioux County was appended to the nesting report for that year (Bennett 1982). During the Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas Project (1984-89), the species was reported from eight survey blocks in Dawes and Sioux Counties, with one confirmed breeding record (Mollhoff unpublished). More recently, apparent breeding has been reported, without publication of details, from Scotts Bluff and Banner Counties (Grzybowski 1996).

While doing field work on other early-nesting birds in northwestern Nebraska on 3 May 1997, I found Pygmy Nuthatches to be both rather common and very involved in courtship and nest

building, and I decided to document this poorly known species. Although I must emphasize that these are only preliminary observations, I feel that an adequate sample size was studied to warrant publication. Further long-term study is planned to gain a better understanding of the breeding ecology of this interesting species.

#### STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The initial phase of this study took place in West Ash Creek Canyon in Dawes Co. (SE 1/4 of T31N, R51W), in one of the survey blocks established for the Breeding Bird Atlas project. This site is on the southern edge and approximately in the middle (west to east) of the Pine Ridge. Later, the study was expanded to include blocks at both ends of the Pine Ridge in Sioux and Sheridan Counties, to determine whether the findings were typical of the entire area. These sites were chosen because of my familiarity with the area and because they are on public land and readily available to current and future researchers. The blocks also appear to be representative of habitat in the area.

The arc of the Pine Ridge is the southernmost of the encircling ring of escarpments tipped outward by the Black Hills Uplift. The area in Nebraska stretches from 102° 30' to 104° W. and 42° 30' to 43° N. The forest, which cloaks the ridges and canyons, is the southernmost extension of the coniferous Black Hills forest, itself an eastern outlier of the Rocky Mountain forests. The forest consists almost entirely of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) with scattered red cedar (*Juniperus* sp.). The canyon floors are dominated in many places by riparian stands of mixed hardwoods, consisting mostly of hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), willow (*Salix* sp.), cottonwoods (*Populus* sp.), elm (*Ulmus americana*), box elder (*Acer negundo*), and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*). Elevation ranges from about 1200 meters (3900 ft.) at the lower northeast end of the Ridge in Sheridan Co., to about 1575 meters (5100 ft) at the northwestern end in Sioux Co. Local relief from canyon bottom to adjoining ridge top is usually in the range of 100 - 150 meters (300-450 ft).

The climate may be characterized as semi-arid and continental with hot summers and cold winters. It is subject to prolonged dry periods, with diurnal temperature fluctuations of 25° C (or 45° F) being the norm during the breeding season. The overall setting is shortgrass prairie surrounding the scarp woodland of the ridges and canyons (Urbatsch & Eddy 1973).

#### Equipment

Equipment essential for this study included a pair of lineman's pole-climbing spikes and belt, a Coleman Powermate inspector's pocket light, Model 5398C700 (which has a 1.7 cm diameter flashlight head attached to the flashlight body by a 20 cm length of semi-flexible wire that can be bent to the desired shape), an oval mirror 2.0 X 4.5 cm glued to a 30 cm length of 14 gauge copper wire, topographic maps, leather gloves, canteens, safety rope, camera, binoculars, tape recorder, notebook, etc. and a backpack to carry it all.

#### Methods

On 3-4 May 1997, pairs of Pygmy Nuthatches were located initially by random encounter while traversing habitats in West Ash Creek Canyon, from canyon floor to ridgetop. After noting similarities in the habitat used by the first six pairs found, further searching was concentrated in areas of similar habitat. If no birds were seen in likely habitat, a tape of their call was played and brought an immediate response if any were in the area.



Initially, eight pairs and three trios were located in the West Ash Creek area.

On a return visit to the site on 30 May 1997, four active nests were located. On 31 May 1997, I visited the block in Monroe Canyon (Gilbert-Baker State Wildlife Management Area), Sioux Co. (NW 1/4 of T32N, R56W) and found two pairs and two active nests, and a block in the Metcalf State Wildlife Management Area, Sheridan Co. (NW 1/4 of T33N, R45W), where I found four more pairs and two active nests. Thus, information was collected on a total of 17 pairs/trios and from 8 active nests. The birds in the West Ash study area were found along a 12 km (7.5 mi.)-long route scattered across 5 sections. The locations of each pair and of each active nest were plotted on a topographic map so that they could be relocated for further study.

After an active nest was found, the tree was climbed, either with the aid of the climbers and belt, or by free climbing if sufficient, solid hand- and foot-holds were present. Upon reaching the nest hole, the flexible head of the flashlight was bent and hung in the hole to illuminate the contents, and the mirror was inserted to bring the contents into view. It often took several minutes of adjusting the light and bending the mirror around the contortions of the narrow, twisting holes before the contents could be seen.

The nest holes constructed by the species are tiny, usually found in clusters placed exclusively in dead ponderosa pines, and therefore unlikely to be confused with those made by other cavity nesters found in the area. For this study, however, data on nest location, construction, etc. was collected only from active nests to preclude the possibility of misidentification.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Habitat

Since the Pine Ridge lies at the eastern limit of Pygmy Nuthatch range, habitat use here may be at some variance from that observed nearer the core of its range. Other workers have consistently noted the close association of the species with ponderosa pine forests (Bailey & Niedrach 1965; Bent 1948; Ryser 1985). Some have commented on the near dependence of the birds on ponderosa pines, while others have noted that some use is made of other trees for foraging or nesting (Bent 1948; Scott et al. 1977).

In my study area, the only native coniferous trees present were ponderosa pine and red cedars. No use of the cedars was noted during the breeding season; the nuthatches observed thus far used pure to almost pure stands of ponderosa pines that were mature enough to bear cones. The stands ranged from areas where the trees shaded an estimated 40-50% of the ground, to dense, closed-canopy forest where the ground was 100% shaded and the boles were 5-10 meters apart. The birds were not noted in stands of saplings 2-6 meters tall, or in isolated saplings found scattered in stands of mature trees, although they very likely used them at least occasionally for foraging.

No birds were noted on the floors of the canyons among the deciduous trees or in the canyon-bottom stands of pines. The lowest birds found were about 1/3 of the way up the side of the canyon, but most (12 of 17 pairs) were at or near the tops of the ridges. They were most readily found along the ridge tops between canyons, often at the very upper reaches where small grassy clearings occurred, or near the forest - grassland border. These areas are often rather open, with perhaps 60-70% of the ground shaded and little or no undergrowth beneath the pines.

All active nests were within 40 meters of the edge of a

clearing or the forest edge, and half of them were located at the edge. This may give a somewhat skewed impression, however, because the nest trees were easier to find in this setting. Within stands of mature pines, the major limiting component seemed to be the availability of standing dead pines for nest holes. In those instances where there were no standing dead pines for a distance of .3 - 1.0 km, no nuthatches were found. Conversely, in extensive areas of healthy, vigorously growing pines, I often had only to search out an isolated dead tree of the proper specifications to find a pair of the birds. They seemed to be absolutely dependent on the presence of free-standing dead pines and did not use dead trees that were uprooted or broken and tipped against another tree.

#### Territory size

No attempt was made to map the specific boundaries of the territory of any of the pairs encountered, nor was a gridded search made in an attempt to locate all the pairs in a given area. However, a general idea of the breeding density could be inferred from the minimum distance between territorial pairs, which was about 200 meters. This distance occurred 4 times for the 17 pairs found, in extensive areas of what appeared to be suitable habitat. The same density was noted throughout the three separate study blocks.

#### Nests

Although instances have been reported of the species making opportunistic use of existing cavities (Bent 1948), the overall impression is that of all the nuthatch species found on this continent, the Pygmy Nuthatch is most likely to excavate its own nest hole. Harrison (1979) commented that of 17 nests he examined, all appeared to have been excavated by the birds themselves. Scott et al. (1977) stated that the species normally makes its own cavities.

All eight of the active nests examined in my study were in dead ponderosa pines and appeared to have been excavated by the birds themselves. No use was noted of natural cavities or of holes made by woodpeckers. The two newest holes appeared to be 1-4 years old, two were estimated at 5-10 years old, while the remaining four holes appeared to be at least 10 years old. These estimates were based on the comparative appearance of dead trees of known age from various burned areas in the vicinity, but are reasonably accurate. In trees with active nests, all nuthatch holes, both partial and complete, were noted for use as a baseline for continued study. Each active nest was identified and measured (after the young had fledged) to establish accurate known ages and time sequences for nest excavation, reuse, etc.

Each of the 8 trees examined had 1-2 completed nest holes, plus an additional 0-2 partially excavated holes. Several of the trees were in close proximity to another 1-2 dead tree(s), which also contained holes that appeared typical of the species. Close observation in future years will reveal whether the same hole is used repeatedly in successive years, or whether adjacent holes in the same or nearby trees are used in some sort of rotation system.

While locating nesting pairs initially on 3-4 May 1997, only one case of excavation of a new hole was noted. I watched one bird spend 10-12 minutes of actual excavation time during the 30 minutes I was watching. The hole was 2.0 cm in diameter and had penetrated 4.0 cm into the tree. When I revisited the site on 30 May 1997, the hole was 2.2 cm in diameter and excavated to a depth of 6 cm. Meanwhile, the pair had laid their eggs in a previously completed hole a meter higher up in the same tree. When rechecking the site

on 23 August 1997, I found that the entrance measured 2.5 X 3.0 cm and the entry tunnel was excavated to a depth of 7.0 cm but had not yet begun to expand to form the nest cavity. Two other pairs were modifying or completing holes that had been started several years before. In both cases, the holes were used for nesting in 1997.

Grinnell, cited in Bent (1948), reported a pair of Pygmy Nuthatches that were still excavating a nest hole after 35 days, but he did not indicate whether the nest was used that season. My own observations suggest that only 1 out of 11 pairs was actively excavating a new nest during nest-building season; that a new nest was still far less than one-fourth done after being worked on from mid-late April through late August; and that all active nests were in holes that had been initiated several years to more than a decade previously. Therefore, I believe that the excavation of a hole takes a year or more before it is actually used for nesting.

Bent (1948) and Harrison (1979) both found old holes in which the cracks and splits in the trunk of the tree, caused by drying and weathering, had penetrated into the nest cavity itself. These splits had sometimes been "weather-proofed" by packing the crack with nest material to allow continued use. Three of the eight nests in this study had been repaired in this manner, with the cracks or holes packed with plant fiber, nuthatch feathers, or wood and bark chips. Continued use of old holes may indicate extended nest-site fidelity by a pair and may correlate with the cooperative nesting behavior reported for the species (Sydeman et al. 1988).

Extended nest-site fidelity, that is, reuse of the same tree/hole for many years, and suggestions of cooperative breeding (3 of 17 "pairs" were trios), are clues that may indicate permanent family territories. In addition, Sydeman et al. (1988) reported year-round occupation of the territory by groups whose breeding units consisted of a breeding pair, plus 0-3 helpers made up of previous offspring. This raises intriguing implications. The birds have an enormous investment of time and energy in excavating just a single hole. Most pairs also had at least one or two partially completed holes available for completion when needed, many of them several years old. It appears to be common to have at least one extra completed hole ready as a "standby." Once completed, a hole appears to be used for years by successive generations of birds. Indeed, it is entirely possible that successive generations may be involved in excavating a given hole.

The investment of time and energy in excavating and maintaining a hole or suite of holes, plus their susceptibility to loss through blowdown, lightning, usurpation, etc., could logically lead to strategies to protect their investment. These may include: year-round occupation (and defense?) of the territory against neighboring groups of the same species; interspecific defense against other hole nesters; and cooperative breeding among parents, offspring, and siblings (Sydeman et al. 1988); all done to defend and propagate a family resource (the nest), which is passed on from generation to generation. The construction and maintenance of reserve holes may also serve other functions as well, e.g. extra roost sites during incubation for the "helpers," winter roosts and bonding for members of the extended family, etc.

Many previous workers have noted that nest holes are usually placed near the top of a dead, broken snag, with the implication that the holes were deliberately excavated in that position (e.g. Bent 1948; Johnsgard 1979). My observations lead me to a different conclusion. The new hole in the initial stage of excavation mentioned earlier was placed about 2/3 of the way up a dead tree, but the nest used by the pair this year was placed in a hole that was 1-2 years old and was located a meter farther up the tree,

while another partial hole was 15 cm above the new hole. This was very similar to other trees with multiple holes. Other standing snags with nest holes had partially completed holes in the detached top portion, which lay on the ground nearby. Based on these observations, I propose the following sequence of events. After a tree has been dead for several years, but the bark is still on the tree and retaining moisture, the wood is softened by decay and becomes somewhat spongy, enabling the nuthatches to begin work. The birds tunnel horizontally 3-6 cm, then turn sharply downward, enlarging the tunnel to form a cavity as they go deeper. If the wood is soft throughout the trunk, the hole simply expands to the necessary dimensions. If some portion of the trunk core is pitchy and the wood still sound, the hole turns to the side and down to form a rather flat cavity between the solid core and the outer surface (more than half the holes had this configuration). If solid wood is encountered before reaching the necessary distance in from the surface, hole excavation is suspended until decay progresses further. Other nest holes may be initiated during the succeeding several years while the bark persists on the tree, thus keeping the surface of the trunk moist and soft enough to work. Later, the dead bark falls from the tree and the outer layer of wood dries out, becoming quite durable and too hard for the nuthatches to initiate holes. The inside remains soft and probably becomes even softer as rot sets in due to the entrance of additional moisture through the holes. As the rot continues, the birds are able to complete the holes that were initiated in previous years, examples of which I witnessed in two of the active nests I found.

After a tree has been dead for a number of years and weakened by decay and/or nest holes, wind may break off the upper part, about 1/2 to 2/3 of the original height of the tree, which coincides with the zone where most nestbuilding occurs. This leaves a broken-off snag, with nest holes near where the break occurred. Nest trees still standing at full height had nest holes, both active and empty, extending from about 1/3 of the way up, to about 3/4 of the way to the top of the tree, and farther up to where the trunk becomes too small in diameter to excavate a hole. The smallest trunk diameter at which I found a nest hole completed was 14 cm. Of the eight nests examined, half were located in broken snags, with the holes located 1-5 meters below the top of the snag. Thus, the position of the hole relative to the top of a broken snag is more likely determined by the place where the tree is broken off by the wind after the hole is built, and not by the birds actively deciding to make a hole near the top of a broken-off snag.

Specific information concerning the eight nests is as follows:

Height of nest: mean, 7.1 meters (range: 3.75-9.5 meters)  
Height of tree: mean, 9.9 meters (range: 5.5-14.0 meters)  
Cavity depth: mean, 16 cm (range: 12-19 cm)  
Typical entrance hole: 2.8 X 3.2 cm

The holes faced every direction except south and southeast. The lining of the nests ranged from nothing but the residual sawdust-sized wood chips resulting from excavation, to the addition of a few scales of pine bark, a few feathers (all appearing to be nuthatch feathers), or a few shreds of vegetable fibers or mammal hair.

#### Competition

While playing the taped call at a large old snag, which had several holes typical of those made by Pygmy Nuthatches, the replying call from a nearby pine was that of a Red-breasted

Nuthatch, which immediately appeared, apparently ready to defend the tree. The bird was in very faded plumage with only a slight rusty wash to the underparts, and had I not heard the call, I might have mistaken it for a Pygmy Nuthatch. Due to its pale coloration, I suspected that it was a female. It did not enter any of the nest holes present, so after it left, I climbed the tree and checked all the holes I could see but did not find a nest. As I descended, it returned and entered a hole that I had not noticed near the top of the snag, then left a few seconds later. I climbed back up the tree and as I was inserting the flashlight tip and mirror into the hole, I was nearly struck in the face by the incubating bird as it exploded out of the hole. It was even paler than its mate, but was indeed a Red-breasted Nuthatch. The entrance to the hole was encircled by fresh pitch, liberally smeared around the hole, as described for the species by Bent (1948) and Harrison (1979). Otherwise, the hole was typical of other Pygmy Nuthatch nest holes in size, placement, configuration, etc. It appeared to be a case of usurpation of an old Pygmy Nuthatch hole by the Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Another of the active Pygmy Nuthatch nests I found, also in an old hole in an old snag, appeared typical of other nests of the species and had the hole surrounded by pitch, but in this instance, the pitch was old and dry. I interpreted this to be a hole excavated by Pygmy Nuthatches, later usurped by Red-breasted Nuthatches and, still later, reoccupied by the former.

A third case of interaction with other nuthatch species was witnessed when I surprised a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches carrying nest material into a natural cavity they were preparing to use. When they saw me, they immediately began to scold me, and were joined within seconds by a trio of Pygmy Nuthatches and, a few seconds later still, by a Red-breasted Nuthatch. Once assembled, the birds directed their attention at one another, with the White-breasted Nuthatches soon driving off the other four birds.

Based on these few examples, it seems that the three nuthatch species do not tolerate the presence of one another, at least in the vicinity of the nest during the breeding season. Based on my observations of the large investment made by Pygmy Nuthatches in hole excavation and their apparent usurpation by at least the Red-breasted Nuthatches, I would speculate that this intolerance might be based at least in part on competition for nest sites.

#### Breeding Cycle

When the initial observations were made on 3-4 May 1997, I found eight pairs and three trios. One nest was in the initial stages of excavation and two other nest holes were being modified/completed. Two more pairs were noted carrying nest material. Another pair was foraging together in a tree when approached by a single bird from across a narrow canyon; the encroaching bird was immediately driven off.

On a return visit on 30-31 May 1997, a search was made for 10 of the pairs and 8 of them were found; it got dark before I had a chance to search for the remaining two pairs. Of the eight pairs, four nests were found. On the second day, the search was extended to the other two study areas, where six more pairs and four nests were found.

On 30 May 1997, three of the nests in the Dawes Co. study area held only eggs, while the fourth held three eggs and three newly hatched young, one with a piece of eggshell still stuck on its back. On 31 May 1997, the four nests all contained only eggs. The Dawes Co. nests held clutches of 6, 6, 7, and 7. The Sioux Co. nests held clutches of 6 and 7, while the Sheridan Co. nests both

contained clutches of 8 eggs.

On 30-31 May, with an overnight temperature of 50° F, all nests found before noon were being incubated and the adult usually did not leave the nest until I was within about a meter of the nest hole. During the afternoons, with the temperature about 80° F, I found both adults foraging nearby as I approached one nest. A nest found just at dusk was occupied, but the bird came to the hole and peered out at me as I approached the tree.

After completing my examination of the nests, I noticed that several of the birds returned and re-entered the nest before I had descended two meters from the hole. In the other cases, I was too busy concentrating on making a safe descent to observe what the birds were doing.

#### SUMMARY

Preliminary findings are reported on a study of Pygmy Nuthatches in the Pine Ridge area of northwest Nebraska, and detailed information on the nesting habits in this state is presented for the first time. A total of 17 pairs / trios of Pygmy Nuthatches was located, and eight active nests with eggs, or eggs and young, were found during two weekends of field work. The three study sites were located in the middle and at both ends of the Pine Ridge in Dawes, Sioux, and Sheridan Counties. The observations on nests with eggs appear to be the first reported in Nebraska, and extend the known breeding range eastward slightly (but not surprisingly). The density of breeding pairs appeared the same throughout the area and, combined with the appearance of the nest trees, lead me to believe that breeding has been taking place in the entire area for a very long time. The birds are restricted to ponderosa pine forest and appear to be absolutely dependent on the presence of standing dead pine trees for nest sites. An indication of cooperative breeding was noted. Initial observations indicate that an extended period is required for nest building.

#### FURTHER STUDY

Further observations are planned to gather more information on the timing of various aspects of the breeding cycle, especially hatching and fledging dates. More study is needed to document the occurrence, prevalence, and activities of "helpers" that assist the breeding pair, and to record interactions with, and niche separation from, other hole-nesting species in the area, especially among the three nuthatch species. A long-term study will be needed to better understand the extended nest excavation period, reuse of nests, usurpation/reoccupation of nest holes, and, most importantly, the natural history of the dead trees themselves, without which the species could not exist in the area.

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FALL FIELD REPORT, AUGUST-NOVEMBER 1997

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INTRODUCTION

Notable this Fall was very heavy coverage of the Panhandle during Sep-Oct, which yielded several outstanding records (all, of course, pending NOURC approval). Incredible were first Panhandle records of Golden-winged, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted, and Prothonotary Warblers, 3<sup>rd</sup> record of Northern Waterthrush, and 4<sup>th</sup> record of Blackburnian Warbler. Philadelphia Vireo was found in the Panhandle for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. Important also were 3 records of Hammond's Flycatcher, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> for the state, and likely a regular migrant, and 5 of Cassin's Vireo, previously known only by 2 specimens. Finally, from the Panhandle, 4 reports of Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher may be changing the status of this species there; there are still fewer than 10 such records.

Just as significant were 2 surprising easterly records, Clark's Grebe in Lancaster Co and a Plumbeous Vireo in Stanton Co. Rarities independent of location were a potential 1<sup>st</sup> state record Eurasian Collared-Dove at Shelton; the NOURC will decide if this was (is!) a wild bird. It was a good fall for jaegers, 4 reported, 2 identified to species, a 2<sup>nd</sup> state record Parasitic and a 4<sup>th</sup> state record Pomarine. A Roseate Spoonbill flew into NE airspace for the state's 3<sup>rd</sup> record.

The OPPD Wetlands mitigation project in e Otoe Co yielded interesting waterbirds which are lacking in e NE due to virtually lacking cattail marsh habitat. Species seen there were Least Bittern, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, King Rail, and Common Moorhen.

Other species appeared in surprising numbers. There were single-locality, single-day counts of 3 Red-necked Grebes, 20,000+ Western Grebes, 10 Tundra Swans, 191 Hooded Mergansers, 54 Northern Harriers, 35,000 and 30,000 Franklin's Gulls, up to 30 Sabine's Gulls (for the season), 4000 Cliff Swallows, and 39 Wilson's Warblers.

Late dates were provided by Common Tern, Indigo Bunting, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, for no discernible pattern! Finally, a new altitude record was set by a Brewer's Sparrow at Panorama Point in Kimball Co, the state's highest point. Eat your heart out, Colorado!

CORRECTION

In the 1996 Fall Report we listed a Black Tern at Sutherland Res 28 Oct; the date should have been 26-29 Sep.

ABBREVIATIONS

\* = documentation provided; **ad(s)**: adult(s); **ADF**: Arbor Day Farm; **BOL**: Branched Oak L; **Cem**: cemetery; **CLNWR**: Crescent L NWR; **Co(s)**: County (ies); **FF**: Fontenelle Forest; **FL**: Funk Lagoon; **HCR**: Harlan Co Res; **imm(s)**: immature(s); **juv(s)**: juvenile(s); **L**: Lake; **LM**: L McConaughy; **n,s,e,w**, etc: cardinal points; **NC**: Nature Center; **NE**: Nebraska; **NM**: National Monument; **NNF**: Nebraska National Forest; **NOURC**: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; **NPNWR**: North Platte NWR; **NWR**: National Wildlife Refuge; **OPPD**: Omaha Public



Power Division; **Res:** Reservoir; **RWB:** Rainwater Basin; **SL:** Sewage Lagoon(s); **SP:** State Park; **sp:** species; **SRA:** State Recreation Area; **WHNC:** Wildcat Hills NC; **WMA:** (State) Wildlife Management Area; **WPA:** (Federal) Waterfowl Production Area.

#### GAZETTEER

**Arbor Day Farm:** Nebraska City; **Branched Oak L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; **Buffalo Creek:** WMA, Banner-Scotts Bluff Cos; **Calamus Res:** SRA, Garfield-Loup Cos; **Carter Canyon:** Scotts Bluff Co; **Chadron SP:** Dawes Co; **Clear Creek Marshes:** WMA, Keith-Garden Cos; **Crescent L NWR:** Garden Co; **Cunningham L:** Omaha, Douglas Co; **Dead Timber:** SRA, Dodge Co; **DeSoto NWR:** Washington Co; **Enders Res:** SRA, Chase Co; **Facus Springs:** WMA, Morrill Co; **Fontenelle Forest:** Bellevue, Sarpy Co; **Funk Lagoon:** WPA, Phelps Co; **Gavin's Point Dam:** forms Lewis and Clark L, Knox-Cedar Cos; **Grandpa's Steakhouse L:** behind Grandpa's Steakhouse, Kearney, Buffalo Co; **Hansen Lagoon:** WPA, Clay Co; **Harlan Co Res:** SRA, Harlan Co; **Harvard Lagoon:** (formerly Inland Lagoon) WPA, Clay Co; **Holmes L:** Lincoln, Lancaster Co; **Jack Sinn Marsh:** WMA, Lancaster-Saunders Cos; **Johnson Lagoon:** WPA, Phelps Co; **Johnson Res:** SRA, Dawson-Gosper Cos; **Keystone L:** adjoins L Ogallala, Keith Co; **Kingsley Dam:** forms L McConaughy; **L Alice:** part of NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co; **L Babcock:** Platte Co; **L McConaughy:** Keith Co; **L North:** Platte Co; **L Minatare:** SRA, Scotts Bluff Co; **L Ogallala:** below Kingsley Dam, Keith Co; **Louisville Lakes:** SRA, Cass Co; **Monroe Canyon:** Sioux Co; **Neale Woods:** Douglas Co; **North Platte NWR:** Scotts Bluff Co; **Offutt (Air Force) Base L:** Sarpy Co; **Olive Creek L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; **Oliver Res:** SRA, Kimball Co; **OPPD Wetlands:** Otoe Co; **Pawnee L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; (Lillian Annette) **Pintail Marsh:** WMA, Hamilton Co; **Rainwater Basin:** region of natural wetlands in sc NE; **Rowe Sanctuary:** Kearney Co; **Sandhills:** native grassland region in nc NE; **Schramm SP:** Sarpy Co; **Scotts Bluff NM:** Scotts Bluff Co; **Sininger Lagoon:** WPA, York Co; **Sowbelly Canyon:** Sioux Co; **Spikerush Basin:** WMA, York Co; **Stagecoach L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; **Summit Res:** SRA, Burt Co; **Sutherland Res:** SRA, WMA, Lincoln Co; **Swan Creek Res:** Saline Co; **Wehrspann L:** Omaha, Sarpy Co; **Wildcat Hills NC:** Wildcat Hills SRA, Scotts Bluff Co; **Willow Creek L:** SRA, Pierce Co; **Winter's Creek L:** part of NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co; **Wolf L:** Dodge-Saunders Cos; **Wood Duck:** WMA, Stanton Co; **Yankee Hill L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; **Zorinsky L:** Omaha, Douglas Co.

#### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

**Red-throated Loon:** The only report was of a single at Louisville Lakes SRA 31 Oct (Tom Aversi, Seattle).

**Pacific Loon:** At least 3 different birds were found at NPNWR 26 Oct-23 Nov (\*SJD,JS). Elsewhere, singles were at Holmes L 28 Oct (\*LE) and Skyview L, Norfolk, 1-2 Nov (MB, DH,NB).

**Common Loon:** The 3 present during the summer at L Ogallala were found on and off again during Aug (SJD,JGJ,JS). Another early bird, in alternate plumage, was found at NPNWR 2 Aug (SJD,JS,WRS,JGJ). The main migration occurred later in fall; high counts were 9 at NPNWR on 1 Nov (SJD) and 7 at BOL 9 Nov (JGJ).

**Pied-billed Grebe:** High count was 143 at CLNWR 12 Aug (MF). Late birds included a single 0.5 mi w of Wood Duck on 30 Nov (DH) and 2 at Grandpa's Steakhouse L 29 Nov (LR,RH).

**Horned Grebe:** Earliest was a single at BOL 20 Sep (JS). An excellent high count was 145 at NPNWR 8 Nov (SJD,JS). Last were 2 at LM 24 Nov (SJD).

**Red-necked Grebe:** The 3 reports made it an excellent fall for this species, the second in a row. Lone birds were reported from Willow

L, Brown Co, 27 Sep (\*LR,RH), from Summit Res 9 Nov (\*JGJ), and from LM 16-24 Nov (\*SJD,JS).

**Eared Grebe:** High counts from the w include 326 at NPNWR 8 Aug (LK), 70 at CLNWR 12 Aug (MF), and 46 at Oliver Res 1 Nov (SJD). High counts from the e were no larger than 10. Last was a single at NPNWR on 29 Nov (SJD).

**Western Grebe:** In contrast to last fall when there were numerous easterly reports, only 8 birds were tallied in the e half this fall. Earliest was a single at FL 17 Aug (LR,RH). LM entertained spectacular numbers again this fall; 20,000+ was a count made by birders in a boat on 4-5 Oct (SJD,JS,WRS,JGJ), and 1,600 were still present on 24 Nov (SJD,JS). Highest count away from LM was 764 at NPNWR 26 Oct (SJD).

**Clark's Grebe:** Twelve were reported, 11 from either LM or NPNWR. The noteworthy exception was a single at Pawnee L on 11-19 Oct (JW,JGJ,JS,MB). Latest was a single at LM on 24 Nov (SD,JS). In addition, a hybrid Western X Clark's was reported from NPNWR on 15 Aug (SJD).

**American White Pelican:** Peak migration occurred during the latter half of Sep, when observers reported several counts in the hundreds. Highest were 1000 flying over Buffalo Co on 19 Sep (LR,RH) and 500 flying over Bellevue on 29 Sep (BP,LP). Late migrants were the 5 at BOL on 30 Nov (JS,BP,LP).

**Double-crested Cormorant:** High counts were 960 at BOL on 10 Oct (LE) and 350 at Nebraska City on 18 Oct (LF,CF). Individuals were noted at HCR and Sutherland Res at the end of the period; some will likely remain into Dec.

**American Bittern:** Most reports were from CLNWR, where 7 were found on 12 Aug (MF). Observations away from CLNWR were limited to 2 at FL 13 Sep-5 Oct (LR,RH) and 2 at Spikerush Basin 21 Sep (JGJ).

**Least Bittern:** The marshy wetlands mitigation area south of Nebraska City, near the OPPD Plant, was birded intensely during August, primarily due to the discovery of a Roseate Spoonbill nearby in adjacent Iowa (see below). While most missed the spoonbill in NE, observers made several exciting finds, beginning with Least Bittern. As many as 8 were found at the OPPD Wetlands 5-16 Aug (JS,SJD,WRS,BP,LP,MB). Elsewhere, a single was found at FL on 3 Aug (JS).

**Great Blue Heron:** High counts were 80 at FL on 2 Aug (LR,RH) and 62 at HCR on 14 Aug (SJD). Individuals commonly linger through the fall period into winter.

**Great Egret:** Up to 49 were present at HCR during Aug (SJD,JGJ). Other concentrations included 34 at Hansen Lagoon on 10 Aug (JGJ,JS) and 32 at Nebraska City on 13 Sep (LF,CF). A single remained at BOL until 8 Nov (BFH,JS,MB), the latest ever recorded in the state. Previous latest was 26 Oct.

**Snowy Egret:** Furthest n and w was a single at CLNWR on 25 Aug (JS). High counts were 14 at HCR 29 Aug (JGJ) and 10 at the Rowe Sanctuary 1 Sep (LR,RH). Latest were 4 at BOL 15 Oct (JS), 2nd latest ever.

**Little Blue Heron:** Thirteen were reported, all from the se and sc. High count was 8 at Nebraska City 22 Aug (LF,CF). Furthest w were singles at FL 2-10 Aug (LR,RH) and HCR 4-14 Aug (SJD).

**Cattle Egret:** Reports were few, best counts 35 at Nebraska City on 25 Aug (LF,CF) and 31 e of Lincoln 13 Oct (JS), the latter also the latest.

**Green Heron:** Good high counts for this secretive species included 6 at the OPPD Wetlands on 14 Aug (JS) and 5 at HCR on 29 Aug (JGJ), the latter a good westerly count.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron:** High counts were from 2 locales in Phelps Co, both with 9 birds: FL on 31 Aug (LR,RH) and Johnson

Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ). Very late, in fact the 3rd latest ever, was a single at Neale Woods on 13 Nov (JB fide LP,BP).

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron:** One would have been good, but 3 imms at the OPPD Wetlands on 14 Aug (SD,JS) was very good. In the RWB, where the species is nearly regular in late summer/early fall, a single was at Hansen Lagoon 10 Aug (JGJ,JS).

**White-faced Ibis:** High count was 24 at CLNWR on 2 Aug (MF). Away from CLNWR there were only 4 reports of single imms cautiously identified only as *Plegadis* sp. Most easterly was a single at Hansen Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ).

**Turkey Vulture:** High counts for this DNA-designated stork (Turkey Stork?) were 66 at Valentine 30 Aug (JGJ) and 30 at Gering 15 Sep (AK).

**Roseate Spoonbill:** Certainly one of the top finds of the season, and possibly the year, was an imm which roosted in Iowa but was observed flying into NE airspace on two occasions, 5 and 14 Aug (\*SJD,\*WRS). It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> NE record.

**Tundra Swan:** This species may have been found in unprecedented numbers this fall. Five reports totalling 10 birds were received, including westerly reports of singles at LM 1 Nov (SJD) and NPNWR 22 Nov (SJD). In the e, a single was 7 mi s of Auburn 4 Nov (LF,CF), 2 were at L Babcock 15-22 Nov (JGJ,MB), and 5 likely different birds were also at L Babcock 27 Nov (JS).

**Trumpeter Swan:** Numerous pairs and small groups were noted in the Sandhills during Aug. Otherwise, only the LM area hosted birds, up to 7 in Nov (SJD,JS).

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Reports were disappointing. High count was only 100, at Pawnee L on 14 Oct (LE). Westerly reports include a single at NPNWR on 22 Nov (SD), another loner at the Gering SL on 23 Nov (SJD), and 8 at NPNWR 29 Nov (SJD).

**Snow Goose:** A single at FL 14 Aug (SJD) may have summered. Reported high count was 1075 at NPNWR 9 Nov (SJD). DeSoto NWR likely hosted larger numbers, but no estimates were received.

**Ross's Goose:** (yes, this is the new spelling! Yuk!) Excellent fall counts were 88 at NPNWR on 9 Nov (SJD), 13 at Keystone L 2 Nov (SJD), and 6 at L North 22 Nov (JS).

**Canada Goose:** High count was 17,785 at NPNWR 25 Nov (LK).

**Wood Duck:** High count was 117 at NPNWR 30 Oct (LK). Quite late were 3 there on 25 Nov (LK).

**Green-winged Teal:** High counts were 130 at NPNWR 17 Sep (LK) and 200 at Sutherland Res on 24 Nov (SJD). A few linger into Dec and beyond.

**American Black Duck:** No reports were received.

**Mallard:** High counts were 73,792 at NPNWR on 25 Nov (LK) and 50,000 at Sutherland Res on 24 Nov (SD,JS).

**Northern Pintail:** High counts include 80 at CLNWR 11 Sep (MF) and 200 at FL 14 Aug (LR,RH), the latter rather early for such a southerly locale.

**Blue-winged Teal:** High counts included 1700 at Sinninger Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ) and 800 at NPNWR 1 Sep (SJD). Quite late were 3 at Cunningham L 5 Nov (JGJ).

**Cinnamon Teal:** A single was reported from CLNWR on 11 Sep (MF).

**Northern Shoveler:** An excellent high count was 1500 at the Gering SL 26 Oct (SJD); no other count came close. Latest was a single at the Scottsbluff SL on 29 Nov (SJD).

**Gadwall:** High counts were 500 at BOL 21 Oct (BP,LP) and 310 at NPNWR on 9 Nov (SJD).

**American Wigeon:** Excellent high counts included 820 at NPNWR on 15 Oct (LK) and 292 at CLNWR 11 Sep (MF). Last were 2 at Wolf L 28 Nov (TH).

**Canvasback:** High counts were unimpressive, best only 67 at NPNWR on

9 Nov (LK). A single at Johnson Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ) was rather far south for so early in fall.

**Redhead:** The 2 at FL 2 Aug (LR,RH) may have been early fall migrants or may have summered there. High counts were 890 at NPNWR 12 Nov (LK) and 689 at CLNWR 11 Sep (MF). Last were 15 at Gavin's Point Dam 29 Nov (DH).

**Ring-necked Duck:** High count was 149 at NPNWR 15 Oct (LK). Latest was a single at Cunningham L 29 Nov (JGJ).

**Greater Scaup:** This species is rarer in fall than in spring. It was, however, well reported this fall, mostly from the w. Earliest was 1 at the Gering SL 26 Oct (SJD). Other reports from the w included up to 9 at NPNWR 1-9 Nov (SJD), 1-2 at L Ogallala 1-9 Nov (SJD), 2 at the Scottsbluff SL 9 Nov (SJD), 1 at Oliver Res on 8 Nov (SJD), 1 at NPNWR 22-23 Nov (SJD), and 10 were likely settling in for the winter in the North Platte River below Keystone Dam (SJD). The only reports from the east were 3 at Wehrspann L on 14 Nov (JGJ) and 2 at Swan Creek Res #2 15 Nov (JGJ).

**Lesser Scaup:** Early, and possibly molt migrants, were 2 at the North Platte SL 4 Aug (SJD). High count was 700 at NPNWR 9 Nov (SJD).

**Oldsquaw:** Five singles were reported, all imm/female types. Reports were from L Babcock 9 Nov (JGJ), Keystone L 16 Nov (SJD), LM 24 Nov (SJD,JS), Sutherland Res 24 Nov (JS,SJD), and NPNWR 22-29 Nov (SJD,JS).

**Black Scoter:** The only report was a group of 3, one of which was a male, at Pawnee L on 13 Nov (JS).

**Surf Scoter:** The only report was of 3 at NPNWR 27 Oct (SJD).

**White-winged Scoter:** Bucking the trend of previous Falls, this scoter was the species most often found this year. In all, 8 reports totaling 11 birds were received. Earliest was a single at Zorinsky L 25 Oct (JGJ) followed by a male at Pawnee L 28 Oct (JS). High count was a group of 3 female/imms at BOL on 3 Nov (JGJ). All other observations were of singles and include reports from BOL on 10 Nov (JS), L Ogallala 15-16 Nov (SJD), North Platte River below Keystone Dam 15-16 Nov (SJD), Zorinsky L 22 Nov (JGJ), LM 24 Nov (SJD), L Ogallala 24 Nov (SJD), and Knox Co 26-30 Nov (MB,EB).

**Common Goldeneye:** Quite early were 28 at CLWNR on 11 Sep (MF); typically arrival is usually noted during the latter portion of Oct, as was the case this year. High count was 1300 at Sutherland Res on 24 Nov (SJD,JS).

**Bufflehead:** Earliest was a single at the Scottsbluff SL 21 Sep (SJD,DCE). High counts were 231 at NPNWR on 9 Nov (SJD) and 112 at NPNWR on 15 Oct (LK).

**Hooded Merganser:** Quite early and far west was a male at NPNWR 2 Aug (WRS,JGJ,JS,SJD), as well as a female there on 15 Aug (SJD). A fabulous high count of 191 was recorded at NPNWR 9 Nov (SJD,JS).

**Common Merganser:** The male which was forced to summer 0.5 mi w of Wood Duck due to injury was observed until 4 Nov (DH). Likely molt migrants were the 88 at NPNWR 2 Aug (JS,SJD,WRS,JGJ). Numbers gradually rose throughout the period there, culminating with 12,107 on 25 Nov (LK), the season's high count.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** This merganser is rarer and more difficult to identify in Fall than in Spring. It often occurs in drab female/imm plumage types in late Oct and early Nov before the main movement of Common Mergansers. Earliest were 4 at BOL 1 Nov (JS). Outstanding high counts included 47 at Summit Res 9 Nov (JGJ) and 28 at NPNWR the same day (SJD,JS), the latter a good westerly count. Last were 6 at NPNWR 19 Nov (SJD).

**Ruddy Duck:** High count was 158 at NPNWR 15 Oct (LK). Latest were 19 at Keystone L on 24 Nov (SJD).

**Osprey:** This was one of several raptors which were well reported

this Fall. In all, 38 birds were found across the state. High single locale counts were 6 at BOL 5 Sep (LE) and 3 at LM 4 Oct (SJD,WRS,JS,JGJ).

**Mississippi Kite:** It is exciting that breeding was once again observed at Ogallala, and yet puzzling why birds and breeding activity have not been noted elsewhere in the state, especially to the south (Republican Drainage?). Are kites being overlooked elsewhere? Would birders (including myself) drive through Ogallala without seeing the kites soaring over the city if they did not know they were there? This year a nest with two fully-grown young and 5 adults were observed on 3 Aug (SJD). Ads feeding single juvs were observed 15 Aug (SJD) and 25 Aug (JS).

**Bald Eagle:** Summer and early Fall reports are becoming routine as the species continues to do well. At least 3 birds were present at BOL 29 Aug-21 Sep (JGJ,JS). Season's high count, as well as an excellent count for the locale, was 21 at L Babcock on 27 Nov (JS).

**Northern Harrier:** An excellent high count was of 54 migrating along the n shore of LM on 12 Oct (SJD).

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Reports were received from 11 counties, totaling 18 birds. High single locale count was 4 at Camp Wakonda, Bellevue, 13 Oct (BP,LP).

**Cooper's Hawk:** Reports were received from 17 counties, totaling 20 birds, although no more than 2 were found at a single locale on a single day.

**Northern Goshawk:** An imm was observed at Wildcat Hills NC 9 Nov (SJD,JS). Identification details were provided.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** Interesting was a single heard in extreme ne Otoe Co 17 Aug (MB); no breeding locations are known other than at Fontenelle Forest, some 45 miles to the north.

**Broad-winged Hawk:** Six were observed in the period 4-27 Sep. Rather far w was an imm (details provided) at Halsey 27 Sep (JS,BH). Other reports were of singles at FF 4 Sep (BP,LP), Cass Co 15 Sep (GW), and Camp Wakonda 29 Sep (LP,BP), and 2 along Bellevue Boulevard, Bellevue, 19 Sep (BP,LP).

**Swainson's Hawk:** No large groups were observed. Later birds were 3 in Lancaster Co 10 (JS), 1 in Kearney Co 11 Oct (LR,RH), and 2 at Camp Wakonda 13 Oct (LP,BP).

**Red-tailed Hawk:** High counts include 38 at FF 21 Oct (BP,LP) and 14 in Otoe Co 4 Nov (LF,CF).

**Ferruginous Hawk:** At least 29 were observed in the Panhandle during the period SJD,DH,MB,JS,MF). Furthest e were a single in Brown Co on 27 Sep (LR,RH) and an injured imm picked up in a pasture 6 mi w of Osceola; the latter bird was being rehabilitated at the Raptor Recovery Center near Elmwood operated by Betsy Hancock (*Omaha World Herald*, 17 Sep 1997; JS).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** Earliest were singles at Keystone L 4 Oct (SJD) and in Dixon Co 10 Oct (JJ). High count was 5 in Banner Co both 1 and 22 Nov (SJD).

**Golden Eagle:** Birds found in the eastern half of the state were singles 1 mi e of BOL 17 Oct (JS) and at FF 21 Oct (BP,LP).

**American Kestrel:** Migration may have peaked on 21 Sep when 74 were found in Scotts Bluff Co (SJD,DCE) and half the state away 30 in Franklin Co (LR,RH).

**Merlin:** It was a magical Fall for this species, as some 28 birds were recorded statewide 3 Aug-28 Nov. Identification of subspecies is possible and such information is appreciated. Three birds were identified as *richardsoni*: singles at FL on 14 Aug (SJD), Whitney L 23 Aug (SJD,JS), and Oliver Res 1 Sep (SJD). Birds identified as "dark" (either *columbarius* or less likely *suckleyi*) included singles at FL on 13 Sep (LR,RH) and at Keystone L 12 Oct (SJD). Finally, a single at BOL 22 Sep (JGJ) was identified as

*columbarius*.

**Peregrine Falcon:** Eight singles were observed in 7 counties. Earliest was one at Wood Duck on 4 Sep (DH) and last was one at LM 12 Oct (SJD).

**Prairie Falcon:** Ten were found from Halsey westward. Additional easterly reports were of singles in Platte Co on 27 Nov (JS) and another at Neale Woods 13 Oct (JB fide BP,LP).

**Gray Partridge:** The only report was of one 5 mi e of Creighton 29 Jul (MB); the observer noted no others for the second half of 1997.

**Ring-necked Pheasant:** Reports were routine.

**Greater Prairie-Chicken:** Unexpected were 5-6 at Pintail Marsh 21 Oct (JGJ,WRS). These may have moved southward from their breeding location, possibly a family group.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse:** Reports were routine.

**Wild Turkey:** Reports were routine.

**Northern Bobwhite:** None were reported from the Panhandle, suggestive of minor range retraction. Otherwise, reports were routine.

**King Rail:** A single was heard at the OPPD Wetlands 5 Aug (SJD,WRS) and 16 Aug (JS); it was actually seen on 14 Aug (SJD).

**Virginia Rail:** This species is found locally late in Fall into Winter. Up to 6 were at Clear Creek Marshes 15 Nov (SJD), a suspected wintering location, a single was below Kingsley Dam 16 Nov (SJD), 2 were at Facus Springs 23 Nov (SJD), and a single was at Oliver Res 29 Nov (SJD).

**Sora:** High counts were 6 at both FL 13 Sep (LR,RH) and Spikerush Basin 22 Sep (JGJ). Latest were 2 at FL 5 Oct (LR,RH).

**Common Moorhen:** An ad was found at the OPPD Wetland on 5 Aug (JS). An ad and a juv were observed on and off 10 Aug-13 Sep (JS,JGJ,SJD,MB).

**American Coot:** High counts were 2734 at CLNWR 11 Sep (MF), 2984 at NPNWR 15 Oct (LK), and 2000 at BOL 21 Oct (BP,LP). Last were 15 at HCR 30 Nov (LR,RH).

**Sandhill Crane:** Intriguing was a single at FL on 31 Aug (LR,RH). All other reports were during Oct and include high counts of 3000 s of Gering 13 Oct (AK) and 270 in Buffalo Co the same day (LR,RH).

**Black-bellied Plover:** The only reports were from L North were 1-3 were observed 1 Sep-22 Sep (JGJ), and L Babcock, where one was reported 23 Oct (MB). Very late was a juv at L North 9 Nov (JGJ), second latest ever.

**American Golden-Plover:** Rare in the w, 2 juvs were near Bayard 13 Sep (SJD) and a single was at the Milburn Diversion Dam, Blaine Co, 26 Sep (LR,RH). High count and latest were 29 at the Tekamah SL 28 Sep (JGJ).

**Semipalmated Plover:** No more than 3 were found at a single locale. Latest were 2 on 4 Oct at both HCR (LF,CF) and L Ogallala (SJD).

**Piping Plover:** High count and latest were 4 at L North on 17 Aug (JGJ,GJ).

**Killdeer:** High count was 110 in Scotts Bluff Co on 17 Sep (NK).

**American Avocet:** High counts were 38 at the North Platte SL 28 Sep (JS) and 27 at HCR 29 Aug (JGJ). Tying the latest record ever were 2 at Oliver Res on 1 Nov (SJD), and setting a new record was a single at Facus Springs 2 Nov (SJD).

**Greater Yellowlegs:** High counts were 30 at Pawnee L on 25 Oct (JGJ) and 20+ 2 mi w of Beemer on 7 Sep (DH). Latest were 2 at NPNWR on 9 Nov (AK,SJD,JS).

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** High counts were 124 at Hansen Lagoon 10 Aug (JGJ), 117 at Sinninger Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ), and 115 s of Bayard on 13 Sep (SJD). Latest were 2 birds 7 mi s of Auburn (LF,CF) and 1 at LM 23 Nov (SJD); details were provided for latter, the latest ever.

**Solitary Sandpiper:** High count was 3 at Calamus Res on 7 Sep

(LR,RH). Latest was a single at HCR 4 Oct (LF,CF).

**Willet:** In the w, 3 were at CLNWR 16 Aug (BFH) and a single was at NPNWR 21 Sep (SJD,DCE). Rare in the e in Fall, 2 were at FL on 31 Aug (DH).

**Spotted Sandpiper:** Reports were routine.

**Upland Sandpiper:** High counts were 12 at L Ogallala 3 Aug (SJD,WRS,JS,JGJ) and 4 in sw Dixon Co 16 Aug (JJ). Latest was a single in sw Dixon Co on 6 Sep (JJ).

**Long-billed Curlew:** High counts included 52 at NPNWR 2 Aug (SJD,JS,WRS,JGJ) and 37 at CLNWR 16 Aug (BFH). Rare in the e, a single was heard at FL on 13 Sep (LR,RH).

**Marbled Godwit:** The only reports from the w included singles at Swan L, Arthur Co, on 30 Aug (JGJ) and at NPNWR 6 Sep (SJD). Rare in the e in Fall, singles were at FL on 31 Aug (DH) and Sinninger Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ).

**Ruddy Turnstone:** No reports were received.

**Sanderling:** High counts included 45 at NPNWR 6 Sep (LK) and 11 at LM 4 Oct (SJD,JS,WRS,JGJ). Only 12 other birds were reported, including a juv/first-winter at L North on 9 Nov (JGJ), second latest ever.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper:** High counts were 60 2 mi w of Beemer 7 Sep (DH), 52 at Sinninger Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ), and 36 in Cuming Co 28 Sep (MB). Much rarer in the w, 3 were at the Scottsbluff SL on 21 Sep (SJD,DCE). Latest was a single at BOL on 30 Sep (LE).

**Western Sandpiper:** Even though this species is most common in Fall, only 7 reports totaling 15 birds were received. High count was 9 at BOL 7 Sep (LE), and latest was a single at the Scottsbluff SL 5 Oct (SJD).

**Least Sandpiper:** High counts included 137 at Sinninger Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ) and 35 at FL 17 Aug (LR,RH). Latest was a single at Cunningham L on 4 Nov (JGJ).

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** Two reports were received without details, 2 birds at FL on 2 Aug and a single at Calamus Res on 7 Sep. There are no documented Fall records for this species in NE; its Fall migration pathway is off the Atlantic Coast.

**Baird's Sandpiper:** High counts were 50 2 mi w of Beemer 7 Sep (DH) and 45 at CLNWR 13 Oct (MF). Very late, but not unprecedented, was a single at L North 9 Nov (JGJ).

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** High counts were 220 at Hansen Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ), 205 at Hansen Lagoon 10 Aug (JGJ), and 100 at HCR 14 Aug (SJD). Latest were 4 at L North on 9 Nov (JGJ).

**Dunlin:** Very rare in the w, a single was at Sutherland Res 16 Nov (SJD), third latest ever even for this late migrant.

**Stilt Sandpiper:** High counts were 144 at Sinninger Lagoon 11 Sep (JGJ,GJ), 112 at Sinninger Lagoon 10 Aug (JGJ), and 78 at Hansen Lagoon 10 Aug (JGJ). Latest were 3 birds 2 mi w of Beemer 18 Oct (DH) and 2 in Loup Co the same day (MB).

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** Overall 57 birds were reported, the majority in a single flock of 31 at the Tekamah SL 6 Sep (JGJ). Latest was a single injured bird at Jack Sinn Marsh 10 Sep (JH,EH).

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** All reports were of juvs (details provided on all) and follow: a single was at Cunningham L 19 Aug (JGJ), up to 3 were at Hansen Lagoon 25-29 Aug (JS,JGJ), 2 and 4 were at Sinninger Lagoon on the respective dates of 29 Aug and 11 Sep (JGJ,GJ), and 2 were at HCR 29 Aug (JGJ). If approved by the Grant County Records Committee, 2 in e Grant Co on 30 Aug (JGJ) may become the county's first record for the species.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** High counts included 107 at Bean Soup L, Arthur Co, 30 Aug (JGJ) and 93 at Keystone L 12 Oct (SJD). Latest was a single juv at Pawnee L 25 Oct (JGJ).

**Common Snipe:** High counts were 13 at Hansen Lagoon 29 Aug (JGJ) and

10 at Sinninger Lagoon 11 Sep (JGJ,GJ). Latest reported away from a known winter area was a single at FF 18 Nov (JH,EH).

**Wilson's Phalarope:** High counts were 2000 at CLNWR 24 Aug (JS) and 500 near Antioch the same day (JS).

**Red-necked Phalarope:** None were reported e of North Platte. High counts were 14 at the Scottsbluff SL 6 Sep (JS,SJD), 8 at Antioch 24 Aug (JS), and 8 at NPNWR 6 Sep (SJD). Latest were 4 at the Scottsbluff SL 21 Sep (SJD).

**Jaeger sp.:** Poor light and a brief look made identification of a jaeger at Pawnee L on 22 Sep (JS) impossible. Another jaeger briefly seen at LM on 12 Oct (SJD) was thought likely to be a Pomarine Jaeger, but was not conclusively identified.

**Pomarine Jaeger:** A juv barred or intermediate morph was observed at Pawnee L 15-19 Nov (\*JGJ,\*BP,\*LP,\*JS). If accepted by NOURC, this will be NE's 5th record.

**Parasitic Jaeger:** For the second consecutive year, a certain (certifiable?) group of birders took "pelagic" boat trips on LM 4-5 Oct (JS,SJD,WRS,JGJ) and a juv of this species identified on 5 Oct was the reward. Identification was concluded, albeit with some logistical difficulty since the jaeger was able to move much faster than the boat, which topped out at 25-30 mph. If accepted by NOURC, this will be only the second record for NE.

**Franklin's Gull:** Excellent high counts were 35,000 at Sutherland Res 29 Aug (JGJ) and 30,000 at HCR 11 Sep (JGJ,GJ). Latest were singles at both Pawnee L (LR,RH) and Olive Creek L (JGJ), both on 9 Nov. In addition, a pale- or frosty-mantled Franklin's was observed at LM on 14 Sep (SJD).

**Bonaparte's Gull:** Earliest was a single at BOL 30 Sep (JS) followed by a lone imm at LM on 4 Oct (WRS,JS,JGJ,SJD). Excellent high counts were 300 at Sutherland Res on 10 Nov (JS) and 250 at HCR on 3 Nov (JGJ).

**Little Gull:** A juv at NPNWR on 6 Sep (\*SJD,\*WRS,JS) and a probable second-winter at Summit Res 19 Oct (\*JGJ) will likely furnish the state's 4th and 5th records.

**Ring-billed Gull:** High counts were 3000 at NPNWR 9 Nov (SJD,JS) and 1000+ at HCR 4 Sep (LE).

**California Gull:** Reports from the e third where the species is still casual included a second-winter bird at BOL on 9 Nov (JGJ) and a single at Willow Creek L on 22 Nov (JS). An adult at HCR on 4 Aug was also rather far e. At Sutherland Res, an adult was found 14 Aug (SJD) and 1-2 ads were there 2-16 Nov (JGJ,SJD). High count at LM was 105 on 4 Oct (SJD,WRS,JS,JGJ).

**Herring Gull:** Early were 2 at HCR on 4 Sep (LF,CF) and the 14 at LM on 4 Oct (SJD,JS,WRS, JGJ) was a high count for early fall.

**Thayer's Gull:** A single adult was well studied at Keystone L on 4 Oct (\*SJD,\*JS,\*WRS,JGJ). Other reports include a first-winter at L Ogallala on 10 Nov (JS), another first-winter at Yankee Hill L on 16 Nov (JGJ), and a third-winter was at NPNWR on 22-29 Nov (SJD,JS).

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** None had been reported in 1997 until 29-30 Nov when a second-winter bird was found at BOL (\*JGJ,\*JS,\*BP,\*LP).

**Great Black-backed Gull:** About the 11<sup>th</sup> for NE and the first recorded at Gavin's Point Dam, in Cedar Co, was a first-winter bird there 2 Nov (\*MB).

**Sabine's Gull:** Two Falls ago, it was exciting when a single bird was reported. Last Fall it was amazing when 7 birds were reported. Duplicate sightings of single birds makes pinpointing the exact number difficult, but this year no fewer than 24 and possibly over 30 different birds were found. No doubt subsequent sightings will lack a certain amount of luster. All sightings this year were in



the period 6 Sep-15 Oct. At NPNWR, 2 juvs were found 6 Sep (\*SJD,WRS,JS) and 2 ads and 7 juvs were there 21 Sep (\*SJD,DCE). At LM, single juvs were observed on 8 Sep (JS,WRS) and 5 Oct (SJD,WRS,JS,JGJ), and 5 juvs were there 13-14 Sep (\*SJD). At Keystone L, 2 juvs were noted 12 Oct (\*SJD). At BOL, 2 were present 21-22 Sep (JS,JGJ) 6 were there 2 Oct (JGJ,WRS), and 1-3 until 15 Oct (JS,BP,LP). Finally, single juvs were at Oliver Res on 13 Sep (\*SJD) and Whitney L on 14 Sep (DH,MB).

**Caspian Tern:** High count was a mere 2 at LM 12-14 Sep (SJD). Latest was a single at BOL on 20 Sep (JS).

**Common Tern:** A single was at NPNWR 6 Sep (JS) and as many as 7 were at NPNWR 13-21 Sep (SJD,DCE,JGJ). An imm was at Gavin's Point Dam, in Cedar Co, 13 Oct (MB). Details were provided for two unprecedented late reports, singles at Conestoga L on 25 Oct (JS) and at NPNWR on 1 Nov (SJD).

**Forster's Tern:** High count was 63 at LM on 3 Aug (SJD) and latest were 2 at BOL 15 Oct (JS).

**Least Tern:** High count was 6 at LM on 3 Aug (SJD) and latest were 2 at Offutt Base L on 2 Sep (BP,LP).

**Black Tern:** High count was 275 at FL on 14 Aug (SJD).

**Rock Dove:** Reports were routine.

**Mourning Dove:** Best count was 450 in Buffalo Co 7 Sep (LR,RH).

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** A single appeared at a feeder in Shelton 29 Nov, but was not identified as this species until about 6 Dec (\*RH,LR). It was still present through at least 2 Jan (WRS). Acceptance by the NOURC and addition to the State List depends upon whether the bird is considered to be wild and a pioneering representative of the rapidly expanding population radiating from Florida, or merely a released or escaped cage-bird.

**Black-billed Cuckoo:** Last was one at Stagecoach L 9 Sep (LE).

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** Last was one at FF 30 Sep (BP,LP).

**Barn Owl:** Five were roosting in a willow thicket at CLNWR 8 Sep (JS,WRS). Last of the summering birds at Clear Creek Marshes was noted 5 Oct (SJD), a rather late date.

**Eastern Screech-Owl:** A good count was 9 at NPNWR 13 Sep (DH).

**Great Horned Owl:** Reports were routine.

**Burrowing Owl:** "Twenty or more" were noted in Cherry Co 16 Sep (RG), an excellent count. An injured imm at the University of Nebraska-Kearney campus on the rather late date 13 Oct was turned over to the Raptor Recovery Center (fide RH).

**Barred Owl:** Scattered sightings from the w edge of the range were at Wilderness Park, Lincoln (LE), 3 in Stanton Co on the Elkhorn River at highway 24 on 16 Oct (DH), and, possibly the furthest nw report in recent years, in Brown Co 17 Sep (RG).

**Long-eared Owl:** At a date suggestive of breeding nearby, 3 were flushed from a willow thicket (with Barn Owls!) at CLNWR 25 Aug (JS) and again 6 Sep (JS,WRS). No nests were in this thicket, however.

**Short-eared Owl:** 1-3 were noted at CLNWR 8-20 Oct (MF). This is a summering location. The only other report was of one in Loup Co 17 Oct (MB).

**Common Nighthawk:** Best counts of migrants were 150 in Dixon Co 6 Sep (JJ) and 100 in Dawes Co 24 Aug (AK). Last were 24 at Bellevue 6 Oct (BP,LP), a rather late date.

**Common Poorwill:** Last of the reports, all from the Panhandle, were from Sioux Co 13-14 Sep (DH,MB).

**Chuck-will's-widow:** None were reported. These birds are rarely reported after Jun; there are only 3 such reports, in Jul-Aug.

**Whip-poor-will:** None were reported, more of a surprise than in the case of Chuck-will's-widow.

**Chimney Swift:** Now reported essentially statewide from towns, last

were in the e: 33 at Bellevue (LP,BP) and 3 at Nebraska City (LF,CF), all on 13 Oct. Best count was 100 at Bellevue 24 Sep (BP,LP).

**White-throated Swift:** Last were 4 at Scotts Bluff NM 1 Sep (SJD). The only other report was of 3 in Sowbelly Canyon 24 Aug (SJD).

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** Good numbers were reported in the e, with the westernmost report 5 females/imms at Kearney 9 Sep (George Brown fide LR,RH). A total of about 36 were noted, best count 6 at FF 29 Aug (BP,LP). Last was on 27 Sep, when one passed through Bellevue (BP,LP). Last of the ad males was at Winside 22 Aug (NB).

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird:** None were reported, but see *Selasphorus* Hummingbird sp., below.

**Rufous Hummingbird:** The only bird identified to species was a female at Bushnell 11 Aug (\*BFH). See *Selasphorus* Hummingbird sp., below.

***Selasphorus* Hummingbird sp.:** Eight were reported unidentified to species, either due to the apparently remote possibility of Allen's Hummingbird, or the more likely problem of separation of Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. These 8 birds were seen in the period 1 Aug-6 Sep, all at Bushnell or Kimball (SJD,BFH,JS). The latest, a female on 6 Sep, was rather late.

**Belted Kingfisher:** Reports were routine.

**Lewis's Woodpecker:** Only 2 were reported, both at the traditional Deadhorse Burn site behind Chadron SP, 23 Aug (SJD,JS).

**Red-headed Woodpecker:** Last of few reported away from the e were 11 in Scotts Bluff Co 3 Sep (NK), a rather early departure date.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** Westernmost were singles at Roscoe and Sutherland Res 16 Nov (SJD); the LM area is about the westerly limit for this species in the North Platte Valley.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** The only reports were of singles at FF 30 Sep (BP,LP) and another at Hormel Park, Fremont, 23 Oct (MB).

**Downy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine.

**Hairy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine.

**Northern Flicker:** Best count was 30 at Calamus Res 7 Sep (LR,RH). "Red-shafted" Flickers were first noted ne of Elsmere, in Brown Co, 27 Sep (LR,RH) and as far e as Wood Duck 30 Oct (DH).

**Olive-sided Flycatcher:** Earliest was 1 at Dead Timber 13 Aug (DH), best count 6 at FF 29 Aug (BP,LP), and last was 1 at ADF 23 Sep (LF,CF). Most reports are from the e, but there is a low-density movement through the Panhandle also, with 4 reports this fall, from 23 Aug at Carter Canyon (SJD) through 1 Sep at Oliver Res (SJD).

**Western Wood-Pewee:** The only reports were from the summer range; last were 2 at NPNWR 13 Sep (DH,MB). One-two pewees unidentified to species were at Oliver Res 12-13 Sep (JGJ,SJD).

**Eastern Wood-Pewee:** All reports were from the e; last was at ADF 25 Sep (LF,CF).

***Empidonax* sp.:** Identification of silent fall *empidonax* flycatchers is not impossible, but very difficult; it requires some details on structural and soft-part characters [overall shape (big- or small-headed), bill shape, size and color (especially underneath), eye-ring shape and color, primary extension, etc.]. In general, plumage colors of *empidonax* flycatchers are unreliable indicators of identity when unaccompanied by structural information. Individuals reported as unidentified to species were 4 at Wolf L 31 Aug, thought to be Least (TH), and 2 at Oliver Res 21 Sep (SJD). **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:** One was reported from Dead Timber 16 Aug (DH); the bird had a yellow throat, and while likely this species, other species, especially juvs, may also have yellow throats in fall.

**Acadian Flycatcher:** None were reported.

**Alder Flycatcher:** None were reported.

**Willow Flycatcher:** Birds reported as Willows were 3 at BOL 14 Aug (LE), probably summering birds, and 1 at Agate 7 Sep (JS,WRS). The latter bird was identified by calls.

**Least Flycatcher:** All reports were presumed migrants, as none were reported from the n and w, where breeding may occur. Earliest was one at Funk Lagoon 31 Aug (LR,RH) and last one at ADF 10 Sep (LF,CF).

**Hammond's Flycatcher:** As observers gain more experience with fall *empidonax* flycatchers and spend sufficient time in the field, identification becomes a little easier, especially in the case of Hammond's Flycatcher, which stands out in that it is the only likely species in NE which molts prior to Fall migration and so is in bright, colorful plumage at this time, as well as having a tiny bill. Evidence has suggested that Hammond's Flycatcher is a regular Fall migrant in NE (e.g. banding studies at Hays, Kansas) and this Fall, this was found to be likely the case. Photographs and documentations were received of 4 birds. One was photographed and described at Blue Creek on the Crescent Lake NWR-Oshkosh road 8 Sep (\*WRS,\*JS); one was described se of Sidney 12 Sep (JGJ); a third was described at Winter's Creek L 21 Sep (\*SJD); and a 4<sup>th</sup> was described at Oliver Res 21 Sep (\*SJD). These reports, if accepted by the NOURC, become the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Fall records for NE, all in the period 2-21 Sep; the easternmost is from Adams Co 2 Sep 1995.

**Cordilleran Flycatcher:** The only report was of a migrant at Agate 7 Sep (WRS,JS); it was identified by structural characters as well as its yellow throat. There are few Fall reports purporting to be this species, the 5 available all from the Panhandle in the period 9 Aug-10 Sep.

**Eastern Phoebe:** Reports were all from the e, last at ADF 21 Oct (LF,CF).

**Say's Phoebe:** Easterly reports were of one at Willow L, Brown Co, 27 Sep (LR,RH), also the last for the season, and one in sw Dixon Co 14 Aug (JJ), the latter probably part of the outlying summering population there.

**Great Crested Flycatcher:** The population in ne NW was represented by 3 reports, the last 30 Aug at Sowbelly Canyon (DH). Has anyone seen this species in the central Niobrara Valley (w of Valentine?) Last of the easterly reports was one at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 9 Sep (LE).

**Cassin's Kingbird:** Eighteen were reported, all from the w Panhandle. Last was one at Stage Hill, Scotts Bluff Co, 5 Oct (AK), the latest ever. Late yellow-bellied kingbirds in the Panhandle are mostly Cassin's Kingbirds (Dick Rosche).

**Eastern Kingbird:** Best count was an outstanding 180 at Wood Duck 22 Aug (DH), although "hundreds" were in the w RWB 17 Aug (LR,RH). Previous peak counts were also in late Aug. Last was one in Pierce Co 21 Sep (MB).

**Western Kingbird:** Best count was 48 s of Gering 27 Aug (AK), although "hundreds" were in the w RWB 17 Aug (LR,RH). Last was one in Cherry Co 16 Sep (RG).

**Horned Lark:** Best counts were 1520 in Scotts Bluff Co 26 Oct (SJD) and 1000 near Central City 15 Nov (DH).

**Purple Martin:** Of interest was a report of 5 at O'Neill 11 Aug (DH,MB); this is approaching the w edge of the range in the Niobrara Valley, currently known to be Ainsworth. Last were 6 at Nebraska City 17 Aug (LF,CF).

**Tree Swallow:** Best count was a moderate 75 in se Otoe Co 22 Oct (LF,CF), also the last.

**Violet-green Swallow:** Best count was 30 in Carter Canyon 2 Aug (AK), and last, 2 at Sowbelly Canyon 24 Aug (SJD), a rather late date. Record latest is 29 Aug.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow:** Best count was 1400 in se Otoe Co 25 Aug (LF,CF) and last, 5 there 18 Oct (LF,CF).

**Bank Swallow:** Best count was 2000 at L North 10 Aug (JGJ). Last were 10 in Scotts Bluff Co 3 Sep (NK).

**Cliff Swallow:** Best count was 4000 e of FL 10 Aug, including one with white outer primaries (LR,RH), Bonaparte's Swallow? This a record high count for NE. Last was one in Douglas Co 28 Sep (MB).

**Barn Swallow:** Best count was 1000 at Wood Duck 27 Sep (DH), and last singles at Nebraska City 22 Oct (LF,CF) and at L Babcock 23 Oct (MB).

**Steller's Jay:** One was briefly seen "on two mornings this fall" in Carter Canyon, where two wintered last year (Stella Bigsby fide AK).

**Blue Jay:** An excellent count was 440 in Red Cloud and Franklin Cos 14 Sep (LR,RH); this is a record high count.

**Pinyon Jay:** The only reports were from Sioux Co 13 Sep (MB) and of 24 near Pants Butte 29 Nov (SJD).

**Black-billed Magpie:** A southeasterly report for summer was one at Wood Duck 8 Aug (DH); this is at the se edge of the breeding range. Fall wanderers to the se were one at BOL 30 Nov (BP,LP) and 2 in w Webster Co 5 Oct (LR,RH).

**American Crow:** Reports were routine.

**Black-capped Chickadee:** Strongly suggestive of a fall influx was a count of 168 in Scotts Bluff Co 17 Sep; the observer (NK) had made regular counts through the summer, when the best count was only 8 on 20 Aug. This is valuable data and shows the importance of regular counts of common species.

**Tufted Titmouse:** Reports were routine.

**Red-breasted Nuthatch:** This species was widely reported in small numbers (best count 4), beginning with one in a Bellevue yard as early as 12 Aug (KCR).

**White-breasted Nuthatch:** First to arrive at a non-breeding location was one e of Scottsbluff 11 Oct (AK). One in the same county 13 Sep (MB) may have summered; breeding is not known there, although there are a few recent summer reports. Time to get out the screech-owl tape recorders to record these nuthatches and determine whether they are western from the Pine Ridge or eastern from the Platte Valley.

**Pygmy Nuthatch:** The erratic nature of this species' wanderings was indicated by its absence at the feeders at WHNC 29 Nov (SJD), in contrast to this time last year.

**Brown Creeper:** Reports were of Fall migrants; first was in Cass Co 27 Oct (GW) and furthest w were 3 at Box Butte Res 14 Sep (JGJ). Best count was 5 at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, 26 Nov (LE).

**Rock Wren:** Reports were routine.

**Carolina Wren:** Reports were from the expected range in the e, except for a Fall wanderer rather far to the w near Gibbon 6 Sep (LR,RH).

**House Wren:** Last was one at ADF 20 Oct (LF,CF), a rather late date; latest on record is 22 Oct.

**Winter Wren:** All reports but one were from the lower Missouri Valley; earliest was at Neale Woods 7 Oct (JB). The other was westerly near Gibbon on 29 Sep (LR,RH). There are only about 20-25 reports from c and w in fall. Best count was 4 at FF 10 Oct (JS).

**Sedge Wren:** Several were reported during Aug, including singing birds in suitable breeding habitat; best count was 12 at Nine-mile Prairie, Lancaster Co (JH,EH) and westerly were singles near Gibbon 1 Aug (LR,RH) and at FL 2 Aug (LR,RH). Last to depart was one at Cunningham L 18 Oct (BP,LP).

**Marsh Wren:** At a southerly location for the date was one in Otoe Co 6 Aug (MB); if breeding, this would be the southernmost record

ever. Last were 2 at Oliver Res 29 Nov (SJD); these wrens may winter if open water is present; 3 were still at CLNWR as late as 20 Nov (MF).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** First was one in Saunders Co 24 Oct (MB) and best count 10 at Johnson Res 23 Nov (LR,RH).

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** Earliest was one at Agate 7 Sep (JS,WRS), best count 16 at Forest Lawn Cem, Omaha, 20 Sep (JS), and last was one at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 26 Nov (LE), a rather late date.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** Apparently not as unusual in the Panhandle as previously thought, although there are still fewer than 10 reports in all, there were no fewer than 4 reports this Fall: a female was described at Chimney Rock Cem (\*DH), and 2 were at Stage Hill, Scotts Bluff Co, 1 and 6 Sep (SJD). Two at WHNC 6 Sep (JS) may have been the same birds as those at Stage Hill. Two more were in Long Canyon, Banner Co, 12 Sep (JGJ), a record late date.

**Eastern Bluebird:** Best count, presumably migrants, was 52 in se Otoe Co 22 Oct (LF,CF). Two at Stage Hill 17 Aug (AK) probably summered. Other Panhandle reports were from Sioux Co 13 Sep (MB), James Ranch, Sioux Co, 13 Oct (SL), and 2 at Oliver Res 27 Oct (SJD), a rather late date for the Panhandle.

**Mountain Bluebird:** Last to leave the high country were at James Ranch, Sioux Co, 13 Oct (SL), and 3 had appeared in Scotts Bluff Co by 23 Oct (AK).

**Townsend's Solitaire:** Earliest appearances were made by singles at L Minatare and L Alice and in Sioux Co 13 Sep (DH,MB), and 2 at NNF, Halsey, 28 Sep (LR,RH).

**Veery:** None were reported.

**Gray-cheeked Thrush:** None were reported.

**Swainson's Thrush:** Apparently not a good "thrush" year, only about 6 were reported, albeit statewide. First were 2 at Agate 7 Sep (JS,WRS) and last, one at Oliver Res 21 Sep (SJD).

**Hermit Thrush:** Of interest was a single at Winters Creek L 1 Sep (SJD), one of only 11 Panhandle reports. Panhandle migrants are likely the western race *auduboni*, but the only data to support this is a sight record with details 12 Oct 1996 and a specimen (University of Nebraska State Museum #ZM6670) identified as *auduboni* collected in Lancaster Co 9 Apr 1906, but which closely resembles eastern *faxoni* (WRS,JS). Easterly reports were of about 7 birds in the period 12 (GW)-28 Oct (JS).

**Wood Thrush:** The few reported were in the se, but one was northwesterly at NNF, Halsey, 15 Sep (RG), also the latest.

**American Robin:** Best count was 100, made at 2 locations: Dixon Co on 21 Sep (JJ) and s of Gering 4 Nov (AK).

**Gray Catbird:** Westerly were singles at Winter's Creek L and in Sioux Co 13 Sep (DH,MB) and Oliver Res 1 Sep (SJD). Last was one at FF 7 Oct (BP,LP). Peak migration was indicated by counts of 12 at Wolf L 6 Sep (TH) and 11 at Wood Duck 4 Sep (DH).

**Northern Mockingbird:** None were reported.

**Sage Thrasher:** Normal in recent years were reports totalling at most 10 birds from the Panhandle. First were 1-2 in Kimball Co 1-2 Aug (SJD,JS), with up to 3 in the same location through 15 Aug (SJD). These are apparently fall migrants, as this species is on the move by late Jul. Last was one at Buffalo Creek 29 Aug (JH,EH).

**Brown Thrasher:** Last was rather late at Wolf L 23 Nov (TH).

**American Pipit:** Migrants were noted in good numbers, best counts 80 in Knox Co 15 Oct (MB) and 44 at LM 4 Oct (SJD). Earliest was one at L Minatare 13 Sep (SJD) and last one there 27 Oct (SJD).

**Sprague's Pipit:** This tough-to-find bird was noted 15 Oct in a native prairie 3 mi e of Creighton (\*MB).

**Cedar Waxwing:** There are usually a few around in summer, and this year was no exception (GW,NK). Numbers were not noted until Nov,

when the best count of 145 was made at Wolf L (TH).

**Northern Shrike:** First were in the w, as expected, in Scotts Bluff Co 21 Oct (AK), but most unexpected, as far se as Wood Duck the same day (DH). No details were provided, however, for the latter report. Best count was of 3 at Oliver Res 24 Nov, all ads (SJD).

**Loggerhead Shrike:** Three were reported from the Panhandle, last 2 in Sowbelly Canyon 13 Sep (DH,MB). Two were in Frontier Co 19 Oct (LR,RH), rather late, as latest dates in the Panhandle are in early Oct.

**European Starling:** Reports were routine.

**Bell's Vireo:** Last, and an excellent count, were 30 at Calamus Res 7 Sep (LR,RH). Few others were reported.

**Blue-headed Vireo:** About 6 were reported, all from the e, as expected. First was in a Bellevue yard 3 Sep (BP,LP) and last was a single, which tied the 4<sup>th</sup>-latest ever, in the same Bellevue yard (was the bird glued down?) 28 Oct (BP,LP).

**Cassin's Vireo:** Prior to this fall, and splitting of the "Solitary Vireo" complex, there were 2 specimen records of this taxon. This fall, good coverage of Panhandle migrant traps yielded documented reports of 5 birds, in the period 24 Aug-21 Sep. Singles were at L Minatare 24 Aug (\*SJD,JS), Oliver Res 1 Sep (\*SJD), L Minatare 6 Sep (\*SJD,\*WRS,JS), Riverside Park, Scottsbluff, 7 Sep (\*WRS,\*SJD,JS), and at Oliver Res 21 Sep (\*SJD). Colorado data (Andrews and Righter 1992) suggest that Cassin's Vireo moves through mostly in Sep while the few Blue-headed Vireos tend to be reported in Oct.

**Plumbeous Vireo:** Last within the regular Panhandle range were one at Oliver Res 13 Sep (SJD) and 2 in West Hat Creek Canyon the same day (JGJ). There are few records specifying this species in Fall. Unexpected was a documented report of one far to the e at Wood Duck 21 Sep (\*DH), which, if accepted by the NOURC, would be the first eastern NE report of this taxon.

**Yellow-throated Vireo:** Last was one at FF 17 Sep (BP,LP).

**Warbling Vireo:** A very yellow bird at Winter's Creek L 6 Sep (SJD) may have been of the western subspecies *swainsonii*, currently believed by many to be a species separate from eastern *gilvus* (Sibley and Monroe 1990). The two are difficult to identify in the field, however. Latest were 2 at FL 5 Oct (LR,RH), tying the record late date.

**Philadelphia Vireo:** Between 1979 and 1995 there were fewer than 10 Fall reports, but in 1996 and 1997 this has changed. This year 5 were reported, 4 from the e, as expected, in the short period 6 Sep at Wolf L (TH) through 30 Sep at FF (BP,LP). Most unexpected, however, was a documented report of one at Riverside Park, Scotts Bluff Co, 3 Sep (\*NK), only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panhandle record.

**Red-eyed Vireo:** Best counts were 14 at FF 5 Sep (JS) and 12 in Dakota Co 7 Sep (BFH). Last was one at FF 17 Sep (BP,LP).

**Golden-winged Warbler:** Only casual in fall, one at FF 4 Sep (JA) was about the 15<sup>th</sup> fall record ever. Much more surprising was the first fall Panhandle record, a male at Sowbelly Canyon 14 Sep (JGJ). There are, however, 9 fall records on the ne Colorado plains and foothills (Andrews and Righter 1992).

**Tennessee Warbler:** Only casual in the w, 2 were reported at Oliver Res, one each on 13 and 14 Sep (SJD). These are the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Fall Panhandle records. Other reports were from the e, earliest one at FF 27 Aug (BP,LP) and last in Dixon Co 5 Oct (JJ). Only about 9 were reported in all.

**Orange-crowned Warbler:** A statewide migrant, earliest were singles on 26 Aug at both ADF (LF,CF) and in Scotts Bluff Co (NK). Best counts were 17 at Oliver Res 21 Sep (SJD) and 15 at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 14 Oct (LE). Last was at ADF 28 Oct (LF,CF), a rather late

date.

**Nashville Warbler:** Reports were from the e, as expected; this species is only casual in the west. Earliest was at FF 3 Sep (BP,LP), best count 10 there 17 Sep (BP,LP), and last one at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 10 Oct (LE).

**Northern Parula:** Only 3 were reported, including one at NNF, Halsey, 22 Sep (RG), only the 6<sup>th</sup> Fall record away from the east. Others were a single at Indian Cave SP 13 Sep (JS), and 2 at Forest Lawn Cem, Omaha, 20 Sep (JS).

**Yellow Warbler:** Last were, surprisingly, in Sioux and Scotts Bluff Cos 13 Sep (MB).

**Chestnut-sided Warbler:** Previously there were no Panhandle records; now there are 2: one was at NPNWR 13 Sep (JGJ) and another was in Scotts Bluff Co 17 Sep (NK). There are about 18 Fall records for Colorado (Andrews and Righter 1992). There were only 2 other reports, singles at FF 4 Sep (BP,LP) and in Bellevue 9 Sep (BP,LP).  
**Magnolia Warbler:** Reports were from the e, except for one which was banded at NNF, Halsey, 23 Sep (RG). Elsewhere, earliest were 2 at Schramm SP 5 Sep (JS) and one at ADF the same day (ADF). Last was one at FF 10 Oct (JS).

**Black-throated Blue Warbler:** The only report was of one at Neale Woods 25 Sep (JB); this species is but a casual migrant.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler:** The only reports specifying the western subspecies "Audubon's Warbler" were of singles at Oliver Res 1 Sep (SJD) and at James Ranch, Sioux Co, 22 Sep (SL). Taking the species as a whole, earliest were in the w, with 2 in "fall plumage" at WHNC 29 Aug (JH), possibly fledged nearby, as next to appear was one in Dixon Co 20 Sep (JJ). Best count was 30 at the Krimlofski Tract, Neale Woods, on 18 Oct (JS), and last was one at Neale Woods 13 Nov (JB).

**Townsend's Warbler:** Apparently a regular Fall migrant in small numbers in the Panhandle, there were 3 reports involving 5 birds, all imms/females, and all at Oliver Res. One was seen 6 Sep (\*SJD,JS,WRS), 3 were there 13 Sep (SJD), and another was seen 21 Sep (SJD).

**Black-throated Green Warbler:** Only 3 were reported: singles were at FF 3-4 Sep (BP,LP) and another was in Bellevue 7 Oct (BP,LP).

**Blackburnian Warbler:** There are only 3 previous Panhandle reports, and so a record this Fall of an imm male at Ash Hollow SHP becomes the 4<sup>th</sup>, even though it was just barely in the Panhandle (\*SJD). The only other reports were of one at FF 3 Sep (BP,LP) and 4 there 4 Sep (BP,LP).

**Yellow-throated Warbler:** Rarely reported in Fall, 2 were at FF 2 Sep (JS).

**Blackpoll Warbler:** While rather common in spring, this species is only casual in fall. There were 2 reports: singles were at FF 4 Sep (JA) and in Dixon Co 13 Sep (JJ).

**Bay-breasted Warbler:** Usually reported regularly in Fall, this year the only report was surprisingly far w, at CLNWR, where 2 imms together were studied at length 8 Sep (\*WRS,\*JS). This is the first Panhandle record for this species. There are 13 eastern Colorado records, however (Andrews and Righter 1992).

**Black-and-white Warbler:** The earliest was in Monroe Canyon 24 Aug (SJD), and may have summered there; away from breeding locations first were one at Winters Creek L 1 Sep (SJD) and 3 at FF 3 Sep (BP,LP). Best count was 4 at FF 4 Sep (BP,LP) and last one there 1 Oct (BP,LP).

**American Redstart:** Earliest was one at Winters Creek L 1 Sep (SJD), and last one at Stage Hill, Scotts Bluff Co, 21 Sep (SJD). Only about 8 were reported.

**Prothonotary Warbler:** The only report was, most unexpectedly, of 1

near L Minatare 13 Sep (MB,DH,JGJ), yet another first Fall Panhandle record. There are 14 records for the eastern Colorado plains (Andrews and Righter 1992).

**Ovenbird:** The few reports were routine.

**Northern Waterthrush:** Only the 3rd Fall Panhandle record was provided by one in Carter Canyon 15 Aug (SJD), a rather early date. The only previous records were in Sioux Co 25-27 Aug 1990 and Dawes Co 5 Sep 1992. Only 2 others were reported, in Dakota Co 2 Sep (BFH) and at FF 3 Sep (BP,LP).

**Connecticut Warbler:** The only report was of one at FF 9 Sep (JA).

**Mourning Warbler:** Only 5 were reported, all from FF; first was one 27 Aug (BP,LP), 3 were there 3 Sep (BP,LP), and one on 4 Sep (BP,LP).

**MacGillivray's Warbler:** Only 2 were reported, from w of Harrison on 14 Sep (DH) and in Sowbelly Canyon the same day (JGJ). This species, like Townsend's Warbler, is probably a regular Fall migrant in small numbers through the Panhandle.

**Common Yellowthroat:** Best count was 8 at FF 17 Sep (BP,LP) and last was one there 7 Oct (BP,LP).

**Wilson's Warbler:** This was a great Fall for this statewide migrant, especially in the w, where best counts were 39, a new record, at Oliver Res 1 Sep (SJD) and 36 there on 13 Sep (SJD). Earliest was one at ADF 24 Aug (LF,CF) and last one at FF 1 Oct (BP,LP). Best eastern count was 5 at ADF 4 Sep (LF,CF).

**Canada Warbler:** Singles were at FF 3 and 5 Sep (BP,LP) and at ADF 21 Sep (LF,CF) for the only reports.

**Yellow-breasted Chat:** Reports were routine.

**Summer Tanager:** The only reports were a little early for migrants, although 2 at Indian Cave SP 10 Aug (JS) and one at FF 29 Aug (BP,LP) were at locations which have not had known breeding populations in recent years.

**Scarlet Tanager:** The only report was of one at FF 5 Sep (BP,LP).

**Western Tanager:** Migrants were in Scotts Bluff Co 3-17 Sep (NK) and at Oliver Res 21 Sep (SJD). Other reports were from summering locations.

**Northern Cardinal:** Bad news from the tiny Scotts Bluff Co outlier population was the death of a female after the late Oct blizzard (AK). Such an event could be the end of this colonizing attempt.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** Reports were from expected locations in the e; last was an imm male at Wood Duck 3 Oct (DH), a rather late date.

**Black-headed Grosbeak:** Last was one near Gibbon, at the e edge of the range, 29 Sep (LR,RH), tying the 3<sup>rd</sup> latest ever.

**Blue Grosbeak:** Last were 2 in Dixon Co 19 Sep (JJ).

**Lazuli Bunting:** Reports were from the Panhandle, last a male at Oliver Res 21 Sep (SJD), a rather late date.

**Indigo Bunting:** Westerly were a single in Carter Canyon 2 Aug (AK) and 2 in Scotts Bluff Co 3 Sep (NK). Last was one at ADF 13 Oct (LF,CF), tying the 2<sup>nd</sup> latest ever.

**Dickcissel:** Reports were all from the e half of the state. Best count was 11, all imms, in Clay Co 4 Oct (LR,RH), and latest was one in s Lancaster Co 5 Oct (LE).

**Eastern Towhee:** Reports were mostly from the e, best counts 5 at Wood Duck, a breeding site, 8 Aug (DH) and 4 at FF 16 Oct (BP,LP). A hybrid was at Wood Duck as late as 28 Oct (DH). Was it an arriving bird considering itself a Spotted or a departing bird thinking Eastern? Of interest at the w edge of the n part of the breeding range was one in extreme e Knox Co 5 Oct, only the 2<sup>nd</sup> county record for the observer (MB). Last was westerly at Kearney 30 Oct (LR,RH), and also westerly was one at FL 5 Oct (LR,RH). These 2 reports suggest that Fall migrants may occur west to ce NE.



**Spotted Towhee:** First in the se was in Cass Co 24 Sep (GW), followed by 3 at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 30 Sep (LE). Best count was 8 at Wyuka Cem 10 Oct (LE).

**American Tree Sparrow:** Earliest were in Knox Co 15 Oct (MB), Arthur Co 18 Oct (MB), and 2 at FF 21 Oct (BP,LP). Best count was 70 at BOL 14 Nov (LE).

**Chipping Sparrow:** Best count was 25 in Dixon Co 5 Oct (JJ) and last one at ADF 27 Oct (LF,CF).

**Clay-colored Sparrow:** First was one at WHNC 27 Aug (JH), best count 20 in Scotts Bluff Co 3 Sep (NK) and last, one near Gibbon 18 Oct (LR,RH).

**Brewer's Sparrow:** Reports of summering birds from locations not mentioned often for this species were of a pair with 3 fledglings at Panorama Peak, Kimball Co, 12 Aug (BFH), the state's highest point (boy, were they ever high!), and a single ad at Oliver Res 16 Aug (BFH). Four were near Exit 1 on I-80 7 Sep (SJD).

**Field Sparrow:** Rare in the w, westerly reports were of singles far to the w in Sioux Co 13 Sep (MB), and somewhat far w at NNF, Halsey, 22 Sep (RG) and 28 Sep (LR,RH), and in Frontier Co 19 Oct (LR,RH). Best count was 45 at Wolf L 15 Oct (TH), and last a single at ADF 28 Oct (LF,CF).

**Vesper Sparrow:** Last was one in Knox Co 25 Oct (MB).

**Lark Sparrow:** A "big movement" was noted at NNF, Halsey, 15 Sep (RG). Last was one in Dixon Co 5 Oct (JJ).

**Lark Bunting:** None were reported e of the Panhandle, where best count was only 100, those n of Harrison 30 Aug (DH), and last were several groups in the same place 14 Sep (MB,DH).

**Savannah Sparrow:** First were 6 at Enders Res 27 Sep (LR,RH) and last 20 at ADF 24 Oct (LF,CF) and one in Dodge Co 25 Oct (MB).

**Grasshopper Sparrow:** Best count was 200 in groups of 10-30 along Highway 20 in Sioux Co 30 Aug (DH); these were presumably migrants or post-breeding flocks. Last were 2 at Jack Sinn Marsh 12 Oct (JS), a rather late date.

**Le Conte's Sparrow:** This sparrow is rather common in fall, as reflected by the several reports, but w only to Knox and Lancaster Cos. First was one at Dodge Park, Omaha, 20 Sep (JS) and last one at ADF 28 Oct (LF,CF). Best count was 20 at Pintail Marsh 21 Oct (JGJ,WRS).

**Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow:** The only reports were of one at a regular location, Jack Sinn Marsh, 12 Oct (JS), and 2 at Pintail Marsh 21 Oct (JGJ,WRS), the latter the latest ever.

**Fox Sparrow:** Most seen in NE are the rusty eastern subspecies; there are only 2 records of greyish western types. All reports were from e NE, where most of the NE birds are normally found. Earliest was one in Lancaster Co 30 Sep (LE), best count an excellent 18 at Wood Duck 28 Oct (DH), and last one at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 14 Nov (LE).

**Song Sparrow:** Rare in the w, there were 2 such reports, a single in Scotts Bluff Co 3 Sep (NK), and 2 n of Harrison 13 Sep (DH). There seems to be a very low-density fall movement in the Panhandle, where breeding is unknown except for Oliver Res.

**Lincoln's Sparrow:** This species was widespread this fall; although less common in the w, it occurs statewide. Earliest were 10 in Scotts Bluff Co 1 Sep (AK), rather early, best counts 25 in Clay Co 4 Oct (LR,RH) and 23 in Dixon Co the same day (JJ), and last 2 at ADF 1 Nov (LF,CF) and 4 in Dixon Co the same day (JJ).

**Swamp Sparrow:** Not many observers reported this species. Best count was 22 in Knox Co 5 Oct (MB).

**White-throated Sparrow:** Earliest were in Knox Co 22 Sep (MB). Best count was 30 at FF 16 Oct (BP,LP), and last one at Wolf L 23 Nov (TH). A few linger into Dec most years, however.

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Although both subspecies occur in NE, eastern *leucophrys* (black lores, pink bill) and western *gambelii* (pale lores, orange bill), it appears that the black-lored birds are more numerous, especially in e and central NE. One observer (SJD) saw only one white-lored bird all Fall, that at Oliver Res 5 Oct (SJD). Most reports were not specified as to subspecies. Earliest was a "big movement" at NNF, Halsey, 16 Sep (RG), best count 60 black-lored at Keystone L 12 Oct (SJD). A few winter.

**Harris' Sparrow:** Earliest was in Knox Co 1 Oct (MB) and best count 200 at Wood Duck 28 Oct (DH). Rare in the w, one was s of Gering 26 Oct (AK).

**Dark-eyed Junco:** Most are reported unspecified as to forms; it would be valuable to differentiate at least between the 4 forms, now considered subspecies, which at one time were separate species: "Slate-colored", "Oregon" (includes "Pink-sided"), "White-winged", and "Grey-headed". Reports of specified forms are treated first. "Slate-colored", comprising most migrant and wintering e NE juncos, but also common in the w, were first at James Ranch 28 Sep (SL). "Oregon" juncos, most numerous in the w, rare in the e, were first at James Ranch 12 Oct (SL); "many" were at HCR by 30 Nov (LR,RH), and in the e, 3 were with 35 "Slate-colored" at Wood Duck 13 Nov (DH), and one at Wolf L 28 Nov (TH). "White-winged" junco, the only form that breeds in NE (in the Pine Ridge), and which winters uncommonly in the w, first appeared at the James Ranch feeders 16 Oct (SL). As for Dark-eyed Junco (unspecified), earliest (apart from the 28 Sep "Slate-colored" form at James Ranch) were in Knox Co 30 Sep (MB). Best count was 210 in Lancaster Co 14 Nov (LE). "Grey-headed" junco is casual in NE; none were reported.

**McCown's Longspur:** Reports were routine.

**Lapland Longspur:** Earliest were 70 in w Kimball Co 26 Oct (SJD) and best count 200 in Dodge Co 14 Nov (MB).

**Chestnut-collared Longspur:** Reports were routine.

**Snow Bunting:** The only ones which made the Fall Report were singles at Pawnee L 2 Nov (JS), a rather early date, and in Cass Co 27 Nov (GW).

**Bobolink:** An early fall migrant, flocks occur in Aug, usually in cattails, and most birds are by then in winter plumage and look like giant sparrows. One still in male plumage was at Rowe Sanctuary 2 Aug (LR,RH), however. Last was one at Oliver Res 6 Sep (SJD).

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Best count was 1500 at Wood Duck 4 Sep (DH).

**Eastern Meadowlark:** Reports were routine.

**Western Meadowlark:** Reports were routine.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird:** Last were 10 at Nebraska City 18 Oct (LF,CF).

**Rusty Blackbird:** As expected, reports were from the e; earliest was one at Nebraska City 11 Oct (LF,CF) and best count 22 at Wood Duck 26 Nov (DH). This species often seen in at least early Dec.

**Brewer's Blackbird:** Movement begins in late Aug-early Sep; 100 were near Crawford, in the summer range, 1 Sep (AK), but 350 at Nebraska City (LF,CF) were definitely migrants. Last was one at Nebraska City 18 Oct (LF,CF) and another in Keith Co the same day (MB). Wintering is rare.

**Great-tailed Grackle:** Recent years have seen a few reports in summer in the w; this year one was in Scotts Bluff Co 20 Aug (NK). A breeding colony has established at Wood Duck; the breeding birds departed during late Jul, but 24 apparent migrants were there 24 Aug (DH). Summering in ne Otoe Co continued, with 1-4 at the OPPD Wetland 8-22 Aug (MB,LF,CF,SJD). Clearly migrants were 200 at Offutt Base L 27 Nov (BP,LP), also the last reported.

**Common Grackle:** Best counts were 1000 at both Loomis on 10 Aug

(LR,RH) and Nebraska City 7 Sep (LF,CF). Early flocks such as these probably consist mostly of juvs. Individuals often linger into Dec.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** Best count was 600 at Wood Duck 9 Oct (DH), and last, 2 in Dixon Co 13 Nov (JJ). Few remain into Dec.

**Orchard Oriole:** A pair with a brood was at Oliver Res 11 Aug (BFH). Last were 2 at Winters Creek L 6 Sep (SJD) and 4 at Wolf L the same day (TH).

**Baltimore Oriole:** Last was one at FL 13 Sep (LR,RH). Two hybrid males (with Bullock's Oriole) were at Riverside Park, Scotts Bluff Co, 7 Sep (SJD).

**Bullock's Oriole:** Reports were routine.

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch:** Two groups were reported, 46 at Scotts Bluff NM 22 Nov (SJD), and 6 at an escarpment a few miles n of Henry in sw Sioux Co 29 Nov (SJD).

**Purple Finch:** First was rather early at Neale Woods 7 Oct (JB), followed by another at Winside 30 Oct (NB). Only 11 were reported, all from the e.

**Cassin's Finch:** The only report was of one at WHNC 27 Oct (SJD), not an indication of an impending influx!

**House Finch:** Best counts were 86 in Scotts Bluff Co 17 Sep (NK) and 45 at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 30 Sep (LE).

**Red Crossbill:** Far fewer were afield than was the case last year. The only report away from the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills was a female at a Dixon Co feeder 16 Aug (JJ). No double-digit counts were reported.

**White-winged Crossbill:** Foreshadowing a significant influx this winter were 5-7 at Norfolk Cem 4 Nov (NB,MB) which were still present at the end of the period (SJD), and a female at a LaVista feeder from 17 Nov through the end of the period (JS).

**Common Redpoll:** In contrast to last year, reports were numerous. Earliest was a female near Gibbon (\*RH,LR), followed closely by another at Winside the next day (NB). Best count by period's end was only 4 however, at L Minatare (SJD).

**Pine Siskin:** Shaping up as only an average year, best count was only 44, at WHNC 29 Nov (SJD), far fewer than last year's count there, although as many as 34 were as far se as Nebraska City 23 Nov (LF,CF). Two at Rock Bluff Cem, Cass Co, 1-8 Sep (GW) may have summered, but one near Gibbon 12 Aug (LR,RH) was unexpected.

**American Goldfinch:** Reports were routine.

**Evening Grosbeak:** None were reported, again in contrast to last year.

**House Sparrow:** Reports were routine.

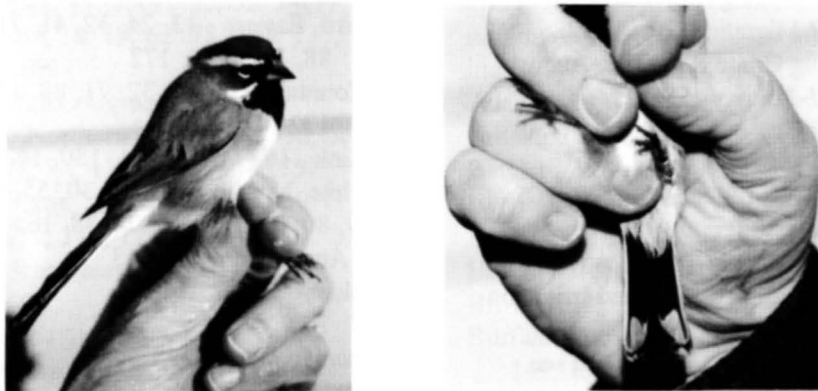
#### OBSERVERS

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BLACK-THROATED SPARROW BANDED IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA  
Ruth C. Green, 506 West 31st Ave., Bellevue, NE 68005

On 20 December 1997, I banded a Black-throated Sparrow in the vicinity of 43rd and J Streets in South Omaha, Nebraska. The band number on this bird is 2120/83856. It was an AHY-Male and, according to the description given by James D. Rising in his book, A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada, it was of the subspecies *Amphispiza b. bilineata*. This is the smallest of the three races found in the United States and it is indigenous to central Texas. Besides the smaller size, the identifying field mark is the greater amount of white found in the outer tail feathers. One of the accompanying photographs of this bird shows this field mark very clearly.

This is the second Black-throated Sparrow to be banded in Nebraska, both in the Omaha area, and the fourth sighting record for the state.



Photographs of the Black-throated Sparrow banded in Omaha, NE. Note the leg band and the tail pattern in the photo on the right. The photos were provided by Raymond C. Korpi, 1106 Bea Circle, Bellevue, NE 68005.

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

This issue is the last of my six-year term as Editor of The Nebraska Bird Review. It has been a challenging and stimulating experience, and I have learned much about bird lore and publishing methods. My workload was lightened considerably when Ross Silcock took on the seasonal field reports in 1994, assisted initially by Richard C. Rosche and recently by Joel G. Jorgensen. Dr. R. G. (Rusty) Cortelyou volunteered to compile the index for each volume during my term. This is a time-consuming and detailed project, and I sincerely appreciate his contribution.

I am very pleased that Dr. Bill Clemente is succeeding me as Editor. In addition to teaching ten courses in the Department of English, Peru State College, Peru, NE, he has had editorial experience reviewing books for several publishing companies, and has made numerous presentations at conferences or symposia. He has involved Grade 5 students in the Project Classroom Feeder Watch programs sponsored by the Cornell University Ornithology Laboratory. It is evident that Bill is eminently qualified to be the NBR Editor, and he is assuming the position with great enthusiasm. My best wishes go to him and those who will assist him.

----- Rosalind Morris

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