

12-2000

## *Nebraska Bird Review* (December 2000) 68(4), WHOLE ISSUE

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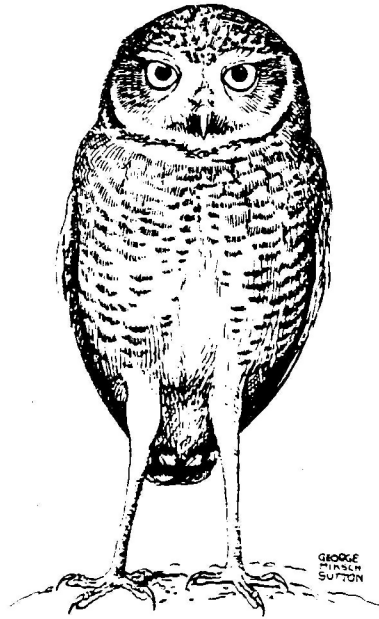
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# ***Nebraska Bird Review***

A Magazine of Ornithology of the Nebraska  
Region

Volume 68    December 2000    Number 4



Published by the  
Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, Inc.  
Founde  
SSSN 002

**FALL FIELD REPORT, August-November, 2000**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This fall season was amazing, or as Stephen Dinsmore put it: "The birding was simply spectacular in western Nebraska this fall." There was something for everyone, whether rarity-chasers, taxonomists, listers, or whatever. There were no fewer than four new species for the state list (pending NOURC approval, of course!), a total of 315 species reported, and fascinating information on western subspecies in the Panhandle.

Numbers of western migrants reached record levels, exemplified by fall totals of 53 Townsend's Warblers, 25 MacGillivray's Warblers, and 28 Western Tanagers. By contrast, eastern migrant warblers in the east were almost non-existent.

At L McConaughy, the exposed flats at the west end of the reservoir attracted myriads of shorebirds and waterbirds, including record fall counts of Western Grebe (44,000!), Green-winged Teal, and a near-record count of Baird's Sandpipers. Several species also had new fall high counts, notably Cliff Swallow (30,000!) and Blue-winged Teal (14,500!).

Stephen Dinsmore's diligent coverage of the Panhandle yielded no fewer than four first state records: Reddish Egret, Arctic Tern, Dusky Flycatcher (using mist-netting, photography, and measurements!), and Black Rosy-Finch. The state total now stands at a healthy 445 species.

There was also a host of significant distributional or seasonal reports, notably a first western White-eyed Vireo, first Panhandle documented Eastern Wood-Pewee, a first August-September Pacific Loon, a first August Red-breasted Merganser, a first fall record for Virginia's Warbler, and a second fall Hudsonian Godwit for the state. Not to mention all three jaegers!

Sparrows were in mediocre numbers, with not much of interest in that group. Of concern are the few reports of Black-billed Cuckoo in recent years; only two were reported this fall. Despite the total of 315 species reported, no fewer than 17 species of regular, though generally rare, occurrence were not found. Most surprising among these were American Black Duck, American Woodcock, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Veery, Wood Thrush, Northern Parula, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, and Summer Tanager. Many of the missed species either depart early in fall or become inconspicuous. Were their breeding seasons unsuccessful?

**ABBREVIATIONS**

**ADF**: Arbor Day Farm, Otoe Co; **BOL**: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co; **CCM**: Clear Creek Marshes, Keith/Garden Cos; **Cem**: Cemetery; **CLNWR**: Crescent

L NWR, Garden Co; FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co; FL: Funk Lagoon, Phelps Co; HCR: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co; LM: L McConaughy, Keith Co; m. ob.: many observers; NC: Nature Center; NM: National Monument; NNE: Nebraska National Forest; NOU: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union; NOURC: NOU Records Committee; NPNWR: North Platte NWR; NWR: National Wildlife Refuge; RWB: Rainwater Basin, Southcentral Nebraska; SHP: State Historical Park; SL: Sewage Lagoons; SP: State Park.

### GAZETTEER

Ash Hollow SHP: Garden Co; Box Butte Res: Dawes Co; Boyer Chute NWR: Washington Co; Calamus Res: Loup/Garfield Cos, Chadron SP: Dawes Co; DeSoto NWR: Washington Co; Gavin's Point Dam: Cedar/Knox Cos; Johnson Basin: Phelps Co; Kiowa Springs: Scotts Bluff Co; L Alice: NPNWR; Little L Alice: NPNWR; L Minatare: Scotts Bluff Co; L Ogallala (includes Keystone L): Keith Co; L Zorinsky: Douglas Co; Neale Woods: Douglas/Washington Cos; Offutt Base L: Sarpy Co; Oliver Res: Kimball Co; Pawnee L: Lancaster Co; Pine Ridge: Sioux, Dawes, Sheridan Cos; Ponca SP: Dixon Co; Schramm SP: Sarpy Co; Scotts Bluff NM: Scotts Bluff Co; Sherman Res: Sherman Co; Sowbelly Canyon: Sioux Co; Sutherland Res: Lincoln Co; Swanson Res: Hitchcock Co; Wehrspann L: Sarpy Co; Wildcat Hills: Scotts Bluff Co.

### OBSERVERS

Alice Kenitz (AK), Gering; Alan Risor (AR), Wisner; Nebraska Birdline (B); Beverly Canterbury (BC), Omaha; Bob Foreman (BF), Smithville, MO; Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City; Brooke Levey (BL), Kearney; Babs Padelford (BP), Bellevue; Carol Falk (CF), Nebraska City; Clem N. Klapfacke (CNK), Bellevue; Charles Otte (CO), Junction City, KS; Don Maas (DM), Omaha; Don Paseka (DP), Ames; Elizabeth Allen (EA), Omaha; Eric Scholar (ES), Omaha; Francisco Rivas (FR), Omaha; George Canterbury (GC), Omaha; Glen Hoge (GH), Alma; Gertrude Wood (GW), Elmwood; Helen K. Hughson (HKH), Mitchell; Ira Sanders (IS), Boulder, CO; John Breneman (JB), Omaha; John Dinan (JD), Lincoln; Joe Fontaine (JE), Fort Collins, CO; Joe Gubanyi (JG), Seward; Joel G. Jorgensen (JGJ), Blair; Jan Greer (JGr), Council Bluffs, IA; Jan Johnson (JJ), Wakefield; Jan Paseka (JP), Ames; Jerry Toll (JT), Omaha; Julie Wilcox (JW), Vermillion, SD; John W. Hall (JWH), Omaha; Kathleen Crawford-Rose (KCR), Bellevue; Kevin Poague (KP), Lincoln; Laurel Badura (LB), Kearney; Larry Einemann (LE), Lincoln; Laurence Falk (LF), Nebraska City; Loren Padelford (LP), Bellevue; Lanny Randolph (LR), Gibbon; Linda R. Brown (LRB), Lincoln; Mark Brogie (MB), Creighton; Mark Orsag (MO), Crete; Moni Usasz (MUs), Lincoln; Merlin Wright (MW), Brownville; Neva Pruess (NP), Lincoln; Neal Ratzlaff (NR), Omaha; Paul Bedell (PB), Lincoln; Ruth Green



(RG), Bellevue; Robin Harding (RH), Gibbon; Rick Schmid (RS), Omaha; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Fort Collins, CO; Steve McIlree (SM), Omaha; Steve Van Sickle (SV), Yankton, SD; Thomas E. Labedz (TEL), Lincoln; Thomas Hoffman (TH), Omaha; Todd Jensen (TJ), Rapid City, SD; Wanda Hoge (WH), Alma; W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor, IA.

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Red-throated Loon: One in first basic plumage was sighted at L Minatare on 12 November (SJD; details), only the 2nd fall Panhandle record and 9th fall Nebraska record. Interestingly, a loon reported at L Minatare on 30 September was thought to be either a Red-throated or a Pacific, but the observers were unable to confirm the identification.

Pacific Loon: A first alternate bird was seen at LM between 7 August and 8 September (SJD), the first August-September record for Nebraska. At least 6 additional birds, all either juveniles or first basic, were reported from 12 November to 26 November at L Minatare, L Ogallala, and LM (SJD). This species is a regular fall migrant in western Nebraska in the period between 19 October and 27 November.

Common Loon: An excellent count reached 22 on 22 October, with 13 seen at L Minatare and 9 spotted at Box Butte Res (SJD). Summering birds are regular on western reservoirs, but the one discovered at HCR on 21 August (GWH) was unusual.

Pied-billed Grebe: As expected, migration was underway by mid-August, and peak count reached an excellent 422 at Offutt Base L on 20 September (B), with another good count totaling 165 at Box Butte Res on 22 October (SJD). Most had departed by late October; the one found on the Missouri River in Knox Co on 25 November (MB) was a little tardy.

Horned Grebe: An excellent count totaled 93 at L Minatare on 12 November (SJD); only 5 were reported there on 14 November (SJD).

Red-necked Grebe: At least 6 individuals were found at L Ogallala and LM; included were an "immature with a striped face" seen on 21 November (RS), possibly the same bird reported as a juvenile on 14, 19, and 26 November (SJD); a molting adult seen 7 September through at least 11 October, the earliest fall record ever (SJD, BP, LP); and adults in basic plumage found between 19 and 26 November, with an amazing 5 basic adults spotted on the latter date (SJD, LR, RH). It appears that this species has begun to appear regularly in fall at this location. Prior to this fall, there were only 12 documented fall records and 10 additional undocumented fall reports; and the earliest was reported on 26 September, so the molting adult spotted on 7 September represents the earliest ever.

Fared Grebe: The one seen at HCR on 5 and 6 August (GH, WH) was very early away from (presumably!) the breeding range, as was another discovered in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ). There is a possibility that

occasional breeding occurs in the RWB, but no direct evidence exists. An excellent count totaled 77 at Box Butte Res on 20 September (SJD).

**Western Grebe:** The incredible numbers at LM in recent years continued, with peak count totaling 44,000 on 27 September; and 40,000 were carefully counted from a boat on 12 October (SJD). As many as 4350 were present as early as 6 August, and 1065 were still present on 26 November (SJD). A good total of 5000 was also noted at Sutherland Res on 14 October (SJD). There were several reports of 1 to 2 in the east, totaling at least 6 birds, beginning with 2 found at BOL on 8 October (JGJ), with rather late singles spotted at Zorinsky L on 21 November (JGJ) and at South Bend on 23 November (B).

**Clark's Grebe:** All reports came from LM westward, including good counts of 14 at LM on 7 August (SJD) and 7 at L Minatare on 2 November (SJD). Five were still found at LM as late as 26 November, and 1 to 2 additional birds were spotted on L Ogallala the same day (SJD).

**American White Pelican:** The best count totaled an excellent 900 at Calamus Res on 29 September (JGJ); and 500 were counted in Dixon Co on 11 September (JJ). The twenty tallied at BOL on 6 August (LE) were rather early for the east, where as many as 300 were seen flying over Bellevue as early as 23 August (BP, LP). The last at HCR was one noted on 9 November (GH, WH).

**Double-crested Cormorant:** Rather early were the singles found at Pawnee L on 6 August (LE) and in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ). Migration peaks in late September to October; an excellent count of 3,200 was made at Calamus Res on 29 September (JGJ). Of 504 reported at Pawnee L and BOL on 23 September, about 75% were immatures (WRS). A few stragglers were noted in late November in the east (m. ob.), while last in the west were the 3 spotted at Sutherland Res on 19 November (SJD).

**American Bittern:** The two found at Johnson Basin on 20 August and the one seen at FL the same day (LR, RH) may have been local breeders or early migrants; while breeding probably occurs in the RWB region, evidence is poor. One bird spotted in a yard near FF on 22 October (B; no details) was rather late, although there are a few other November records.

**Least Bittern:** None reported.

**Great Blue Heron:** Excellent counts reached 98 at HCR on 12 August and 94 at Swanson Res the same day (SJD).

**Great Egret:** This species was reported widely, with at least 294 reported. The 150+ tallied at HCR on 21 August (GH, WH), the Great Egret capital of Nebraska, denotes a record fall count. Reports are scarce in the west, but conditions at LM allowed a build-up of numbers to a peak of 20 on 7 August (IS); the last was noted on 12 October (SJD). Elsewhere, several were reported well into October; the last was one lingering at Pawnee L from 13 to 21 October (JGJ, LE, JG).

**Snowy Egret:** LM accumulated good numbers of this species also; 10 were present on 12 August (SJD), and last there was an immature spotted on 12

October (SJD; details), a rather late date. Elsewhere, reports were widespread, with at least 27 birds reported.

**Little Blue Heron:** In contrast with and somewhat more rare than the previous species, few were reported: an immature was seen at LM on 7 August (IS; details), where the species is rarely reported; an adult and an immature were discovered at BOL on 13 August (LE); two were reported at Niobrara Marsh on 16 September (MB); and an immature was noted at Sandpiper Basin, Clay Co, on 16 September (JGJ)--the latter two reports represent a rather late date.

**Reddish Egret:** An amazing first state record was a white morph individual found at the west end of LM between 27 September and 15 October (SJD, WRS, MB, JF, MB). The bird was photographed by SJD, and the pictures were examined by expert Rich Paul, who confirmed the identification and thought that the bird appeared to be an immature. The white morph is rather rare even in its regular haunts, comprising only about 5-12% of the Gulf Coast population (Hancock and Kushlan, The Herons Handbook, 1984).

**Cattle Egret:** Numbers were average, with best count of 84 registered in Phelps Co on 16 September (JGJ). Rather late were 12 spotted at Walnut Creek L, Sarpy Co, on 22 October (B).

**Green Heron:** There were no reports from the western half of the state, but the one seen at Calamus Res on 30 September (MB) was rather late for the location.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron:** Excellent counts totaled 47 (37 adults and 10 immatures) at FL on 13 August (SJD), and 37 (29 adults) at HCR the same day (SJD). FL was still hosting 32 on 3 September (LR, RH). And an immature still remained at LM on 14 October (SJD).

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron:** The juvenile seen at Box Butte Res on 20 September (SJD; details) represents only the 5th Panhandle report for fall. Still only a casual species as far west as L Ogallala, another juvenile was found there from 21 to 22 August (SJD; details). Less unusual, but still a good find, were 2 juveniles identified at HCR between 12 and 13 August (SJD; details).

**White-faced Ibis:** Most reports were submitted as "Plegadis sp.," acknowledging the difficulty in fall of eliminating the possibility, albeit slight, that Glossy Ibis may occur. Excellent counts were the 37 tallied at FL on 20 August (LR, RH) and the 33 noted in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ). An immature was found as far east as Pawnee L on 2 September (LE). Rather late were the 2 found in the east RWB on 13 October (JGJ).

**Turkey Vulture:** Movement is underway by mid-September, as shown by a good count of 53 at HCR on 16 September (JGJ). The one identified at Pawnee L on 4 November (LE; details) was rather late. Late dates for this species are poorly documented, but there are 11 additional reports for November, and neighboring states also have November records. It has been suggested (MO) that late Turkey Vulture reports may be referable in at least some cases to dark-morph Rough-legged Hawks.

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Summer reports are few, most from central Nebraska, and are usually of 1 to 2 birds, one or both injured or unable to migrate. Unusual, therefore, was the presence of a mobile flock of 18 reported at the south Alma SL on 5 August (GH, WH); no others appeared until 7 November. Migration was under way by mid-October, when 80 were counted in the east RWB on 14 October (JGJ); flocks of 75-100 were spotted flying over the east RWB on 4 November (JGJ).

**Snow Goose:** The usual few summer stragglers were noted in central Nebraska, but fall migrants were conspicuously absent until a massive wave hit on 8 November, when 50,000 suddenly appeared at DeSoto NWR (DM), increasing to 100,000 by 10 November (JGr); and 50,000+ flew over the Paseka farm near Ames (DP, JP).

**Ross's Goose:** Much rarer in fall than in spring in the Panhandle (as are Snow Geese), the bird spotted at L. Minatare on 2 November (SJD) represents only the 9th fall Panhandle record.

**Canada Goose:** Migrants arrived in mid-November, about on schedule for the larger forms; 12 large birds were spotted flying south quickly and at a high altitude over Nebraska City on 19 November (WRS). Smaller forms usually arrive a little earlier, in late September and October, but none was specifically noted by observers this fall. At LM a total of 4,000 were present on 26 November (SJD).

**Trumpeter Swan:** As many as 28 frequented the L Ogallala area from 14 November on; they were split almost evenly between adults and immatures (SJD, JF, RS). Wintering in this area is routine, depending on water conditions.

**Tundra Swan:** None reported.

**Wood Duck:** The one seen at Wehrspann L on 23 November (BP, LP) was a little tardy.

**Gadwall:** Breeding occurs in the east RWB, but none was noted there on 2 September (JGJ), possibly due to shrinking water availability. The best count totaled 1,500 at LM on 14 October (SJD); the best ever for fall is 2,200. A few birds straggled into late November, notably the 12 found at Wehrspann L on 23 November (BP, LP).

**American Wigeon:** A group of 10 found in Harlan Co on 27 August (GH, WH) were probably molt migrants; this species often undergoes long flights prior to molting. The best counts tallied 1,670 at LM on 15 October (WRS) and 885 at L Ogallala on 14 October (SJD, JF). A few stragglers were reported into late November in the east.

**American Black Duck:** None reported.

**Mallard:** After breeding, males leave females rather early to form flocks prior to molting, and are joined later by females. Such an early flock, or aggregation of flocks, was the 1,140 counted at LM on 21 August (SJD). Good counts reached 11,500 at L Minatare on 12 November (SJD) and 8,000 at BOL on 26 November (LE).

**Blue-winged Teal:** Numbers build to incredible levels in the east RWB after breeding; a notable rise in numbers was detected by 13 August, when

800 were counted (JGJ); and the season's peak totaled 14,500 on 2 September (JGJ), by far the best ever fall count. Included in the latter was a female with a nearly-fledged brood (JGJ), rather late. Also rather late was an adult male in eclipse spotted at L Ogallala on 14 November (SJD).

**Cinnamon Teal:** None was reported; most leave by early August, and those remaining are in eclipse plumage and therefore difficult to identify.

**Northern Shoveler:** Routine reports.

**Northern Pintail:** A notable rise in numbers rather early led to a count of as many as 200 in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ). Again, these may have been largely molt migrants; pintail drakes leave females early, as do Mallards. A similar scenario accounts for the presence of 5 at Alma SL on 7 August when no others were noted in the area until 7 November (GH, WH). A good fall count was 3,340 tallied at LM on 15 October (WRS). Fall counts for this species are far lower than in spring, when the best count is 75,000.

**Green-winged Teal:** This species is another that arrives in the east RWB in large numbers in August, probably as molt migrants; 150 were seen there on 13 August (JGJ), increasing to a peak of 3,200 on 2 September (JGJ). Numbers were even greater at LM, where as many as 665 were present on 22 August (SJD), rising to a peak of 9,040 on 11 October (SJD). The latter count is a fall record. Only one bird remained at LM on 14 November (SJD).

**Canvasback:** Reports away from breeding areas in the period from late July through mid-September are fewer than 10; one was identified at L Ogallala on 8 September (SJD).

**Redhead:** There were scattered August to early September reports from areas not far from breeding locations; perhaps these were failed breeders. Four were seen at L Ogallala on 7 August (SJD); one was found in the east RWB on 26 August (JGJ); and two each were spotted at North Platte SL on 1 September (WRS) and at L Minatare on 3 September (SJD). An excellent count reached 1,950 at L Ogallala on 1 November (SJD).

**Ring-necked Duck:** The totals of 238 on 1 November and 273 on 26 November at L Ogallala (SJD) represent excellent fall counts; the only higher counts are 2,100 and 1,228.

**Tufted Duck:** Apparently the same bird that was present throughout last winter, for Nebraska's first record, reappeared at L Ogallala on 26 November (SJD). An adult male, it was in molt (SJD).

**Greater Scaup:** The three found at L Ogallala on 12 October (SJD) provided the 2nd earliest fall record, while the 77 seen there on 14 and again on 19 November (SJD, JF) provided a record fall count. Rarely reported away from L Ogallala in recent years, a male was discovered at L Minatare on 12 November (SJD).

**Lesser Scaup:** Record fall counts were set by the 1,160 tallied at L Ogallala on 14 November (SJD) and the 1,000 counted at BOL on 4 November (LE). Maybe Larry should have a recount!

**Surf Scoter:** The only reports were of single immatures, possibly the same bird, noted at L Ogallala on 2 and on 14 November (SJD).



**White-winged Scoter:** A little more in evidence this year than in recent years, at least 4 individuals were reported: an immature male was spotted at L Ogallala on 14 and again on 19 November (SJD, JF); 2 immatures were identified there on 21 November (RS); and 3 female or immature birds were seen there on 26 November (SJD). An adult male was noted at Gavin's Point Dam on 25 November (BFH).

**Black Scoter:** This scoter was also much in evidence this fall, with about 8 reported. At L Ogallala, an adult male was present on 12 October (SJD) through 14 October (SJD, JF), the earliest fall date. Three immatures were seen there on 25 October (SJD), increasing to 4 from 26 October to 2 November (SJD), a new high count. Two immatures still remained there on 14 November (SJD) and one on 21 November (RS). One of these may have moved to LM, where a female/ immature was seen on 26 November (SJD). Three immatures were found at L Minatare on 2 November (SJD).

**Long-tailed Duck:** About 7 individuals were found during the period, more than usual. Up to 4 were spotted at L Ogallala between 14 and 26 November, including an adult female and 3 immatures (SJD, RS). Two were spotted at Wehrspann L between 16 and 23 November (JGJ, JB, BP, LP, NR); and a single was found at Gavin's Point Dam on 24 November (JJ, BP, LP).

**Bufflehead:** The thirteen birds reported at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD), a rather early date, were early migrants, as breeding is not known to occur in Nebraska. A record fall count was the 1,394 tallied at L Ogallala on 14 November (SJD); 966 still remained there on 26 November (SJD).

**Common Goldeneye:** The best count totaled 955 at L Ogallala on 26 November (SJD).

**Barrow's Goldeneye:** An adult male was seen at L Ogallala on 14 and again on 19 November (SJD, JF), joined by another on 26 November (SJD). This species is regular at this location in fall and winter if water conditions allow.

**Hooded Merganser:** Noticeable migratory movement is not evident until October, but in recent years, reports of female/immature birds in August to September have been increasing. These are probably "yearling" birds of both genders, too young to breed. This season, two such birds were spotted near Kenesaw, Adams Co, on 6 August (LR, RH); singles were noted in the east RWB on 13 and on 26 August (JGJ); and two were identified at L Ogallala on 21 and 22 August (SJD). A single found at L Alice on 20 September (SJD) was also likely in this category. An excellent count reached 58 at L Alice on 2 November (SJD), indicating the peak of "true" migration.

**Common Merganser:** L Alice continues as a site for molt migrants; 132 gathered there as early as 5 August (SJD). Numbers at LM built to 4,500 by the end of the period (SJD).

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A female identified at L Ogallala on 7 and on 22 August (SJD) denotes the first ever record for August. Prior to this sighting, there had been no records for June through August. The best counts were 36 at L Minatare on 14 November (SJD) and 28 at BOL on 16 November (JGJ).

**Ruddy Duck:** A few August reports of 1 to 5 birds came from RWB locations where breeding is likely (LR, RH, JG, JGJ), but the first migrants were the

60 birds found at North Platte SL on 1 September (WRS). Groups of Ruddies at this early date may be molt migrants, dispersing young, or failed breeders. A close look could clarify this question. "True" migration usually starts around mid-September. The best count totaled an excellent 1,000 at BOL on 6 November (JGJ). Unusual in fall, an alternate-plumaged male was noted at L Ogallala on 14 November (SJD).

**Osprey:** Singles were reported on 4 August in Cedar Co (SV) and on 6 August at both LM (SJD) and Wolf L, Saunders Co (TH), rather early for fall migrants. These birds are likely prebreeders 1 to 3 years of age. "True" migrants appear later in August, when there is a concentration of early fall dates; such were the singles spotted at Zorinsky L, Omaha, on 20 August (DM) and at Bellevue on 23 August (BP, LP). The 8 birds seen at HCR on 16 September (JGJ) represent a good count.

**Mississippi Kite:** This fall brought an unusual number of sightings away from the only known breeding location in Ogallala. Although young birds disperse widely, including northward, after breeding, it is hard to deny that breeding may be occurring elsewhere in Nebraska. Most indicative of potential breeding was an adult spotted flying over Hastings with two Swainson's Hawks on 13 August (SJD; details). Probable dispersers were two juveniles seen flying over Oliver Res on 26 August (SJD; details); an amazing 15 counted in the air north of Fairbury by an experienced Kansas observer on 10 September (CO); one identified in Bellevue on 19 September (BP, LP; details); and a juvenile discovered near Center on 25 September (MB; details) was the observer's first for Knox Co, and the northernmost sighting for the state. Back to Ogallala: 3 adults and a nest with at least one chick were noted on 6 August (SJD), and one adult still remained there on 7 September (SJD). None was reported later than the bird spotted on 19 September at Bellevue. Interestingly enough, the Hitchcock Nature Center hawkwatch just across the Missouri River in Iowa counted 38 Mississippi Kites this fall (fide MO).

**Bald Eagle:** An adult found at L Minatare on 5 August (SJD) probably was one of the NPNWR breeders. The first migrants appeared in early October, mostly immatures. The only concentration reported was of 40 spotted at Carter L, Omaha, on 17 November (SM). About 67% of the Carter L eagles were adults (SM); JT suggested that adults prefer fish, as the gathering at Carter L indicates, but immatures scavenge, as birds at DeSoto NWR suggest, where immatures predominate while ducks and geese are numerous during November.

**Northern Harrier:** Migrants appear in late August, so the one seen near Kenesaw, Adams Co, on 6 August (LR, RH) may have been a local breeder.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Of interest was a sighting in Sioux Co on 4 August (JWH); breeding probably occurs on the Pine Ridge.

**Cooper's Hawk:** Routine reports.

**Northern Goshawk:** This fall appears to have been good for this species; 17 had been counted at the Hitchcock Nature Center Hawk Watch (in Iowa) as of this writing (fide MO). Only two, however, were reported in Nebraska: the



immature identified at Niobrara on 14 October represented the observer's earliest of 23 sightings of this species, ahead of an immature spotted at the same location on 8 November 1998 (MB); and another immature was found northwest of Center, Knox Co, on 18 November (B).

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** The only report was of 2 discovered at the regular location at FF on 14 September (BP, LP).

**Broad-winged Hawk:** The adult spotted at Oliver Res on 27 September (SJD) represents only the 7th fall Panhandle record. Few were reported--9 of the total of 12 noted total flew over FF on 14 September (BP, LP).

**Swainson's Hawk:** A large group of 87 was seen feeding on grasshoppers in a Phelps Co field on 29 September (BL). The only other concentration was of 18 found near Hooper, Dodge Co, on 2 October (B). Few migrants were reported.

**Red-tailed Hawk:** A total of 52 were counted from a Bellevue yard in two hours on 22 October (BP, LP).

**Ferruginous Hawk:** A total of 13 was reported during the period in the Panhandle (SJD). An immature was spotted as far east as Alma, Harlan Co, by 27 October (GH, WH).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** A light morph immature was identified at Eppley Airfield, Omaha, on 28 September (JT), rather early for the southeasterly location. Excellent counts totaled 15 in Scotts Bluff Co on 12 November (SJD); 11 in Sioux Co on 12 November (SJD); and 10 in Sioux and Box Butte Cos (9 in Sioux, all females) on 22 October (SJD, JF).

**Golden Eagle:** Two adults were seen as far southeast as DeSoto NWR by 10 November (JGr). A total of 14 were counted for fall in the Panhandle (SJD).

**American Kestrel:** Excellent counts included 102 in Banner and Scotts Bluff Cos on 3 September (SJD), a record fall count, and 51 in 180 miles between L Ogallala and L Minatare on 14 November (SJD).

**Merlin:** Reports were numerous, totaling about 49 birds. Arrival was a little later than usual, with singles sighted on 14 September at FF (BP, LP) and Seward (JG). Good counts of 4 were made in the north Panhandle on 22 October (SJD) and in Knox Co on 12 November (MB). A total of 18 were found in the Panhandle for the season (SJD). Most birds identified to subspecies were *columbarius*; reports of this race were statewide in the period from 16 September (JGJ) through 12 November (SJD, MB), while the lone identified *richardsonii* was located in Knox Co on 12 November (MB). A "pale" bird, presumably *richardsonii*, was seen in Dodge Co on 7 November (DP, JP). We now have data from 3 fall seasons on subspecies, and so far no differences in distribution or migration timing have become apparent.

**Prairie Falcon:** The one found at LM as early as 6 August (SJD) may have been a pre-breeder or a failed breeder. Singles had reached east to the RWB by 28 October (JGJ) and to Knox Co by 12 November (MB). The fall total compiled by one observer in the west reached 13 (SJD).

Peregrine Falcon: An immature seen at LM on 6 August (SJD) and another immature spotted there on 7 August (IS) were rather early. About 14 were reported in all.

Gyr Falcon: Two possible sightings of this elusive bird were reported by experienced observers. A "very probable," based on size and behavior (chasing a Canada Goose!), was seen in Scotts Bluff Co on 2 November (SJD); and a "possible," based on very dark overall coloration including the underwings, a streaked breast and slow wingbeats, was identified near Halsey, Thomas Co, on 24 November (TEL). This species is probably regular in the Sandhills and Panhandle each winter in small numbers.

Chukar: Certainly a released bird, one was found near McMurtry Refuge, Clay Co, on 26 August (JGJ).

Gray Partridge: Rarely reported in recent years, the center of whatever population remains is perhaps located north and northeast of O'Neill in Holt Co, where the species apparently established itself from South Dakota some years ago. The only report was of 3 groups found north of O'Neill on 24 November (B).

Ring-necked Pheasant: Routine reports.

Sharp-tailed Grouse: Routine reports.

Greater Prairie-Chicken: Routine reports.

Wild Turkey: Excellent counts of this now well-established statewide species reached between 50 and 75 at DeSoto NWR on 8 November (DM); 65 in Sowbelly Canyon on 22 October (SJD, JF); 63 south of Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 20 November (AK); and 60 at Wildcat Hills NC on 25 November (LR, RH).

Northern Bobwhite: A female with 6 very young chicks was seen at Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co, on 17 August (KP), a rather late date for young chicks. This bird's range extends throughout the Platte Valley, albeit in varying numbers dependent on winter severity. 5 were spotted at L Ogallala on 22 August (SJD), and 2 were found at Sutherland Res on 26 October (SJD). A surprise was one spotted at a feeder near Elmwood Park deep inside Omaha on 16 November (B). A good count totaled 30 at Johnson Basin on 20 August (LR, RH).

Virginia Rail: Migrants appear during August; rails have a propensity for appearing at odd places during migration, as did a juvenile identified in the University of Nebraska Medical Center driveway in Omaha on 20 September (ES). Probably planning to winter, a regular phenomenon at a few locations in the North Platte Valley, one was seen at Kiowa Springs on 2 November (SJD). Wintering is not expected at Niobrara Marsh, so the one discovered there as late as 25 November (MB) was interesting.

Sora: As with Virginia Rail, migrants appear in mid-August. The 15 spotted at Jensen Basin, Kearney Co, on 13 August (LR, RH) were probably migrants, although breeding can occur anywhere. An unusual sight was one found swimming a few feet from shore at Holmes L, Lincoln, on 7 October (LE). The two seen at Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co, on 13 October (KP) were a little tardy.

**American Coot:** A near-record count for fall totaled 5,700 at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD). Other excellent counts reached 5,000 at BOL on 6 October (LE) and 4,000 at LM on 1 November (SJD).

**Sandhill Crane:** Potential breeders in the RWB were the 3 spotted at Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 5 August (LR, RH) and the 2 "greater" sandhills identified in Clay Co on 20 August (JGJ). Migrants appeared right on time in numbers; 60 flew over Kearney on 5 October (LR, RH) and hundreds flew over the Halsey area in flocks of 100 to 200, larger numbers than usual, between 5 and 10 October (RG). Though the bird is only a casual migrant in the east, a repeat of 1998's eastern invasion took place, with 40 seen near Creighton, Knox Co, on 2 November while the observer watched a moose (MB; no details on the moose); 12 spotted flying over Ames on 7 November (DP, JP); 155 found there the next day (DP, JP), and also on 8 November; 150 observed flying over Spring Creek Prairie (KP); 40 over Fort Calhoun (JGJ), 200 over western Douglas Co (B), and with 2 seen flying over Dixon Co (JJ). Last in the east were the 13 seen over Blair on 14 November (JGJ). The best count was 2,379 at Sherman Res on 4 November (LR, RH).

**Whooping Crane:** The only reports were of two noted south of Gibbon on 31 October (Paul Tebbel fide BL), two seen in the east RWB on 2 November (BL), and an amazing 13 found in the Bassett and Valentine areas the week prior to 2 November (BL).

**Black-bellied Plover:** A record fall count totaled 43 at LM on 26 October (SJD). At LM (and for the state), the first spotted were the 8 noted on 7 August; and the last were the 12 seen on 2 November (SJD). None was reported east of the RWB, and only one was found there, on 13 August (JGJ).

**American Golden-Plover:** Usually far less numerous in fall than in spring, and rarer westward, this fall saw good numbers statewide, especially of juveniles, which move through the state later than adults. The best count of juveniles tallied 21 at LM on 12 October (SJD); but the 40 birds seen in the east RWB on 13 October (JGJ) were probably juveniles also, as may have been the 26 identified at LM on 12 October (SJD). Few adults appear in fall; a molting adult found at HCR on 13 August (SJD) represents only the 10th July-August record. The only other adults reported were observed at LM: one on 11 September, another on 21 September, and 5 on 12 October (SJD).

**Semipalmated Plover:** One of two spotted at Pawnee L on 14 October (LE) remained there until 16 October (JG), a rather late date. Also rather late for an adult was one seen at FL on 14 October (JGJ). Numbers are lower in fall, and so counts of 10 in the RWB on 15 August (DM) and at LM on 11 October (SJD) are of interest.

**Piping Plover:** The 19 reported at LM on 7 August (SJD) were presumably part of the local breeding population rather than migrants. The few reports came from LM (SJD) and Cedar Co (SV), both breeding locations.

**Killdeer:** These birds have favored fall staging areas. High counts suggest these locations: 329 were reported at Memphis Lakes, Saunders Co, on 8 October (JGJ); 280 were tallied at LM on 12 October (SJD); and 205 were counted at Pawnee L on 14 October (LE). These dates also indicate a strong

mid-October peak of migration. A few stragglers remained into late November, with 3 found in Lancaster Co on 26 November (LE).

**Black-necked Stilt:** A juvenile was spotted at the west end of LM between 6 August and 11 September, joined by an adult on 21 August (SJD); these were probably part of the family group seen there during summer (SJD). No others were reported. There are only 5 Nebraska records after July; this sighting represents the 2nd latest.

**American Avocet:** The best count was a very good 116 tallied at LM on 12 October (SJD), and the last 2 there were seen on 2 November (SJD). The latest report overall was of one spotted at Pawnee L on 4 November (LE), a rather late date. The 40 found swimming in the middle of Stagecoach L, Lancaster Co, on 15 October (KP) was a strange sight. There was only one other eastern report, in Cedar Co on 26 October (SV).

**Greater Yellowlegs:** Routine reports.

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** Less often reported in November than Greater Yellowlegs, one was identified at LM on 1 November (SJD). The 614 seen at LM on 7 September (SJD) was a record fall count.

**Solitary Sandpiper:** Good counts reached 27 at LM on 7 August (SJD) and 22 in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ).

**Willet:** Much less numerous in fall than in spring, the 8 tallied at L Alice on 5 August (SJD) represent a good count. Rare in the east in fall, the only report there was of one found in Lancaster Co on 6 August (LE). There are only about 20 records for September, so the singles identified at LM on 8 September (SJD) and in western Banner Co at the Ponderosa Hog Farm ponds on 1 September (WRS) were of interest.

**Spotted Sandpiper:** A good count was the 28 spotted at L Ogallala on 22 August (SJD), as was the 15 seen on sandbars near Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 5 August (LR, RH).

**Upland Sandpiper:** A record fall count was the 68 discovered in the east RWB on 13 August, with 49 of them in one hayfield (JGJ). The last was one reported in southeastern Dodge Co on 23 September (DP, JP).

**Long-billed Curlew:** The 3 spotted at L Alice on 3 September (SJD, JF) represented only the 5th record for September for the species.

**Hudsonian Godwit:** This species is very rare in fall in the interior United States. The juvenile identified at LM on 22 August (SJD; details) signified only Nebraska's 2nd documented fall record. The first was also a juvenile, spotted last year on 30 August in the east RWB (JGJ).

**Marbled Godwit:** Very rare east of the Panhandle in fall, the 8 seen at the west end of HCR on 16 September (JGJ) represented only the 14th such record. A good count was the peak of 12 reached at LM on 9 September; sightings there occurred in the period between 7 August and 10 September (SJD, LR, RH, IS).

**Ruddy Turnstone:** An alternate-plumaged adult spotted at LM on 22 August (SJD; details) and 2 juveniles found there on 10 September (SJD; details) provided only the 11th and 12th Nebraska fall records. This species is a casual fall migrant in the state.

**Red Knot:** A juvenile was found at LM 7 on September (SJD; details) and a group of 4 juveniles with a molting adult was seen there by the passengers on a "pelagic" trip on LM the next day (SJD; details). These represented only the 13th and 14th fall records for the state of this casual migrant.

**Sanderling:** Excellent numbers were tallied at LM, peaking at 108 on 21 September (SJD). A new late date for fall was set by a juvenile identified at LM on 14 November, and 3 juveniles were found there on 1 November (SJD); there are fewer than 10 reports for November.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper:** Late dates in fall are clouded by possible confusion with the Western Sandpiper, generally a later migrant than the Semipalmated. This fall rather late dates reported by experienced observers included one located in the east RWB on 1 October (JGJ); one found at Pawnee L on 7 October (LE), likely the same bird seen there on 23 September (WRS); and 3 identified at LM on 12 October (SJD). The latest date in the literature is 25 October, but it is undocumented.

**Western Sandpiper:** This year was a very poor for this species, usually more common in fall than in spring in Nebraska. The only ones reported were seen by experienced observers who counted thousands of shorebirds during this fall period and came up with a total of only 8 Western Sandpipers. At LM, 3 molting adults were seen on 12 August, and single juveniles were spotted on 8 and on 21 September (SJD). In the east RWB, 2 juveniles were seen on 13 August and another on 26 August (JGJ).

**Least Sandpiper:** The best count was the 182 found at LM on 14 October (SJD, JF). Rather late were the 3 observed in the east RWB on 5 November (JGJ).

**Baird's Sandpiper:** The best count was a 3rd-best ever 4,109 at LM on 22 August (SJD). The west end of LM is a staging area for this species. Other good counts reached 1,900 at Swanson Res on 12 August (SJD) and 1,500 at HCR on 13 August (SJD). By contrast, numbers drop off remarkably eastward; the high in the east RWB, for instance, totaled 12 (!) on 13 August (JGJ), admittedly a poor fall for shorebirds there due to dry conditions. Rather late were one identified at Pawnee L on 10 November (LE) and a juvenile seen at LM on 26 November (SJD). The latter was surprisingly only the 4th-latest on record; there are 3 December records.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** In contrast with Baird's Sandpiper, this species is more numerous eastward; the peak in the east RWB hit 474 on 13 August (JGJ), a record fall count, while at LM, 117 were counted on 22 August (SJD). In the fall this species is uncommon in the west, but in spring it is rare there; several were reported from various Panhandle locations (SJD, JF). Rather late were 4 spotted in the east RWB on 5 November (JGJ).

**Dunlin:** This species is unusual among its congeners in that adults do not migrate before juveniles; all migrate after molting. The first to arrive was one located in the east RWB on 21 October (JGJ), about as expected. Good numbers for fall in the western part of the state included the 1-9 found at LM between 25 October and 4 November, peaking at 9 on 1 November (SJD).



These dates are normal for this species, a rather late migrant. Dates in the east RWB were from 21 October to 4 November (JGJ).

**Stilt Sandpiper:** This species came in numbers and stayed late, especially at LM. The peak of 748 seen at LM on 21 September (SJD) established a record fall count. Juveniles arrive in mid-August; the first mentioned were a "very fresh" one spotted in the east RWB on 20 August (JGJ) and another observed near Kenesaw, Adams Co, on 27 August (LR, RH). New record late dates, but only by a day or two, were set by one record late for the RWB on 28 October (JGJ), and another record late for the state at LM on 2 November; as many as 5 were found there the day before (SJD).

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** The 97 spotted in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ) established a record count for fall. This species becomes rarer the farther east or west of the east RWB one travels. Thus, it is rarest in western Nebraska, where this fall 4 adults were seen at LM on 7 August (SJD); and a juvenile was identified there on 22 August (SJD). The two located at Calamus Res on 29 September (JGJ) and the one noted at Memphis Lakes, Saunders Co, on 1 October (JGJ) were late, the latter record late. An excellent easterly count reached 24 at a sod farm in Cass Co just north of the Platte River on 3 September (CNK).

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** There are few reports in late July to early August when adults move through. This fall there was one: a single found in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ). The other reports were of juveniles, which migrate through late August to September: 3 were seen in the east RWB on 20 August (JGJ); a single was spotted rather far west at LM on 22 August (SJD; details), and another was identified in the east RWB on 26 August (JGJ). One was also reported on 1 October without details; there are no documented records later than 10 September.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** A record fall count hit 831 at LM on 12 October (SJD). Also a good count (3rd highest for fall) was 410 at FL on 14 October (JGJ). Two juveniles were found at Pawnee L on 23 September (WRS; details); most juveniles arrive in late September, but actual data are scarce.

**Common Snipe:** The 72 observed in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ) represented a near-record fall count (needed two more). Migrants appear in mid-August, as indicated by birds found at sites where breeding was unlikely to have occurred. Such reports, all on 13 August, included 7 seen at Kenesaw Basin, Adams Co (LR, RH); 10 found in the east RWB (JGJ); and one spotted at Conestoga L, Lancaster Co (LE).

**American Woodcock:** None reported.

**Wilson's Phalarope:** Fewer than usual were reported, with the best count reaching an historically mediocre 187 at LM on 9 September (SJD).

**Red-necked Phalarope:** The 22 seen at LM on 9 September (SJD) denoted a good fall count; numbers are somewhat lower in fall. The three observed at BOL (in the middle of the lake, preparing for a pelagic winter) on 13 October (JGJ) were rather late, as were the two first basic-plumaged birds found at LM on 12 October (SJD).

**Pomarine Jaeger:** The two "pelagic" trips on LM organized by Admiral Stephen J. Dinsmore (Coastguard-certified, no less!) for the purpose of finding jaegers at the NOU Fall Meeting were successful. On 8 September two juveniles were found (SJD, WRS, AB, JF; photos), one dark and one intermediate. On 10 September, the same crew spotted a juvenile and another bird not as well seen but probably also a Pomarine; these were likely the same birds observed on 8 September. These sightings together provide the 9th documented fall record, and one of the earlier sightings of juveniles. There are 2 early records of adults (June and August), and juveniles have occurred between September and December.

**Parasitic Jaeger:** A juvenile was seen closely at HCR on 16 September (JGJ; details). This sighting represented the 3rd documented record; the others occurred in late August and early October.

**Long-tailed Jaeger:** Completing the jaeger sweep was an intermediate morph juvenile identified at L Minatare on 11 September (SJD; photos). This bird was well-studied, and is the 3rd documented record; the others took place on 1 September and 3 October.

**Franklin's Gull:** The count of 27,000 (counted every one!) at HCR on 16 September (JGJ) would seem like a record, but the top fall count is 85,000 tallied at Sutherland Res in 1996. The 20,000 found at Gavin's Point Dam on 1 October (JW) also denoted an excellent count.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** An excellent count reached 502 in Lancaster Co on 1 September (LE). By contrast, a surprising zero was tallied at HCR (GH, WH).

**Ring-billed Gull:** The 768 seen at LM as early as 6 August (SJD) were of interest; numbers do not usually reach that level until well into September. The 2,200 totaled at L Minatare on 22 October (SJD, JF) was a good count.

**California Gull:** A normal fall for this species saw numbers at LM build from 40 on 7 August to 103 on 12 October, and then decline somewhat to 81 on 26 November (SJD). The only report away from LM was of 3 spotted at Sutherland Res between 14 October and 19 November (SJD, JF).

**Herring Gull:** The four birds seen at LM on 7 August (SJD) provided one of the fewer than 20 records prior to mid-September for this species, which is very rare in mid-summer in Nebraska. Migrants are generally not apparent until mid-September, and those are usually immatures. Rather early for an adult was one identified at Calamus Res on 29 September (JGJ). Overall, few were reported, with the best count totaling 21 in Lancaster Co on 26 November (LE).

**Thayer's Gull:** Interestingly, among the earliest fall records of this species, adults predominate, in contrast to the situation for Herring Gulls. This fall, single adults were observed at Sutherland Res and L Ogallala on 1 November (SJD, JF), the 2nd-earliest documented fall records after another adult found at L Ogallala on 4 October 1997. An adult was found at L Minatare on 12 and on 14 November (SJD). An adult was also spotted at Sutherland Res on 19 November (SJD), possibly the same bird as the one reported there on November 1 (noted earlier). For the period, no immatures were reported (are they now too ordinary?).



**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Until this fall, there were only 7 fall records, all of immatures, with most originating from eastern reservoirs. Now, there are 11 fall records, 2 of adults and 4 from western reservoirs! The 4 birds reported this fall included a 4th basic bird spotted at LM on 10 September (SJD), the 2nd earliest for fall and presumably the same bird as the one found there from 15 October (WRS) through 2 November (SJD); a worn 3rd alternate seen at L Minatare on 11 and 27 September and on 11 October (SJD, photos); a first basic noted at L Minatare on 14 November (SJD); and an adult seen at Sutherland Res on 19 November (SJD, JF). There are now about 25 records in all for the state.

**Glaucous Gull:** The earliest ever (by 3 days) was a first basic spotted at L Minatare on 14 November (SJD), followed closely by another first basic located at Sutherland Res on 19 November (SJD, JF). The only other report was of a "pure white" immature found at HCR on 21 November (GH, WH), also rather early.

**Sabine's Gull:** At least 10, all juveniles, were reported. The first was one observed at LM on 8 September (SJD), and the last was observed rather late at HCR on 14 October (JGJ). Easterly reports are far fewer than those from western reservoirs; 1-2 were observed at Gavin's Point Dam between 26 September and 3 October (MB, JJ, JW, SV).

**Black-legged Kittiwake:** The only report was of a first basic bird identified in Omaha at Standing Bear L from 14 to 21 November (NR, m.ob.)

**Caspian Tern:** The best count was 5 at HCR on 6 August (GH, WH).

**Common Tern:** This species was "unusually abundant" this fall (SJD). The 23 found at LM on 8 September, consisting of 8 molting adults and 15 juveniles (SJD) represented a record fall count. Rather late were a juvenile/first basic bird spotted at Pawnee L on 13 October (JGJ) and a first basic bird seen at Sutherland Res on 14 October (SJD, JF).

**Arctic Tern:** A first documented state record was a molting adult photographed at L Minatare on 20 September (SJD; photos). This state first is probably overdue; the only prior reports are of a sighting with minimal details in December 1998 at Gavin's Point Dam, a very late date for any *Sterna* tern, and of a questionable 1866 sighting by Aughey.

**Forster's Tern:** The best count reached 42 at BOL on 6 August (LE).

**Least Tern:** Routine reports.

**Black Tern:** An excellent count was 334 found at LM on 22 August (SJD).

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** The "colony" at Elmwood continues; 5 juveniles with the 3 adults were spotted there on 27 August (GW fide NR; KP); and 5 birds remained there on 16 November (B). The male seen displaying in late July at the north end of Kingsley Dam, LM, was observed there again on 22 August (SJD). Three birds identified at Kimball, Kimball Co, on 22 August (TLE fide SJD; details) were at a new location. A small group of 3 was seen at Sutton, Clay Co, between 6 August and 13 October; the one bird found on a nest between 6 August and 3 September (JGJ) provided the 4th nesting record and the 14th record overall for the species in Nebraska. One appeared

briefly under a feeder in Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 9 November, but has not been seen again (AK).

Ringed Turtle-Dove: A individual of this artificial "species" was identified at Stuhr Park, Lincoln, for a few months prior to 28 August (KP). It's provenance was unknown, but its calls were identical to the calls of Ringed Turtle-Doves in the Lincoln Children's Zoo (KP). There are occasional reports in towns and cities. Observers of such birds should be careful these days to eliminate the possibility of Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Mourning Dove: Large flocks form in late summer; an excellent count totaled 1,000+ going to roost in Omaha on 24 August (BF).

Black-billed Cuckoo: Somewhat alarming, only two were reported: singles were seen in Dixon Co on 3 August (JJ) and at ADF on 27 August (LF, CF).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: The one spotted along Steamboat Trace in southeastern Otoe Co on 21 October (KP) was rather late. Uncommon in the west, one was observed at Ash Hollow SHP on 10 September (AB, JF).

Barn Owl: The six found at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD) represented a good count. Rather rare in the east, a freshly dead bird found in Seward on 28 September was only the observer's (JG) first there in 18 years; and the one spotted at Lange Basin, Clay Co, on 1 October was the observer's (JGJ) first in a region he has covered closely for years. The bird spotted at Oliver Res on 11 October (SJD) was rather late; most depart by mid-October.

Eastern Screech-Owl: The one seen at CLNWR on 21 September was the expected gray morph (SJD); red morph birds become rare towards the northwest.

Great Horned Owl: Routine reports.

Burrowing Owl: A record fall count was the 22 tallied in McPherson Co on 7 September (LR, RH).

Barred Owl: Routine reports.

Long-eared Owl: None was reported; fall arrival is usually in late October.

Short-eared Owl: The one found near Gibbon on 17 August (LR, RH) may have been nesting; suitable grassland is present in the area. There are very few nesting reports this century, but many summer reports.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: Rarely reported, this fall there were 4 reports. The one found near death in a Gering driveway in late August (fide AK) died and is now in a freezer, we hope destined for the curatorial hands of Tom Labedz. It is generally thought that this species occurs sparingly on the Pine Ridge (Rosche), but there is little recent evidence, and none for breeding there. Those of us who habitually check isolated cedars near bodies of water for this species regularly are frustrated in the attempt; not so one Stephen J. Dinsmore, who has written an article on finding these birds in central Iowa and used his skills to locate single saw-whets both near Kingsley Dam, LM, on 14 November (SJD; photos) and at Ash Hollow SHP on 19 November (SJD, JF; photos). Ruth Green did it the easy way; she netted an adult in her Bellevue yard on 28 October (RG), a date indicative of the onset of fall movement.

Common Nighthawk: A flyover of about 200 near Gibbon on 20 August (LR, RH) provided a good count. Rather late were the 2 spotted over Omaha on 20 October (BP, LP) and as was the one seen over Alma on 18 October (GH, WH).

Common Poorwill: Routine reports.

Chuck-will's-widow: The small population near Wolf L, northern Saunders Co, continues; 3 were heard there on 12 August and another on 18 August (TH). The latter date is the latest for Nebraska; these birds are difficult to detect after singing (usually!) ceases in late July.

Whip-poor-will: Migrants may occur somewhat to the west of the summer range in migration; singles were flushed and seen in flight on 23 and on 24 September at Wilderness Park, Lincoln (LE). The latter date is the 2nd-latest on record, just prior to a 2 October 1982 record for Boone Co.

Chimney Swift: The three seen at Gering on 18 September (AK) were rather late for the west; departure is almost a month earlier there than in the east.

White-throated Swift: A good count was the 39 at Scotts Bluff NM on 20 September (SJD).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: Somewhat westerly were an immature found on 8 August and an adult seen on 24 August at Alma, Harlan Co, (GH, WH). Rather late was one observed in Bellevue on 3 October (BP, LP). Migration seemed a little late in general this fall; observers considered sightings on 17 September near Ames (DP, JP) and on 23 September near Wakefield, Dixon Co, (JJ) significantly late. Strikingly captured on video was a *leucistic* individual spotted near Wakefield on 7 August (JJ); the bird had a white tail tipped in black and a full white collar. An excellent count reached 15 at FF on 1 September (B).

Broad-tailed Hummingbird: None reported.

Rufous Hummingbird: A female was spotted at Bushnell, Kimball Co, on 5 August and at least 2 females were seen at Kimball between 5 and 6 August (SJD). Photos were provided of an adult female and an immature at the feeders of Deanna McArtor near Gretna during September (fide RG). This sighting represented about the 6th record in the east, all but one from September or later.

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Lewis's Woodpecker: Three were seen in the area of the Soldier Creek trailhead at Fort Robinson SP between 4 and 5 August (JWH), the only sighting reported for the species. Strangely, there are no July records, and this report becomes the earliest for fall. The species is most often reported in August.

Red-headed Woodpecker: The one noted at LM on 27 September (SJD) was rather late for the westerly location.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Following a June sighting as far west as McGrew, Scotts Bluff Co, another sighting, possibly of the same bird, was made there on 6 November (AK); so far no more than one bird has been

reported there at any one time. Also somewhat west of the current range was one found in eastern Garden Co on 2 November (SJD).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Only 5 were reported: immatures seen in Lincoln on 30 September and on 1 October (LE); singles spotted at ADF on 1 and on 9 October (LF, CF); and a juvenile discovered near Gibbon on 21 October (LR, RH). Because juvenile Red-naped Sapsuckers molt from juvenal to first basic plumage prior to migration, a fall migrant sapsucker away from a breeding area in fall and still in juvenal plumage can fairly safely be considered to be a Yellow-bellied.

Red-naped Sapsucker: There were 2 reports: one was seen at Oliver Res on 1 October (GC, BC), and an adult male was observed at L Ogallala from 26 October to 2 November (SJD; photos). The latter represents the easternmost and latest of the 5 documented fall records for the state.

Downy Woodpecker: Western birds tend to have black "shoulders" (greater and median coverts), while eastern birds have prominent white edgings to these coverts, giving the appearance of white "shoulders" or "epaulets." However, reality in Nebraska is that there is much introgression, with both types fairly common at the "wrong" end of the state. At Wilderness Park, Lincoln, on 23 September, one Downy had the expected white shoulders, but 4 others had minimal white coverts and thus essentially black shoulders (WRS).

Hairy Woodpecker: This species is far more common in the east than in the west, especially in summer, and so the one observed at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS) was unexpected. This patchy distribution is clearly habitat-driven; Hairys require mature forest for breeding.

Northern Flicker: The first "red-shafted" birds found eastward were singles spotted near Gibbon on 24 September (LR, RH) and at Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co, on 27 September (KP), rather early. "Red-shafted" flickers were numerous in the Panhandle; of 73 flickers (a record fall count) tallied at LM on 12 October, 47 were "red-shafted," 9 "yellow-shafted," and 17 intermediate (SJD). A similar count made at Oliver Res on 11 October yielded 49 flickers, including 41 "red-shafted," 2 "yellow-shafted," and 6 intermediate (SJD).

Pileated Woodpecker: The only report was from FF, where 2 were found on 6 October (B).

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Some of the earliest fall records originate in the Panhandle, where the species is a rare migrant; 4 were reported in Sioux Co on 4 August (JWH), rather early. Also in the Panhandle, one was seen at Bushnell Cem on 2 September (JG, MB). Good counts reached 4 at the Geneva Cem on 26 August, the observer's first for the east RWB (JGJ), and 4 in FF on 4 September (BP, LP).

Western Wood-Pewee: Excellent counts totaled 26 in Sioux Co on 4 August (LWH), and 15 at Oliver Res on 2 September (JG). Rather late was the one found south of Gering on 25 September (AK); there are only about 4 later dates.

**Eastern Wood-Pewee:** A good count reached 12+ at Ponca SP on 20 August (JJ). Possibly the only documented record of this species for the Panhandle was the one netted, measured, and photographed at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS); it had an entirely bright yellow underbill and a light breastband with no vest effect.

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:** The only report of this casual fall migrant was of one found at Schramm SP on 30 August, which called vigorously for a few minutes (WRS).

**Willow Flycatcher:** Three were identified as "Willow/Alder" Flycatchers at Oliver Res on 2 September (JG). A good count was 5 at Twin Lakes, Seward Co, on 13 August (MO).

**Least Flycatcher:** Routine reports.

**Hammond's Flycatcher:** As observers learn to identify these rather distinctive (in fall) flycatchers, records are increasing, suggesting that Hammond's may be a rare but regular fall migrant through the Panhandle. The 10 records to date occur in the period from 31 August to 21 September. About 6 were reported this fall: 1 to 3 seen at Oliver Res between 31 August and 2 September (SJD, WRS, JG, MB); one identified at West Lawn Cem, Gering, on 3 September (SJD, JF); and one spotted at Ash Hollow SHP on 11 September (SJD). All the sightings were well described.

**Dusky Flycatcher:** Following the report of one spotted in late July at Wellfleet, Lincoln Co, (see Summer Report), mist-netting at Oliver Res provided three confirmed records for this species, suggesting, as with Hammond's, that it is a regular fall migrant in the Panhandle. Like the Hammond's, the Dusky has a distinctive bill which, considered with other structural features, helps in identification. The first confirmed state record was one netted, measured, and photographed at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS). Another was netted there on 7 September (SJD, BP, LP; photographs) and a third on 20 September (SJD; photographs). Within the same period, between 31 August and 20 September, there were 3 more sight records: a "probable" noted at Oliver Res on 2 and 3 September (SJD, JG); one heard calling at Mud Springs SHP, Morrill Co (SJD; details); and one observed at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 20 September (SJD, HKH; details).

**Cordilleran Flycatcher:** None was reported; fall migration for this species is poorly documented.

**Eastern Phoebe:** Singles were seen rather late at Wolf L, Saunders Co, on 22 October (TH) and, unusually late in the west, at L Ogallala on 25 October (SJD). The 4 records later than these occurred in the east, through 17 November.

**Say's Phoebe:** It was exciting finally to see, after 4 years, two birds (rather than just one) at the site 4 miles west and 5.5 miles north of Wakefield, Dixon Co, (JJ); nesting has not yet been noted at this site. The only other easterly reports included a single found at HCR on 16 September (JGJ), and two identified in McPherson Co on 7 September (LR, RH); this species is only casual away from the Panhandle in fall. The single bird



spotted in Loup Co on 30 September (MB) was rather late and also unexpected that far east in fall. There are only 5 later records, all in October.

**Ash-throated Flycatcher:** There is only one documented record for the state, one seen near Chadron on 29 August 1987 (Rosche). Thus, tantalizing was the report from Sowbelly Canyon of a bird spotted on 20 July 2000 (see Summer Report) and, this fall, one was observed at Riverside Park, Scottsbluff on 4 September (AK). The latter report, while plausible, was not accepted by the NOURC. Identification requires familiarity with calls and a good look at the underparts and distribution of rufous in the tail. Great Crested Flycatchers occur in the northwest, and so observers should carefully study any *Myiarchus* flycatchers in that area.

**Great Crested Flycatcher:** Only the 7th and 8th fall Panhandle records away from the Pine Ridge were the singles observed at Ash Hollow SHP on 10 September (JF) and at the western end of LM (but not at Ash Hollow) on the same day (LR, RH).

**Cassin's Kingbird:** A good count totaled 16 in Long Canyon, Banner Co, on 1 September, including a recently fledged juvenile (WRS).

**Western Kingbird:** The 188 tallied around LM on 22 August (SJD) represents a record fall count.

**Eastern Kingbird:** Routine reports.

**Northern Shrike:** Arrival was on time, with the first 3 found in Sioux and Dawes Cos on 22 October (SJD). Two had reached the extreme south near Orleans, Harlan Co, on 15 November (GH, WH).

**Loggerhead Shrike:** Three were reported in November, all, as expected, in the southeast: one found in Dodge Co on 15 November (DP, JP); one spotted in Lancaster Co on 26 November (LE); and one noted in Otoe Co on 30 November (LE).

**White-eyed Vireo:** Rather amazing was the one seen at Cedar Point Biological Station, Keith Co, on 25 October (SJD; details). This sighting represents the only fall record for the species away from the east and is one of only about 6 fall reports, most undocumented, since the 1970s. Interestingly, there are 3 fall records from the eastern Colorado plains, two in November (*Birds of Colorado*, 1992).

**Bell's Vireo:** One was reported from Indian Cave SP, Nemaha/Richardson Cos, on the very late date of 17 October (LF, CF; no details). There are only 3 other October reports, none documented.

**Yellow-throated Vireo:** The one sighted in southwestern Dixon Co on 26 September (JJ) was rather late.

**Plumbeous Vireo:** Until the recent split of the "Solitary" Vireo complex, there were few reports of Plumbeous Vireo during migration. This fall, singles were reported between 26 August and 12 September east to Ash Hollow SHP (SJD, NR, JF).

**Cassin's Vireo:** This species is clearly a regular fall migrant in the Panhandle; the 25 or so records that have accumulated mainly since 1997 occur in the short period between 31 August and 21 September, with one earlier date of 15 August. Cassin's Vireo appears to be a somewhat earlier

fall migrant than the Blue-headed Vireo (see the following report). This fall, Cassin's Vireos occurred in excellent numbers at Oliver Res, where several were netted and photographed (SJD). Individuals were also observed from 26 August at Oliver Res (SJD) through 11 September at Ash Hollow SHP (SJD), with an excellent high count of 8 tallied at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS). Additional good counts included 5 spotted at Oliver Res on 7 September (SJD, BP, LP) and on 2 September (JG). Farthest east were the singles found at Ash Hollow SHP between 9 and 11 September (SJD, WRS, JF, LR, RH).

Blue-headed Vireo: The one observed at Boyer Chute NWR on 21 October (JT, BP, LP) was rather late; but a hatching-year bird netted and banded at Bellevue on 2 November (RG) represents one of the latest records for fall, and only the 4th November record. The one spotted at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 20 September (SJD, HKH; details) denotes only the 2nd fall Panhandle record; the other occurred on 27 September 1998 at Gering (SJD); these two records are 9 and 16 days later than the last Cassin's Vireo reported this fall and are also in line with Colorado data on migration timing of the two species.

Warbling Vireo: The western subspecies *brewsteri* breeds in the Panhandle; 5 of the 7 Warbling Vireos netted at Oliver Res on 31 August were *brewsteri* (SJD, WRS). Western birds are greener-backed than eastern *gilvus*, the latter having head and back evenly gray. At Ash Hollow SHP on 10 September, one of 3 Warbling Vireos seen was a *gilvus*; the others were *brewsteri* (JF). *Brewsteri* leaves in fall by mid-September; the Ash Hollow SHP sighting was therefore rather late.

Philadelphia Vireo: The only reports came from ADF, where two were seen on 4 September and where singles were spotted on 6 and again on 25 September (LF, CF).

Red-eyed Vireo: Routine reports.

Blue Jay: An excellent fall count totaled 76 at ADF on 30 September (LF, CF). The 3 highest counts for fall occur in the period between 29 September and 1 October.

Pinyon Jay: The only report was of 5 noted near Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 8 November (AK).

Black-billed Magpie: An excellent count was 50+ found in a newly cut alfalfa field near Gibbon, Buffalo Co, on 31 August (LR, RH). Interestingly, the 3 highest fall counts take place in the short period between 23 August and 2 September, suggesting post-breeding aggregations which apparently break up as the winter ensues. Easterly reports included singles identified in southeastern Dodge Co on 27 October and 20 November (DP, JP); in Knox Co on 24 November (BP, LP); in Cedar Co south of Gavin's Point Dam on 24 November (JJ); in northeastern Cedar Co also on 24 November (JJ); and in Wayne Co on 21 October (MB). These reports all originate within but at the east edge of the current breeding range. Mark Brogie stated that this species has "very much decreased in recent years in Knox Co."

American Crow: A high count for the northwest was the 400 tallied near Chadron SP on 22 October (SJD, JF); such large counts are unusual in that



part of the state. Peak migration takes place from October through November. A large roost discovered at LM contained 66 crows on 21 August (SJD).

Horned Lark: The best counts were the "several thousand" with an equal number of Lapland Longspurs tallied in Knox Co on 12 November (MB) and the 3,000 found southwest of Elmwood, Cass Co, on 16 November (B).

Purple Martin: Routine reports.

Tree Swallow: The 400 to 450 totaled at BOL between 23 and 24 September established a record fall count (WRS, LE); 95% were thought to be juveniles (WRS). Close to a record was the count of 400 made at a marsh in Arthur Co on 8 September (LR, RH).

Violet-green Swallow: None was reported; departure occurs in mid-August.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow: A record fall count reached 550 in northeastern Otoe Co on 6 August (LF, CF). The twenty reported near Offutt Base L on 7 October (BP, LP were rather late).

Bank Swallow: Routine reports.

Cliff Swallow: A record fall count totaled 30,000 near Kenesaw, Adams Co, on 13 August (LR, RH). The large concentrations that occur in fall in the RWB region are spectacular; estimates are indeed difficult to make!

Barn Swallow: A record fall count (the year of the swallow?) reached 3,600 at LM on 21 September (SJD). Somewhat late was a nest with young found at Brownville on 16 August (MW); a 2nd brood hatched rather late near Gibbon the day before (LR, RH). There are a few later records of nesting and even of eggs.

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports, if a report of zero found in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ) could be considered routine!

Tufted Titmouse: Only the 3rd record for Seward Co, all by the same observer over an 18-year period (JG), was one identified at a feeder in Seward on 18 October. The one that hit a window at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on 31 October signified the 7th specimen record for Lancaster Co (Emily Thaden fide TEL). Lancaster Co is at the western edge of the regular range, but the Tufted Titmouse is not particularly common there.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Winter visitors away from breeding areas may appear as early as the first week in August; one was spotted at Fort Atkinson SP, Washington Co, during the first week of August (JGr), and another was found at Oliver Res on 7 August (SJD). Breeding is not known to occur at either location. A "minor irruption" took place in western Nebraska this fall, with a total of 125 seen, including 8 identified at L Ogallala on 2 November (SJD).

White-breasted Nuthatch: A single seen at McGrew on 7 August (AK) was out-of-place, whether it was of either the western or eastern subspecies; in the last few summers, however, there have been scattered reports along the western North Platte Valley. Whether breeding occurs in the North Platte Valley west of Keith Co is conjectural at present; while the presence of 2 eastern race birds at Ash Hollow SHP on 10 September,

identified by calls (JF), is suggestive of breeding, the sightings also could indicate fall movement. The western race, *nelsoni*, breeds in Ponderosa Pine habitat on the Pine Ridge; the presence of one at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 20 September (SJD) suggests that fall movement by this race may begin rather early. Another western race bird was identified at Little L Alice on 12 November (SJD). The White-breasted Nuthatch reported at Riverside Park, Scottsbluff, on 30 September (AK) was not identified to subspecies.

**Pygmy Nuthatch:** Up to 6 (on 1 September) were found at Wildcat Hills NC during August and early September (WRS, SJD, AK), a regular location; but most unexpected was the one carefully observed and heard at Ash Hollow SHP on 25 October (SJD). This report is only the 3rd one of this species away from Ponderosa Pine habitat.

**Brown Creeper:** A record-tying fall count was 7 seen at Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City, on 5 November (WRS). This species is less common in the west, and so good counts included the 4 found at L Ogallala on both 14 and 26 November (SJD) and the 3 spotted at Oliver Res on 25 October (SJD).

**Rock Wren:** There were a couple of easterly reports: one spent from 19 to 21 September in a northern Lancaster Co yard (JD) and another ("Rocky"!!) was observed in a southeastern Dodge Co "yard" (actually, farm) on 22 September (DP, JP). These represent the 6th and 7th fall records away from the breeding range in the east. A record fall count totaled 17 at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, (not really a yard, either) on 20 September (SJD, HKH).

**Carolina Wren:** Brave individuals continued to push the range limits north and west, although the coming winter weather may curtail such activity. Most surprising was one found singing at LM on 6 August (SJD; details); there are two Panhandle records from the 1950s. Other westerly reports this late summer and fall included one spotted in southwestern Dixon Co on 26 August (JJ); one observed singing at Geneva Cem on 20 August (JGJ); and two identified at McMurtrey Marsh, Clay Co, on 26 August (JGJ). The latter 3 reports define the current western edge of the summer range.

**Bewick's Wren:** The only report of this casual spring and summer visitor was of one seen at Lange Basin, Clay Co, on 20 August (JGJ; details). Although its plumage was somewhat bedraggled, its behavior was carefully studied (JGJ).

**House Wren:** The one at identified Holmes L, Lincoln, on 22 October (LE) was rather late; a good count for fall was 9 made at ADF on 17 September (LF, CF).

**Winter Wren:** Most of the several reports were confined as expected to the Missouri Valley; but recent years have shown that a few occur around L Ogallala in fall and attempt to overwinter. This fall, singles were found there on 25 October and on 2 November (SJD); interestingly the 25 October bird was a *hiemalis*, the eastern race (SJD). The occurrence of western interior *salebrosus* (formerly included within *pacificus*) in Nebraska is based on a single sight record; two specimens from eastern Colorado were found to be *hiemalis* by Allan Phillips.

**Sedge Wren:** The one spotted at Wehrspann L on 23 October (BP, LP) was rather late. There were numerous reports of singing birds in August west to Buffalo Co (LR, RH); most such birds are apparently looking for last-minute breeding opportunities, but there are few reports of nesting during this period. An exception was a nest found under construction at Nine-Mile Prairie, Lancaster Co, on 14 August (PB). Native prairie is a preferred habitat; two were identified singing in planted native grass at Standing Bear L, Omaha, on 6 August (NR).

**Marsh Wren:** Reports from Kenesaw Basin, Adams Co, on 6 and 13 August (LR, RH), from the east RWB on 20 August (JGJ), and from FL on 3 September (LR,RH) are indicative of local breeding populations, few of which occur south of the Platte Valley.

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** A single observed at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD) was rather early. The first in the east was one seen at Bellevue on 5 October (BL, LP). And a good count reached 17 at L Ogallala on 26 November (SJD).

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** There is about a month's lag between the appearance in the northwest and the southeast of this species in fall. About on time for the northwest was one identified at Bushnell Cem on 31 August (SJD, WRS), but the one found in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ) was rather early. None was reported farther east until singles were observed in Lancaster Co on 23 September (WRS, LE). The one spotted at Sutherland Res on 1 November (SJD) was rather late for that westerly location.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** This species continues to increase in numbers and range in the southwestern Panhandle. The best counts totaled 16 on 5 August (SJD) and 14 on 1 September (WRS) along Stage Hill Road in the Wildcat Hills, where breeding almost certainly occurs. Reports of singles occurred north and east to Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co, on 1 September (WRS); West Lawn Cem, Gering, on 26 August (SJD); and Oliver Res, where 4 were seen from 2 to 3 September (SJD, JF) and where one was spotted on 7 September (SJD, BP, LP). Rather late and somewhat out-of-range were singles identified at L Ogallala on 10 September (JF, AB) and at Sandpiper Basin, Clay Co, 16 September (JGJ).

**Eastern Bluebird:** Most depart the west and north by late October; the four seen at Box Butte Res on 22 October (SJD, JF) were bringing up the rear. An excellent count reached 100+ in one flock observed in Knox Co on 15 October (MB).

**Mountain Bluebird:** None was reported east of LM before the end of the period; the 5 found at CCM on 19 November (SJD, JF) and 2 discovered at nearby Ash Hollow SHP on 24 November (LR, RH) were probably moving east in the Platte Valley to wintering areas.

**Townsend's Solitaire:** Considered "quite common" in western Nebraska this fall (SJD), the 2 to 3 seen at Oliver Res on 7 September (BP, LP, SJD) were the first to arrive. The only reports east of the LM area were of several observed at NNF, Halsey, between 21 and 26 November (RS, RG).

**Veery:** None reported.

**Swainson's Thrush:** The singles noted at Bellevue on 20 October (BP, LP; details) and Boyer Chute NWR on 21 October (JT) were rather late. A good count for fall was the 4 tallied at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 20 September (SJD, HKH).

**Hermit Thrush:** Observers are discovering that the grayish Rocky Mountain subspecies *auduboni* appears to be a regular fall migrant in the Panhandle, with arrival dates generally earlier than when eastern Hermit Thrushes appear in Nebraska. A total of about 16 was reported in the period from 3 September (SJD) through 15 October (WRS; details), east to CCM on 11 October (SJD). At Oliver Res, one was netted and photographed on 7 September (SJD), and as many as 6 were found there on 11 October (SJD). By contrast, the earliest report from the rest of the state, presumably of the eastern subspecies *faxoni*, occurred on 21 October (JGJ). Unusually far west was one identified as *faxoni* at L Ogallala on 26 October (SJD).

**Wood Thrush:** None reported.

**American Robin:** Routine reports.

**Varied Thrush:** One was spotted in an Alliance yard during December (Doug Thomas fide RG). There have been few reports in recent years.

**Gray Catbird:** The one observed at Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co, on 1 September (WRS) was rather late for the Panhandle; there are only 5 later dates.

**Northern Mockingbird:** An excellent count was 13 made in southwestern Kimball Co on 6 August; the observer thought 2 family groups were involved (SJD).

**Sage Thrasher:** At least 18 were reported from Kimball, Banner, and Scotts Bluff Cos in the period from 6 August (SJD) through 12 September (NR); and the best count totaled 6 in southwestern Kimball Co on 6 August (SJD).

**Brown Thrasher:** The one spotted at Oliver Res on 14 October (SJD, JF) was rather late for the Panhandle. The count of 8 made at ADF on 25 September (LF, CF) was 2nd best for fall.

**European Starling:** Routine reports.

**American Pipit:** The 744 totaled along the lightly vegetated exposed shoreline of LM on 12 October (SJD) established by far a record fall count. Another excellent count reached 100 in southeastern Dodge Co on 3 November (DP, JP). There were several rather late reports: at least one was found in Cedar Co from 17 to 18 November (SV); 5 were spotted at Crystal Cove L, Dakota Co, on 15 November (BFH); and one was noted at L Ogallala on 14 November (SJD).

**Sprague's Pipit:** None reported.

**Cedar Waxwing:** Routine reports.

**Tennessee Warbler:** Surprisingly, the only report was of one found in southwestern Dixon Co between 30 September and 1 October (JJ).

**Orange-crowned Warbler:** The 45 tallied at ADF on 26 September (LF, CF) established a record fall count. Although the yellowish Rocky Mountains

race *orestera* has not been documented in Nebraska, a very yellow bird seen in Clay Co on 2 September (JGJ) caught the observer's attention.

**Nashville Warbler:** There are 7 Panhandle reports for fall, at least two of which are of the distinctive western subspecies *ridgwayi*, which, unlike the eastern *ruficapilla*, has varying white on its belly and continually pumps its tail. A bird spotted at CCM on 14 October had extensive white on its underparts and was constantly pumping its tail (SJD, JF). Migration was protracted, with rather early reports of 20 August in the east RWB (JGJ) and of one banded at Bellevue on 23 August (RG), and a rather late report of 30 October at ADF (LF, CF). An excellent count totaled 20 in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ).

**Virginia's Warbler:** This species has only recently been noted in the state, all records to date in spring. This fall, however, 3 birds were found: an immature female spotted at Oliver Res on 26 and 27 August (SJD, JF; details); an adult female identified in southwestern Kimball Co on 27 August (JF; details); and an adult male seen at Oliver Res on 3 September (SJD, JF; details). These spring and fall migrants probably come from the recently-discovered population breeding in the Black Hills.

**Northern Parula:** None reported.

**Yellow Warbler:** Good counts reached 19 at Oliver Res on 26 August (SJD) and 12 in the east RWB on 16 September (JGJ).

**Chestnut-sided Warbler:** Surprisingly, the only reports were of singles observed in the observers' Bellevue yard on 4 and on 15 September (BP, LP).

**Magnolia Warbler:** None was reported, which is also surprising.

**Black-throated Blue Warbler:** This fall was outstanding for this species, with 6 birds reported. The two reports from the Panhandle bring the total to 11 from that area: a male spotted in Scotts Bluff Co on 1 October (Kathy Larsen fide SJD) and a male and a female noted at Oliver Res on 11 October (SJD). The others included a female seen at Neale Woods on 1 October (JB); a male that hit a window on 20 October (NR; salvaged to Univ Nebraska State Museum); and one identified near Schuyler, Colfax Co, on 20 October (RG).

**Yellow-rumped Warbler:** Birds of the Pine Ridge are western *auduboni*; they migrate earlier than eastern *coronata*; the 6 reports originated in Kimball and Banner Cos in the period between 22 August and 2 September (SJD, JF, WRS). All other reports were of presumed *coronata*. Rather late for the Panhandle was one seen at L Alice on 12 November (SJD); also rather late was one observed at L Ogallala on 26 November (SJD). A good count was 77 made in Washington and Douglas Cos on 8 October (WRS). Rather late were two found at Niobrara SP, Knox Co, on 23 November (MB).

**Black-throated Green Warbler:** Only two were reported: singles spotted at Lange Basin, Clay Co, on 2 September (JGJ) and in Bellevue on 4 September (BP, LP).

**Townsend's Warbler:** This fall was exceptional for this species; at his Barr L, CO, banding station, Tony Leukering banded 50, compared to his



previous fall high of 10. This abundance was reflected in Nebraska, with an incredible 53 reported. Reports occurred in the period between 22 August and 21 September, peaking at 10 found in the Panhandle on 7 September (SJD), and east to Ash Hollow SHP, where 1 to 2 were seen from 9 to 11 September (m.ob.). Other excellent locality counts included 9+ at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS) and 7 at Hull Cem, Banner Co, on 1 September (WRS).

**Blackburnian Warbler:** Only 3 were reported: singles were seen in Omaha on 25 August (Melba Wigg fide RG), in Bellevue on 30 August (BP, LP), and in the RWB on 2 September (JGJ). The latter is only the 11th report away from the east in fall.

**Yellow-throated Warbler:** None reported.

**Palm Warbler:** This species is only casual in fall, and so the 2 identified in Otoe Co on 23 September (WRS) were unexpected. One was very yellow, probably of the race *hypochrysea* (WRS).

**Bay-breasted Warbler:** Yet another species with surprisingly few reports: indeed, the only report was of one observed in Bellevue on 15 September (BP, LP). Usually more are reported in fall than in the spring.

**Black-and-white Warbler:** Routine reports.

**American Redstart:** The one spotted in the east RWB on 1 October (JGJ) was rather late; this sighting denotes only the 3rd October record for the eastern half of the state, the others occurring on 2 October and on 13 October. There are 5 October reports for Scotts Bluff Co, none recent; and there are several late September dates for the state.

**Prothonotary Warbler:** None reported.

**Worm-eating Warbler:** One was seen at Conestoga L, Lancaster Co, on 5 October (LRB; details). This sighting represents only the 5th fall record for the state.

**Ovenbird:** The one observed in a Lincoln yard on 11 November is the latest ever (MUs; details). The previous late date was 26 October.

**Northern Waterthrush:** In recent years this species has been shown to be a regular migrant in the Panhandle in fall, sometimes in numbers: 5 were spotted at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS), and a total of 10 were seen there between 31 August and 20 September (SJD, WRS, JF, JG).

**Louisiana Waterthrush:** None reported.

**Kentucky Warbler:** None reported.

**Mourning Warbler:** The only report was of one found in southwestern Dixon Co on 2 September (JJ).

**MacGillivray's Warbler:** This species was another much in evidence in the west. About 25 were reported, including one observed rather far to the east in the east RWB on 2 September (JGJ; details). This sighting and a specimen from Antelope Co represent the easternmost documented records for the state. The remainder of this fall's reports occurred in the period between 27 August and 20 September, peaking at 8 identified on 2 September at Oliver Res (JG, MB).

Common Yellowthroat: The one seen at Wehrspann L on 18 October (BP, LP) is the 4th latest ever. A good count was 10 made at FL on 3 September (LR, RH).

Wilson's Warbler: This species was widely reported in good numbers, especially in the west. The female found at L Ogallala on 25 October (SJD) is the latest ever, although there are several reports after mid-October. A record high fall count was 75+ tallied at Oliver Res on 12 September; the observer said they were "everywhere" (NR). Other good counts included the 47 seen at Oliver Res on 31 August (SJD, WRS) and 41 counted there on 11 September (SJD).

Canada Warbler: A male observed in Clay Co on 20 August (JGJ) denotes only the 8th report away from the east. About 8 others were reported, all in the east, as expected.

Yellow-breasted Chat: Only casual in the east, the one spotted at Summit Res, Burt Co, on 10 September (JGJ) was only the observer's 2nd in the Missouri Valley. One seen at Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 2 September (LR, RH) was at the eastern edge of the current range. A good count reached 8 in Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co, on 1 September (WRS).

Summer Tanager: None reported.

Scarlet Tanager: The only report was of a calling basic-plumaged male observed at Schramm SP on 30 August (WRS). This species molts during August.

Western Tanager: An excellent day count was 7 made in Kimball and Scotts Bluff Cos on 3 September (SJD). This was a good fall for this species; about 28 were reported between 27 August and 30 September, east to Ash Hollow SHP.

Green-tailed Towhee: Five were found in southwestern Kimball Co from 3 to 21 September: 3 adults were identified on the latter date (SJD) and single adults were spotted on 3 September (SDJ, JF) and on 12 September (NR). These 3 records represent only the 10th through the 12th for fall, although the species appears to be a regular migrant in small numbers.

Spotted Towhee: The singles found near Gibbon on 6 August (LR, RH) and at Ponca SP on 20 August (JJ) were summering birds at the eastern edge of the breeding range. The good count of 22 made in Scotts Bluff Co on 1 September probably also was of local breeders (WRS), but the 21 observed at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD) were probably migrants. The first migrants to reach the southeast were one identified in Clay Co on 16 September (JGJ) and two located in western Lancaster Co on 23 September (LE). Rather late to leave was one noted at L Ogallala on 26 October (SJD).

Eastern Towhee: Few were reported, apparent migrants all, and, as expected, all in the southeast; one was seen at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, on 2 September (LE); two males were observed at Boyer Chute NWR on 1 October (BP, LP); and a phenotypic Eastern was discovered with 12 phenotypic Spotted in Clay Co on 13 October (JGJ).

American Tree Sparrow: Routine reports.



**Chipping Sparrow:** An adult was spotted feeding a juvenile at Wildcat Hills NC on 1 September (WRS), and another juvenile was identified at Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co on the same day (WRS); breeding is regular in Wildcat Hills Ponderosa Pine woodlands. Banding of 23 birds at NNF, Halsey, between 18 and 21 September yielded two birds recaptured for the 4th year; this statistic suggests strong site fidelity to a migration stopover (RG). The one found at ADF on 2 November (LF, CF) was rather late.

**Clay-colored Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Brewer's Sparrow:** An excellent daily count was 50 made in Scotts Bluff and Banner Cos on 3 September, with 36 of these birds found in Scotts Bluff Co (SJD, JF).

**Field Sparrow:** Rare in the west, as many as 6 were spotted at L Ogallala on 8 September (SJD), and 2 were found at CLNWR on 21 September (SJD). The latter record is only the 18th in fall for the Panhandle. The one seen at Sherman Res on 4 November (LR, RH) was rather late for the location.

**Vesper Sparrow:** A good count reached 37 in Lancaster Co on 14 October (LE).

**Lark Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Lark Bunting:** A female observed near Kenesaw and 2 males and a female found 1.5 miles east of Heartwell on 6 August (LR, RH) appeared at the east edge of the range; the Sandhills pockets in that area may have attracted them.

**Savannah Sparrow:** Breeding occurs at a few Panhandle locations with damp grassland; the 6 birds found at the end of Soldier Creek Rd in Fort Robinson SP on 4 August (JWH) may have been a family group or very early migrants.

**Grasshopper Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Le Conte's Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow:** The only reports were of one spotted at Pawnee L on 16 September (LE) and of 3 noted at Jack Sinn Marsh, Lancaster/Saunders Cos, on 8 October (JGJ).

**Fox Sparrow:** As expected, all reports came from Lancaster Co eastward. The 10 found at Boyer Chute NWR on 21 October (JT) was a good count.

**Song Sparrow:** A good count totaled 36 in Lancaster Co on 21 October (LE).

**Lincoln's Sparrow:** This species is uncommon in the Panhandle; only 5 were seen all fall by one active observer (SJD); another was identified at Winters Creek L, Scotts Bluff Co, on 30 September (AK).

**Swamp Sparrow:** Also uncommon in the Panhandle, one was seen at L Ogallala on 25 October (SJD).

**White-throated Sparrow:** The first sighted was rather early at ADF on 22 September (LF, CF), and two found in a Bellevue yard on 1 October were still present on 30 November (BP, LP), a rather late date even for the southeast. Generally considered rare in the Panhandle, 7 birds were reported from various locations there between 11 and 26 October (SJD, JF).

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Most leave the state in winter; this fall none was reported later than 4 November when an immature in located in Lancaster Co (LE).

**Harris's Sparrow:** An amazing record estimate of 1,000 tallied in Dakota Co on 20 October was "probably an underestimate; each of several locations had dozens or hundreds in brushy and weedy corridors" (BFH). This species is uncommon in fall in the west; of interest, were singles seen at Sowbelly Canyon and Whitney L, Dawes Co, on 22 October (SJD, JF); two identified east of Scottsbluff on 25 October (AK); and one observed at West Lawn Cem, Gering, on 12 November (SJD). From 25 October to 4 November as many as 4 were spotted at L Ogallala (SJD).

**Dark-eyed Junco:** A "pink-sided" junco (*mearnsi*) was netted at Oliver Res on 7 September (SJD); this identification is the earliest record to date of this taxon. The limited data available suggest that "pink-sided" junco arrives earlier than "oregon" junco (*montanus*). An "oregon" junco was spotted at Wolf L, Saunders Co, on 22 October (TH), the easternmost reported. Unexpected was a male "slate-colored" junco found in Otoe Co on 19 November that had extensively white cheeks (WRS).

**McCown's Longspur:** The two found at LM on 12 October (SJD) provided only the 4th fall record east of the Panhandle; one of the other 3 was seen near Lewellen (Rosche) but may have been in Garden Co.

**Lapland Longspur:** The six spotted at LM on 12 October (SJD) were rather early. A major influx occurred on 12 November, with "several thousand" observed with Horned Larks in Knox Co (MB); and 1,204 were tallied in Cass and Otoe Cos (WRS).

**Chestnut-collared Longspur:** The only reports came from LM, where 107 were counted on 12 October (SJD); 6 were present on 7 August (SJD). The latter birds may have been a family group that bred nearby; there is a specimen taken in June near Oshkosh, and breeding occurs throughout most of the Panhandle, albeit in low numbers eastward. Southward movement generally does not begin until mid-September.

**Snow Bunting:** "Several" had reached as far south as Elmwood by 23 November (B).

**Northern Cardinal:** Routine reports.

**Pyrrhuloxia:** A bird fitting the description of this species was seen feeding young at Genoa, Nance Co, on 24 August; a female, it had a "large yellow beak and no black on its face" (fide KP). Although this species would seem unlikely to occur in Nebraska, there are a few records for Kansas, including one as close as Linn Co in northeastern Kansas, and one for southeastern Colorado. The Kansas and Colorado records occur in the period between 6 November and 22 April.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** At the western edge of the breeding range, a female was spotted near Gibbon on 6 and 20 August and on 30 September (LR, RH); an immature male observed there on 13 October (LR, RH) may have been a migrant. Both *Pheucticus* grosbeaks summer in the area. Singles, apparent migrants, were identified in Hall and Buffalo Cos on 2 and on 16 September (LR, RH). One was reported at a Kearney feeder at the late date of 13 November (B; no details); there are two other November reports and two for December.

**Black-headed Grosbeak:** Near Gibbon, a female was present on 10 October (LR, RH), a very late date, and a single was found southwest of Holstein on 27 August (LR, RH); both may have been migrants, as the observers had only those two sightings for the period. Unexpected was a female observed at an Omaha feeder from 3 to 4 November (B; no details); there are a few similar late reports, even a couple of feeder records in the east for January.

**Blue Grosbeak:** The one seen in southeastern Otoe Co on 26 September (LF, CF) was rather late.

**Lazuli Bunting:** A female found at Mud Springs SHP, Morrill Co, on 11 September (SJD) was rather late.

**Indigo Bunting:** Good counts included 7 at Summit L, Burt Co, on 10 September (JGJ) and 5 in southeastern Otoe Co as late as 3 October (LF, CF).

**Dickcissel:** This species is rare in the west, especially in the southern Panhandle. Singles were spotted near Lodgepole on 6 August (SJD) and at L Ogallala on 22 August (SJD). There are more records from the northern Panhandle, but it is still rare there; two were identified in Sioux Co on 4 August (JWH).

**Bobolink:** Few are reported in fall, most around marshes. One was seen at LM on 12 August (SJD); 15 were found in the east RWB on 13 August (JGJ); and 15 were observed near Hultine Basin, Clay Co, on 20 August (JGJ). Most leave in August and early September.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Routine reports.

**Eastern Meadowlark:** Routine reports.

**Western Meadowlark:** Routine reports.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird:** A male reported east of Gering on 12 November (SJD) was a bit tardy.

**Rusty Blackbird:** The earliest was a single spotted at ADF on 18 October (LF, CF), about on time. All reports, as expected, came from the Missouri Valley.

**Brewer's Blackbird:** This species is rare in the east, less so as fall progresses; a single, unusual in itself, was reported at Zorinsky L, Omaha, on 20 August (DM; no details). Migrants do appear in late August, but at that date usually only in the west. Also unexpected so far east were 12 seen on 8 October at Memphis Lakes, Saunders Co, (JGJ) and 8 noted near Niobrara on 22 October (MB). An excellent count was 1,000 made west of Mitchell on 3 September (SJD, JF). On 3 November, 175 were observed in a mixed blackbird flock near Harvard in Clay Co (JGJ); the observer wondered if this occurrence were unusual for Brewer's Blackbirds.

**Common Grackle:** Early fall flocks include many birds with short tails; a flock of 1,000 found near Axtell on 3 September were molting their tails (LR, RH). A good count totaled 3,200 at CCM on 25 October (SJD). The last stragglers are usually singles, and so a group of 7 spotted in Wayne Co on 30 November (JJ) was unusual.

**Great-tailed Grackle:** Only casual in the west, a female was seen west of Mitchell on 3 September (SJD, JF). Good counts were 60 tallied at Ceresco on 16 November (JGJ) and 50+ found east of Niobrara on 25 November (MB).

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** The one seen in northern Lancaster Co on 14 November (LE) was verging on tardy.

**Orchard Oriole:** The four seen in northeastern Kearney Co on 27 September (LR, RH) were rather late.

**Baltimore Oriole:** Excellent counts totaled 19 at Lange Basin, Clay Co, on 20 August (JGJ); 16 in Lancaster Co on 27 August (LE); and 14 at Ponca SP on 20 August (JJ). Westernmost was an adult male spotted near Gibbon on 19 September (LR, RH).

**Bullock's Oriole:** Five migrants, all females or immature males, were noted in the southeastern Panhandle between 31 August and 7 September (SJD, WRS, JF).

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch:** Two flocks were located: 216 were found in southwestern Sioux Co at Sam Moore Buttes on the Henry Road on 12 November (SJD), and 105 were counted at the feeders of Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 14 November (SJD, HKH).

**Black Rosy-Finch:** Yet another first state record was of a male discovered with Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches in southwestern Sioux Co on 12 November (SJD; details). This species is found in winter east on occasion to southeastern Wyoming but was unrecorded farther east until now, except for a single record in Ohio (!).

**Purple Finch:** Few were reported; the first were 2 seen in FF on 16 October (BP, LP), and the only other reports in the east were of a single found at a Bellevue feeder from 21 to 22 October (KCR) and 6 seen at Niobrara SP, Knox Co, on 25 November (MB). Unexpected were single females, possibly the same bird, spotted at L Ogallala on 19 and 26 November (SJD, JF), where it is rare.

**House Finch:** Amazing numbers were banded in a Bellevue yard: 800+ during August; the large numbers had moved on by the 2nd week in September, and none has been recaptured since, suggesting that all were migrants (RG). The infectious eye disease in this species appears to have disappeared (RG).

**Red Crossbill:** As many as 20 were found at Wildcat Hills NC through 19 August (AK, SJD), but on 1 September (juvenile) and on 25 November only singles were noted (WRS, LR, RH). Others were spotted in the Panhandle (SJD, JF), but of interest were a few reports from the east: one was seen at Wehrspann L on 18 October (BP,LP); two were found at a Creighton feeder on 17 November (MB); two were spotted at Standing Bear L, Omaha, on 21 November (B); and a female was identified in Cedar Co on 25 November (BFH).

**Common Redpoll:** The only report was of at least one observed at NNF, Halsey, on 25 November (TEL).

**Pine Siskin:** The ten spotted at Wildcat Hills NC on 19 August (AK) were probably from the Pine Ridge. Breeding has not yet been documented in the

Wildcat Hills. Movement starts rather early; one was seen in McPherson Co on 8 September (LR, RH), and 6 were discovered near Gibbon on 30 September (LR, RH). No large numbers were reported.

American Goldfinch: Routine reports.

Evening Grosbeak: The only report was of two spotted at a feeder south of Gering on 17 November (AK). This species has been scarce the past few years.

House Sparrow: Routine reports.

\* \* \* \* \*

### First record of an Arctic Tern for Nebraska

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On 20 September 2000, I arrived at Lake Minatare in Scotts Bluff County after the passage of a strong cold front the day before. At 11:36 a.m., I noticed two distant *Sterna* flying east of the lighthouse. Although the distance was great, I could see that one tern was a juvenile Forster's Tern while the other tern was clearly a different species. Even at a distance, I thought I could see a white cheek, a darker gray belly, and pale upperwings, all indications that the bird was an adult Arctic Tern. I then drove to the lighthouse and soon found the two terns flying along the north shore of the lake where they eventually landed amongst a small flock of Franklin's and Ring-billed Gulls. I was able to approach to within 10 meters of the birds and take several photographs. The Arctic Tern remained at this location until I left the area at 12:40 p.m. and was still there several hours later (Helen Hughsen, pers. comm.).

While it perched, I was able to study the bird extensively and compare it to the juvenile Forster's Tern. I estimated that the bird was 10-15% smaller than the Forster's Tern. Another notable difference was the leg length. I estimated the legs were no more than half the length of those of the Forster's Tern. The bill was no more than 75% of the length of the Forster's Tern bill and was a deep red color with no black tip. The cap was black with a few white flecks on the forehead and crown. The dark cap included the eye. The cheek was white and contrasted with the dark gray underparts. When perched, the bird's mantle and upperwings were dark gray, except for a hint of a dark carpal bar. The carpal bar was not evident when the bird was in flight. I studied the wing pattern carefully when the bird flushed. The upperwings were an even gray color with no darkening in the primaries. The underwings were white with narrow dark tips to the primaries, creating a dark trailing edge to the



underwing. The tail was deeply forked with dark color along the outer edge of the outer rectrices. On the basis of the white flecks on the crown and faint hint of a dark carpal bar, I concluded the bird was an adult that was just beginning the molt to basic plumage. According to Olsen and Larsson (1995), this molting is a bit unusual since most Arctic Terns do not molt until they reach the wintering grounds. However, a small percentage of adult Arctic Terns begin to molt during migration and would be expected to match the plumage of this bird at this date and latitude. The combination of bill shape and color, contrasting white cheek, dark gray belly, short legs, pale upperwings, and narrow black tips to the undersides of the primaries eliminates other species of *Sterna*, especially Common Tern.

This sighting denotes the first record of an Arctic Tern for Nebraska. The species is exceedingly rare in the western Great Plains with a total of 18 records from Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Colorado. Records generally decline in the southern Great Plains. I believe that the occurrence of an Arctic Tern in Nebraska was overdue, although I thought the first record would probably be in late spring at Lake McConaughy or some other large reservoir. Future records of this species can be expected in Nebraska, especially in late spring (mid-May through early June) and in fall (best from late July through early October).

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\* \* \* \* \*

#### Mist netting at Oliver State Recreation Area

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During the fall 2000 migration, I decided to do some mist netting at Oliver State Recreation Area in Kimball County. My main emphasis was to document the occurrence of several species of *Empidonax* in western Nebraska. Limited netting there in fall 1999 was not very successful, but I was more optimistic this year. With that in mind, I obtained the necessary federal and state permits and netted on four dates (26 August, 31 August, 7 September, and 20 September), each chosen to be immediately after the passage of a cold front.

On each date I set up nets at two locations, each location having two nets strung up in tandem. On each of these dates, the nets were set up pre-dawn

and taken down by noon. I captured a total of 87 individuals of 26 species on these four days (see Table 1). The most abundant species was Wilson's Warbler, which is not surprising given their abundance as a migrant and their habit of foraging relatively close to the ground. The most significant find was the capture of three Dusky Flycatchers (Dinsmore and Silcock, in prep.). No other *Empidonax* were caught, although at least one other species (Hammond's Flycatcher) was seen on these dates. Although the sample is very small, this suggests that Dusky Flycatcher may in fact be one of the more common species of *Empidonax* in western Nebraska during fall migration. Several other western migrants, many of them formerly considered casual in Nebraska, were also captured, including four Cassin's Vireos, a Townsend's Warbler, and two MacGillivray's Warblers. I was also interested in identifying as many birds as possible to race, where applicable. This resulted in the capture of a Hermit Thrush of the Rocky Mountain subspecies *auduboni*, the first confirmed record of that form for Nebraska. I also captured a total of eight Warbling Vireos, six of which were the western subspecies *swainsoni*. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of Ross Silcock (31 August) and Loren & Babs Padelford (7 September). Their presence certainly made the experience much more enjoyable.

#### Literature Cited

Dinsmore, S. J., and W. R. Silcock. In prep. "First confirmed records of Dusky Flycatcher for Nebraska."

Table 1. Birds netted at Oliver State Recreation Area, Kimball County, NE, in fall 2000.

Species	Number	Comment
Mourning Dove	2	
Downy Woodpecker	2	
Western Wood-Pewee	1	
Eastern Wood-Pewee	1 on 31 August	Juvenile, first confirmed record for the western Panhandle
Dusky Flycatcher	1 on 31 August 1 on 7 September 1 on 20 September	Adult Age unknown Juvenile First definitive records for NE
Eastern Kingbird	1	

Cassin's Vireo	3 on 31 August 1 on 7 September	2 adults, 1 juvenile Juvenile
Warbling Vireo	1 on 26 August 7 on 31 August	6 were the western race <i>swainsoni</i>
House Wren	2	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1 on 7 September	
Hermit Thrush	1 on 7 September	Western subspecies <i>auduboni</i>
American Robin	2	
Gray Catbird	1	
Orange-crowned Warbler	1 on 31 August	
Yellow Warbler	5	
Townsend's Warbler	1 on 7 September	Immature female
Northern Waterthrush	1 on 31 August	
MacGillivray's Warbler	2 on 31 August	1 female and 1 immature male
Common Yellowthroat	3	
Wilson's Warbler	24	
Western Tanager	1 on 7 September	Adult male
Clay-colored Sparrow	1 on 31 August	
White-crowned Sparrow	1 on 20 September	Pale-lored race <i>gambelii</i>
Dark-eyed Junco	1 on 7 September	"Pink-sided" form <i>earnsi</i>
Black-headed Grosbeak	1 on 26 August	Immature male
American Goldfinch	17	

\* \* \* \* \*

### ECOGEOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN LEKS IN SOUTHEASTERN NEBRASKA

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#### ABSTRACT

An analysis of the distribution of 104 Greater Prairie-chicken leks in Pawnee and Johnson counties indicates that the birds favor using those

mile-square sections having no more than two dwellings per section, ones that are located at least two miles from the nearest town, and at least a half-mile from the nearest lek. Relationships with the nearest water were not clear, but most leks were located at least a half-mile from it, perhaps reflecting a general avoidance of heavy cover during the display season.

## INTRODUCTION

Although the great majority of Greater Prairie-chickens in Nebraska occur at the eastern edges of the Sandhills region, a small and relatively little-known population also occurs in the southeastern corner of the state. They occur primarily in Johnson and Pawnee counties, but with a few outlying flocks also present in southeastern Gage and southern Otoe counties. These birds represent the northernmost terminus of the large population associated with the Flint Hills of Kansas, probably the largest and most secure remaining population of Greater Prairie-chickens existing anywhere in North America.

This population had been protected from hunting since 1930, owing to its small size. In the fall of 2000 the area was opened to a restricted hunting season by the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission. This decision was based on a series of lek surveys performed by Game & Parks biologists (Taylor, 2000) during over the previous five years, indicating that somewhat over 100 active leks were present, nearly all within Johnson and Pawnee counties. They estimated that each of the 110 observed leks possibly supported an average of ten males, or a spring population of 1,100 males, and presumably a comparable number of females.

I have been interested in this population of Prairie-chickens since the 1960s, and took special interest in this situation. Through the kindness of Scott Taylor of Nebraska Game & Parks, and Jackie Canterbury, a contract employee of the agency, I was able to obtain copies of the mapped lek distributions in Johnson and Pawnee counties, and decided that a spacial analysis of these distributions might provide some clues as to the status and ecology of Prairie-chickens in this part of the state.

The county maps used in this study were standard Nebraska Dept. of Roads maps that illustrate not only all roads, but also indicate rivers, creeks and other larger water areas, plus the locations of individual dwellings outside of towns and villages. Nearly all the roads in these two counties were built along section lines, making it possible to subdivide each county into section-sized units of 640 acres each, allowing for convenient statistical comparisons.

Johnson and Pawnee counties both consist of rolling uplands with soils that were produced by a mixture of glacial till and loess accumulations. Soil types are very similar throughout the two counties, mostly being comprised of Wymore-Pawnee loam. The counties are in a well-watered part of the state that receives about 33 inches of precipitation annually, largely falling as

rain during the spring and summer. As a result, there are many creeks as well as two small rivers (Big and Little Nemaha) passing through these counties. Thus, few areas are more than a few miles from the nearest standing water or drainage way, although creek drainages may sometimes be dry for part of the year. Johnson County has a total area of 376 square miles, and supports five towns and villages. The county population as of 1998 was 4,500, or 11.9 persons per square mile. Total grasslands in the county, based on Game and Parks estimates from the 1970s, consist of 143 square miles, or 38 percent of the overall area. Game and Parks biologists counted 45 active leks in Johnson County during the late 1990s, representing a density of one lek per 3.2 square miles of grasslands. The overall county grouse density was one lek per 8.3 sq. miles.

Pawnee County has a total area of 432 square miles, and supports seven towns & villages. The county population as of 1998 was 3,300, or 7.6 persons per square mile. Total grasslands in the county, based on Game and Parks estimates, consist of 193 square miles., or 45 percent of the overall area. Game biologists counted 59 active leks during the late 1990s, representing a density of one lek per 3.2 square miles of grasslands, the same estimate as for Johnson County. The overall county grouse density was one lek per 7.3 sq. miles.

Leks used by Greater Prairie-chickens tend to be situated on open grasslands, especially those that are somewhat elevated, with grassy cover of only moderate height, providing for unobstructed viewing in all directions (Johnsgard, 1973). Anderson (1969) reported that the birds prefer grass cover less than six inches high, with a combination of short grass and unobstructed surrounding vision being much more important aspects of site selection than any specific vegetational cover. There have also been other efforts to document the environmental variables associated with the locations of leks, such as one by Merrill et al. (1999). These authors concluded that lek locations in northwestern Minnesota are strongly dependent on land use, with leks positively associated with smaller amounts of residential-farmsteads, smaller amounts and patches of forest, and greater amounts of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands. As of 2000, there were 43,000 acres (67 square miles) enrolled in the CRP program in Pawnee County, and 36,000 acres (56 square miles) enrolled in Johnson County (data courtesy Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service). Such areas in these Nebraska counties might influence lek distributions in a similar manner to natural grasslands. However, an analysis of lek distribution relative to CRP lands, natural grasslands, and croplands here remains to be done and would be very useful.

## METHODS

Using the county maps, the 104 mile-square sections containing leks in the two counties were marked. This left somewhat over 600 additional sections available for comparison. It was apparent from the outset that almost



no leks occurred within two miles of a town or village, so all those sections lying within such proximity to built-up areas were also excluded from consideration. Of the remaining sections, 100 were randomly selected as "no-lek" sections for comparison with "lek-present" sections. For both categories of sections, distances to the nearest lek, the nearest town or village, and the nearest water was determined. The no-lek sections were measured from the center of the section, and the lek-present sections were measured from the lek itself. Additionally, the number of occupied houses present on each selected section, as indicated by the maps, was counted. Populations in both these counties have been essentially stable for several decades, so it seems likely that these maps are suitable for such analysis purposes, even if slightly outdated.

## RESULTS

Results are shown in the accompanying tables. Nearest-lek distances (Table 1) are closer in sections having leks than those without, suggesting that leks tend to be more aggregated than randomly distributed, probably because of the non-random distribution of suitable grassland habitats. Except for the low numbers of leks within a half-mile of each other, both frequency distributions resemble Poisson distributions. This suggests that, at least for distances greater than half a mile, the individual lek locations are neither positively nor negatively influencing one another.

Nearest distances to surface water (usually creek or river drainages) are shown in Table 2. Here, the slightly greater distances to water in lek sections than in sections lacking leks is probably insignificant. Or, it may reflect the fact that leks tend to be on elevated ground, usually well away from water. It may also reflect the fact that drainages tend to have brush or tree cover, a landscape feature generally avoided by displaying birds.

Nearest-town distances (Table 3) are somewhat surprising, in that the presence of a village or smaller town does not seem to prevent males from occupying leks up to within about two miles distance. Town size probably also plays a role here. Four villages with populations of less than 100 had their nearest leks an average of 1.6 miles away. Eight towns with populations of 100 or more had their nearest leks at an average of 4.9 miles away. Considering all 12 towns and villages, the nearest lek averaged 4.2 miles away.

The clearest distributional relationship in these data relates to the number of occupied residences per section in lek versus no-lek sections (Table 4). Clearly, sections without occupied dwellings were favored as lek sites, but a very few leks were present on sections with as many as four dwellings, the average being 1.0. By comparison, the mean number of occupied dwellings on the sections lacking leks was 1.9. This statistic is perhaps the most significant of those obtained, suggesting a negative relationship between human population density and the density of Prairie-chicken leks.

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Table 1. Percent Frequencies of Nearest-lek Distances (in miles)

Nearest lek	Lek present (N = 104)	No lek (N = 100)
0-0.5 mi.	7	0
0.6-1.0 mi.	20	9
1.1-1.5 mi.	36	40
1.6-2.0 mi.	18	10
2.1-2.9 mi.	14	17
3.1-3.9 mi.	3	8
4.0-4.9 mi.	1	8
5.0-5.9 mi.	0	5
6.0-6.9 mi.	1	2
7.0-9.9 mi.	0	0
Over 10 mi.	0	1
Ave (approx.)	1.6	2.3

Table 2. Percent Frequencies of Minimum Lek-to-water Distances (in miles)

Nearest Water	Lek present (N = 104)	No lek (N = 100)
0-0.5 mi.	36	52
0.6-1.0 mi.	30	40
1.1-1.5 mi.	26	8
1.6-2.0 mi.	6	0
2.0	2	0
Ave. (approx.)	0.8	0.7

**Table 3.** Percent Frequencies of Nearest-town Distances (in miles)

Nearest Town	Lek present (N = 104)	No lek (N = 100)
0-9 mi.	0	—*
1.0-1.9 mi.	6	—*
2.0-2.9 mi.	28	11
3.0-3.9 mi.	18	35
4.0-4.9 mi.	16	21
5.0-5.9 mi.	18	7
6.0-6.9 mi.	6	16
7.0-7.9 mi.	4	5
8.0+ mi.	4	5
Ave. (approx.)	4.2	—*

• Sections located within two miles of towns or villages were excluded from sample; thus average distances to nearest towns were not estimated.

**Table 4.** Percent Frequencies of Human Population Densities (houses per section) Relative to Lek Occurrence

Houses per section	Lek present (N = 104)	No lek (N = 100)
0	40	14
1	26	28
2	27	30
3	5	19
4	2	5
Over 4	0	4
Ave.	1.0	1.9

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The Nebraska Bird Review is published quarterly by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, Inc., as its official journal, and is sent to members not in arrears of dues. Annual subscription rates (on a calendar-year basis only): \$14.00 in the United States; \$18.00 for all foreign countries, payable in advance. Single copies are \$4.00 each, postpaid, in the United States, and \$5.00 elsewhere. Send orders for back issues to Mary Prichard, NOU Librarian, University of Nebraska State Museum, Lincoln, NE 68588-0514.

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