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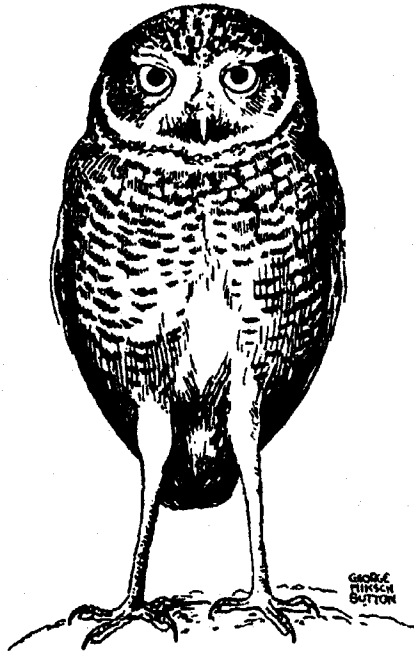
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# ***The Nebraska Bird Review***

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## SUMMER FIELD REPORT, June-July 2010

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## INTRODUCTION

This summer was marked by continuing high water tables along the Missouri River and good water levels in the eastern Rainwater Basin. As a result, American and Least Bitterns, King Rail, Common Moorhen, and several American Coot nests in Sarpy Co were reported. However, Great and Snowy Egrets were scarce, and Black-necked Stilts were absent from the eastern Rainwater Basin after several good breeding years there.

First breeding records for the state are always exciting; Lesser Goldfinch finally took the plunge this year in Banner Co. Also encouraging were increased reports of Black-billed Cuckoo (9) and both Black-billed Magpie and Black-capped Chickadee. Mountain Plovers are present in southwest Kimball Co in surprising numbers, with excellent conservation work being done there. The group responsible for the effort has an excellent Facebook site (see species account). Significant breeding records were made for Burrowing Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Brewer's Blackbird.

Strangely, three species of migrant warblers were found in midsummer: Orange-crowned, Nashville, and Blackburnian, as well as a late June White-crowned Sparrow. Dickcissels again made a good showing in the west. Other eastern birds far west included Eastern Wood-Pewee and Summer Tanager. On the other hand, the earliest ever Rufous Hummingbird in the eastern part of the state was in Lincoln. True rarities were few: a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and a summer American Black Duck were probably the best.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADF: Arbor Day Farm, Nebraska City  
BOL: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co  
Cem: Cemetery  
Co(s): County(ies)  
CLNWR: Crescent L NWR, Garden Co  
FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co  
HCR: Harlan Co Res SRA, Harlan Co  
ICSP: Indian Cave State Park, Richardson/Nemaha Cos  
L: Lake  
LM: L McConaughy, Keith Co  
LO: L Ogallala (includes contiguous Keystone L), Keith Co  
LPB: La Platte Bottoms, Sarpy Co  
m. ob.: many observers  
NC: Nature Center  
NLB: North Lake Basin WMA, Seward Co

NM: National Monument  
NWR: National Wildlife Refuge  
Res: Reservoir  
RWB: Rainwater Basin, including parts of Phelps, Hamilton, York, Clay, Fillmore,  
and Thayer Cos  
SHP: State Historical Park  
SL: Sewage Lagoon(s)  
SP: State Park  
WHNC: Wildcat Hills NC, Scotts Bluff Co  
WMA: (State) Wildlife Management Area  
WP: Wilderness Park, Lincoln  
WPA: (Federal) Waterfowl Production Area  
WSR: Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co

#### GAZETTEER

Harvard Marsh: WPA, Clay Co  
Jack Sinn: Memorial WMA, Lancaster and Saunders Cos  
Pine Ridge: escarpment in Sioux, Dawes, and Sheridan Cos  
Sandhills: large area of sand-based prairie in north-central Nebraska  
Wildcat Hills: escarpment in Scotts Bluff, Banner, and Morrill Cos

#### OBSERVERS

AC: Anton Curtis, Grand Island  
AK: Alice Kenitz, Gering  
ARy: Allan Reyer, Bellevue  
B&DW: Bruce and Donna Walgren, Casper, WY  
CG: Cory Gregory, Ames, IA  
CH: Candace Havely, McCook  
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DC: Doug Carroll, Lincoln  
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DL: Dave Leatherman, Fort Collins, CO  
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G&WH: Glen & Wanda Hoge, Alma  
GG: Gordon Gover, Bridgewater, NJ  
HKH: Helen K. Hughson, Mitchell  
JC: John Carlini, Lincoln  
JED: James E. Ducey, Lincoln  
JG: Joe Gubanyi, Seward  
JGJ: Joel G. Jorgensen, Lincoln  
JJ: Jan Johnson, Wakefield  
JL: Jeff Lusk, Lincoln  
JLL: Jeanine L. Lackey, Doniphan  
JM: Jeanne Miller, Bennington  
JO: Jim Ochsner, Ogallala  
JP: Jim Petersen, North Platte

JR: Justin Rink, Omaha  
JRi: Juanita Rice, Fairmont  
JWH: John W. Hall, Omaha  
KD: Kathy DeLara, Mitchell  
KP: Kevin Poague, Lincoln  
KS: Kent Skaggs, Kearney  
KSc: Kathy Schwery, Plattsmouth  
L&BP: Loren & Babs Padelford, Bellevue  
LE: Larry Einemann, Lincoln  
LF: Laurence Falk, Nebraska City  
LJH: Luke J. Hamilton, Lewellen  
LR: Lanny Randolph, Minden  
MB: Mark Brogie, Creighton  
MM: Marty Mathieson, Shelton  
NR: Neal Ratzlaff, Omaha  
PD: Paul Dunbar, Hastings  
PS: Phil Swanson, Papillion  
RE: Rick Eades, Lincoln  
RH: Robin Harding, Minden  
RHo: Robert Hole, Omaha  
S&RW: Susan & Ron Whitney, Lincoln  
SG: Suzanne Gucciardo, Fort Calhoun  
SS: Shari Schwartz, Lincoln  
TH: Tim Hajda, Broken Bow  
TJW: T.J. Walker, Brady  
WF: William Flack, Kearney  
WM: Wayne Mollhoff, Ashland  
WRS: W. Ross Silcock, Tabor, IA

#### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck:** Only the 9th for Nebraska, an adult was at Harvard Marsh 6-7 Jun (JGJ, PD). Most of the records are since 2000.

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** The only summer straggler reported was at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ).

**Snow Goose:** A surprising 50 were reported at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ); high summer count is 92. Few others were reported; singles or small groups are not uncommon in Jun-Jul.

**Canada Goose:** Strangely, this species is not a regular breeder in the RWB, and so 2 broods at NLB 6 Jun were of interest (JGJ).

**Trumpeter Swan:** The southerly breeding pair in Hall Co was successful for the second straight year (TH); other reports of family groups were from the Sandhills as expected.

**Wood Duck:** Routine reports; statewide breeder.

**Gadwall:** Breeding is mostly in the Sandhills, but occasionally in the RWB and elsewhere; 1-2 at Jack Sinn 8 and 23 Jun (LE) were of interest.

**American Wigeon:** Routine reports; breeds uncommonly in the w. Sandhills.

**American Black Duck:** A surprise in summer was a flyover with 2 Mallards at NLB 1 Jul (WF, details). There are fewer than 15 records mid-Jun through mid-Aug.

- Mallard:** Routine reports; statewide breeder.
- Blue-winged Teal:** Routine reports; statewide breeder.
- Cinnamon Teal:** None were reported; breeds in western parts of the state.
- Northern Shoveler:** Routine reports; breeds mainly in the Sandhills.
- Northern Pintail:** Breeding in the RWB is uncommon; potential breeders were reported without breeding evidence from Phelps (WF), Colfax (D&JP) and Adams (D&JP) Cos.
- Green-winged Teal:** Breeding is rare south of the Platte Valley, with only 2 records since 1987. As many as 12 were still at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ), likely lingerers, and singles at 5 other locations in the RWB through 14 Jul (JC, SS, WF, JGJ) may have been molt migrants.
- Canvasback:** Routine reports; breeding occurs in the w. Sandhills.
- Redhead:** Small numbers have been found routinely in the RWB in recent years, but there are few records of breeding. The 50 at Harvard Marsh 5 Jul (JGJ) were not unprecedented for the RWB, but no evidence for breeding was noted. About 30 others were found around the RWB 26 Jun-25 Jul (DH, LE, WF, JGJ). A male in Antelope Co 19 Jun was unexpected there (MB).
- Ring-necked Duck:** The only report was of one in Adams Co 7 Jun (PD), a rather late migrant.
- Lesser Scaup:** Latest reported was in the RWB 6 Jun (JGJ); latest dates are around 12 Jun.
- Hooded Merganser:** The usual widespread reports of "females/immatures" (but almost certainly one-year-old non-breeders) were received, a total of about 29 statewide (m. ob.).
- Ruddy Duck:** This species is a rare breeder in the RWB, but suggestive was the presence of a pair at NLB 2 Jun (JGJ) and 8 birds at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ).
- Gray Partridge:** Rather surprisingly, given the difficulty of finding this species, 350 were harvested by hunters in 2008 (JL). However, peak was in 1987, when according to Nebraska Game and Parks data, a mind-boggling 11,000 were harvested!
- Chukar:** A nest with eggs was found near Grand Island 9 Jun (DC); although these are released or escaped birds, such events sometimes lead to establishment of a breeding population and should be reported.
- Ring-necked Pheasant:** Routine reports; this species occurs essentially statewide.
- Sharp-tailed Grouse:** Routine reports; this species occurs in grasslands in the nw half of the state.
- Greater Prairie-Chicken:** Good news in two areas: 4 "almost-grown" young were at SCP 14 Jul (KP), and 8 were booming near Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ). This species continues to do well in the se.
- Wild Turkey:** A first nesting for the observers' farm in Dodge Co was indicated by the 5 adults and 20 young there 25 Jul (D&JP).
- Northern Bobwhite:** Good numbers were reported over the entire range. In se Nebraska: "tons" were in Gage Co (CNK), "lots" were in Saline Co (CNK), and it was "heard often" in Nemaha Co (CNK). Westerly the species is doing well also, with numbers "way up" in Lincoln Co (TJW), and the first in a Scotts Bluff Co yard for several years was seen 1 Jun (KD). One in Pierce Co 19 Jun was noted (MB), as were singles a little north and west in McPherson Co 28 Jul (WF) and Logan Co 29 Jul (WF).
- Common Loon:** None were reported; usually a few non-breeders occur on large western reservoirs.

- Pied-billed Grebe:** Young were reported from NLB 13 Jun (JC, SS) and 5 Jul (JGJ), and also from the ephemeral LPB, which was in good condition this year, on 2 and 16 Jul (L&BP). Breeding can occur statewide with good water conditions.
- Eared Grebe:** Young about 3-4 days old were at Lakeside with about 20 adults 24 Jun (LJH), and another was incubating in Grant Co the same day (LJH).
- Western Grebe:** Routine reports; this species nests in the w Sandhills.
- Clark's Grebe:** The only reports were of one in Scotts Bluff Co 11 Jun (JR, MB) and a pair at LM 26 Jun (KS, JLL); breeding has occurred at the latter location.
- American White Pelican:** Fall migration was underway in mid-Jul, when 40 were at HCR 11 Jul (G&WH) and 50 along the Missouri Valley in se Nebraska 25 Jul (WRS).
- Double-crested Cormorant:** Scarce in the east in midsummer, one was at BOL 23 Jun (LE), and fall movement had begun at HCR with 32 present 11 Jul (G&WH); apparently none bred this year at HCR.
- American Bittern:** Usually rather scarce in the e RWB, although it has bred there, this year about 9 were reported (JGJ, JC, SS, WF).
- Least Bittern:** Due to excellent water conditions in se Nebraska, reports were widespread, with at least 15 found. Notable at an ephemeral wetland were 1-3 at LPB (L&BP, JR), the best count of 3 was seen 21 Jul (JC, SS). Another was at Nathan's L in se Washington Co 19 and 24 Jun (NR, CNK). In the e RWB, NLB also had 1-3 on 15 Jun-21 Jul; the 3 were seen 21 Jul (JC, SS). Harvard Marsh had 3-4 17 Jul (PD), and 4 other locations had singles 5-17 Jul (m. ob.). Northernmost were 2 at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 6 Jun (WF).
- Great Blue Heron:** About 125 were counted along the Missouri River Valley from Otoe to Richardson Cos 25 Jul (WRS); most were foraging along the receding water edges where high river levels had inundated crop fields.
- Great Egret:** Numbers were far lower than usual; fewer than 30 were reported, with best counts only 9 in se Nebraska 25 Jul (WRS) and 8 at LPB 19 Jun (JR). Most surprisingly, best e RWB count was only 7 (JGJ).
- Snowy Egret:** The only two reported were in Adams Co 7 Jun (PD) and the e RWB 31 Jul (JGJ).
- Little Blue Heron:** None were reported; this is a rare but regular summer visitor.
- Cattle Egret:** Jun numbers as usual were low, with 12 reported (JGJ, WF, DH), but the expected fall influx began in Jul, with 37 at HCR 25 Jul (G&WH) the best seasonal tally.
- Green Heron:** One in Wheeler Co 28 Jul (DH) was northwesterly.
- Black-crowned Night-Heron:** As with Great Egret, fewer were reported; none were found at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ), normally a good spot. The only reports were from Adams Co 7 Jun (PD) and Grant Co 24 Jun (LJH).
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron:** The 4 reports were about normal; single juveniles were in Cherry Co 27 Jun (KS, JLL), the only Jun through mid-Jul record away from the RWB and southeast. The observer's 2nd in the county in 28 years (JG) was in Seward Co 18 Jul. Other reports were from Hall Co 27 Jul (JLL, KS) and Hansen WPA, Clay Co, 25 and 31 Jul (JGJ).
- Glossy Ibis:** Recent years have seen multiple records, but very few in Jun. Of about 45 records in all to date, only 2 were outside the periods 19 Apr-2 Jun and 14 Jul-24 Aug; two may have been nesting with White-faced Ibises 12-14 Jun

2008 at Harvard Marsh (JGJ) and one was very late 5 Oct 2006 (JGJ photo). This summer, an adult in Fillmore Co 24 and 30 Jun (WF, details) became the 3rd Jun record.

**White-faced Ibis:** In recent years this species has nested almost every year either in the RWB or the Sandhills. This year, 50 adults and 12 nests were found at Harvard Marsh 7 Jun (JGJ), but on 5 Jul 42 adults and 15 nests with eggs were found, suggesting that the earlier nests were flooded (the water was about 18 inches higher) and the birds had re-nested (JGJ).

**Turkey Vulture:** Routine reports were statewide; non-breeding sub-adults occur in numbers statewide, and breeding may occur anywhere.

**Osprey:** Reports between 5 Jun and 15 Aug are few, but have increased in recent years. Two birds sitting on the ground east of Scottsbluff 12 Jun may have been the pair which has attempted to breed at Winters Creek L the past 2 years, but the nest site appeared to be unoccupied (KD). There were 4 other reports involving 5 birds: one in Pierce Co 19 Jun (MB), one between Grand Island and Chapman 19 Jun (PD), one at HCR 20 Jun, the longtime observers' first Jun sighting there (G&WH), and two at LO 26 Jun (KS, JLL).

**Mississippi Kite:** Up to 6 were in Ogallala, a regular summer site, and a nest was noted 4 Jun that may have been restarted by 18 Jul after bad weather (JO, KS, JLL).

**Bald Eagle:** Of interest were the 17 seen along 17 miles of the Platte River between Columbus and Schuyler 19 Jul (JGJ), an indication of the current ubiquity of this species in summer.

**Northern Harrier:** The presence of males in summer is indicative of breeding; one was in Hitchcock Co 3 Jun (TJW).

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** The earliest fall arrivals are in mid-late Jul, probably failed breeders. One was in Stanton Co 15 Jul (D&JP, CNK, DH), and a male was in Merrick Co 22 Jul (DH).

**Cooper's Hawk:** A family group of 5 was at Walnut Grove Park, Omaha, 20 Jul (JWH). This species breeds commonly statewide, including within major cities.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** The only report was of 2 seen briefly over Bellevue 26 Jul, identified by their wing crescents (ARy).

**Broad-winged Hawk:** One was seen in North Platte in the area where breeding occurred last year (JP, TJW), but no evidence of breeding was reported. Other sightings in areas where breeding may occur were of 2 in se Washington Co 7 Jun (D&JP), one at FF 18 Jun (L&BP), and an adult at Hummel Park, Omaha, 24 Jun (CNK). Probably early migrants were 2 immatures over Bellevue 31 Jul (L&BP).

**Swainson's Hawk:** Easterly were singles at Eppley Airfield, Omaha, 1 Jun (RHo) and in Lancaster Co 2 Jul (LE), the latter an unusual midsummer record there.

**Red-tailed Hawk:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.

**Ferruginous Hawk:** Routine reports were received for this uncommon Panhandle breeder.

**Golden Eagle:** Routine reports were received for this uncommon Panhandle breeder.

**American Kestrel:** Two nests with young near fledging were in Keith Co 15 Jun (TJW).

**Prairie Falcon:** Routine reports were received for this uncommon Panhandle breeder.



**Peregrine Falcon:** Presumably one of the local breeders was taking advantage of the large Purple Martin roost in Omaha 27 Jul (JR), although migrants are passing through at this date as well.

**King Rail:** Two King Rails were at LPB 24 Jul (KSc, photo), one of very few July-early Aug records. Such records are suggestive of breeding, but no evidence was noted.



King Rail, La Platte Bottoms, Sarpy Co, 1 Aug 2010. Photo by Duane Schwery.

**Virginia Rail:** Routine reports were received for this widespread breeder.

**Sora:** Singles at LPB 21 Jul (JED), NLB 21 Jul (JC, SS), and in Sarpy Co 26 Jul (JJ) were all likely migrants; fall movement begins in mid-Jul.

**Common Moorhen:** Two were at NLB 5 Jul (JC, SS) for the only sighting; no young were reported during the period.

**American Coot:** Seven broods were found at NLB 5 Jul (JGJ), and an adult with 2 young was at LPB 2 Jul (L&BP). This is a common breeder wherever suitable habitat exists.

**Sandhill Crane:** The Morrill Co breeding pair arrived in late Mar but had not been seen since Jun (KD).

**Black-bellied Plover:** Last for spring was in Adams Co 7 Jun (PD) and first for fall was an adult in breeding plumage in Hall Co 31 Jul (CNK). These are expected dates.

**American Golden-Plover:** None were reported; Jun and Jul records are rare, as most fall migrants are juveniles which arrive mostly in Sep.

**Snowy Plover:** No information was received from the two sites where young were fledged in 2009. Rising water levels appear to have eliminated suitable habitat for this species at LM.

**Semipalmated Plover:** Last for spring was rather late at CLNWR 13 Jun (CG) and first for fall was in Hall Co 27 Jul (JLL, KS).

**Piping Plover:** Although habitat at LM is limited due to rising water levels, at least one was present 26 Jun (KS, JLL). A new breeding site is Linoma Beach in sw Sarpy Co, where 2 adults and 3 young were seen 12 Jul (JC, SS); breeding at such development sites is increasing along the lower Platte River.

**Killdeer:** Excellent counts, 2nd and 4th-highest for fall, were the 750 in the e RWB 25 Jul (JGJ) and 314 in se Nebraska 25 Jul (WRS).

**Mountain Plover:** Excellent updates on the birds in the sw Panhandle are available at <http://www.facebook.com/MountainPlover>. Following a severe spring storm, it appears that many nests survived or re-nesting occurred, as the last eggs hatched as late as 19 Jul, and about 30 broods out of a total of 109 nests were being tracked as of 12 Jul. Chick survival is estimated at 54%. As of 1 Jul, adults were in 2 groups, failed breeders and those with broods. The presumed failed breeders were in small groups of 5-7 birds as early as 1 Jul, at least 3 weeks before flocks usually form. By 21 Jul these flocks had increased in size to 15-20 birds. As late as 28 Jul, 23 adults were still being tracked. Of those, 14 had young, several of which had reached juvenile stage.

**Black-necked Stilt:** After a few years of increasing breeding presence in the e RWB, this year no birds were found there (JGJ), and very few were reported overall. The only breeding reported was at a traditional Sandhills site between mile markers 106 and 107 on Highway 2, where a nest with 2 eggs was located 24 Jun (LJH)

**American Avocet:** Easterly for the date were 4 in the e RWB 4 Jul (JGJ); breeding has occurred in the e RWB, but breeding season reports are few.

**Spotted Sandpiper:** This is a fairly common summering bird statewide; 16 were counted between Grand Island and Chapman 19 Jun (PD).

**Solitary Sandpiper:** First migrant reported was in Lancaster Co 12 Jul (JC, SS), about normal.

**Greater Yellowlegs:** The only report for Jun was in Clay Co 6 Jun (JGJ); returning fall birds appear in mid-Jun, and so this may actually have been an early fall migrant! The last reported this spring was 11 May.

**Willet:** Early fall migrants were somewhat easterly at Jack Sinn 2 Jul (LE) and near Columbus 19 Jul (JGJ). Willets are rare eastward in fall. A juvenile had reached the e RWB by 25 Jul (JGJ), rather early for this age-group.

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** Rather early was one in Seward Co 29 Jun (LE); fall arrival is a bit later on average than Greater Yellowlegs.

**Upland Sandpiper:** Getting rather late for territorial birds were the 2 in Dodge Co 27 Jul (D&JP); fall movement begins in late Jul.

**Long-billed Curlew:** Breeding takes place early or not at all with this species; a juvenile not yet capable of flight was in Cherry Co 9 Jun (CNK), while the transmitter-wearing female "Bailey" departed Nebraska 12 Jun and flew a mere 360 miles to the Oklahoma Panhandle the same day (JGJ).

**Hudsonian Godwit:** Rather late was one in York Co 2-6 Jun (JGJ), the 4th-latest in spring.

**Marbled Godwit:** The only report was of one in Seward Co 22 Jul (CNK). This species is rare in fall in the east; this only about the 27th such record.

**Sanderling:** Rather late was one at CLNWR 7 Jun (JGJ, CG), only the 6th Jun record after 5 Jun.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper:** Last in spring was one at Jack Sinn 8 Jun (LE), rather late. First for fall was one on time in the e RWB 14 Jul (JGJ).

**Western Sandpiper:** There were no reports; fall migrants usually appear in Jul.

- Least Sandpiper:** One at CLNWR 13 Jun (CG) was either the latest ever for spring by 3 days or the earliest ever for fall by 6 days.
- White-rumped Sandpiper:** This late spring migrant was still present in good numbers into Jun: 500 were in the e RWB 2 Jun and 100 were there 6 Jun (JGJ). Last were 6 at Jack Sinn 8 Jun (LE), about a week before the latest dates.
- Baird's Sandpiper:** Last for spring was at NLB 2 Jun (JGJ), and first for fall in the e RWB was on 25 Jul (JGJ), normal dates.
- Pectoral Sandpiper:** Last for spring was in the e RWB 6 Jun (JGJ) and first for fall was there 25 Jul (JGJ), routine dates.
- Dunlin:** None were reported; this species usually tarries into Jun.
- Stilt Sandpiper:** Reports were routine; fall migrants arrive in mid-Jul.
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** Arrival was on the early side: 8 were at 2 locations in the e RWB 25 Jul (JGJ, JLL, KS), and was one in Cass Co the next day (CNK).
- Short-billed Dowitcher:** None were reported; one observer expressed surprise at their absence (JGJ). Adults migrate through the state almost exclusively in Jul.
- Long-billed Dowitcher:** Second-earliest on record for fall were a surprising 11 at Pintail WMA, Hamilton Co, 14 Jul (JGJ); few appear before the end of the month.
- Wilson's Snipe:** Reports were routine; breeding occurs in most of the nw part of the state and occasionally elsewhere.
- American Woodcock:** None were reported; this species is difficult to find in midsummer.
- Wilson's Phalarope:** Breeding is occasional in the e RWB; 7 birds at Harvard Marsh 6 Jun (JGJ) and 2 at Pintail WMA, Hamilton Co, 14 Jul (JGJ) were suggestive. The 37 in the e RWB 25 Jul (JGJ) probably were migrants.
- Franklin's Gull:** Spring stragglers tailed off in mid-Jun, with 2 immatures at BOL 15 Jun (JC, SS) and 3 birds in Keith Co (TJW). A good count for Jun was the 450 at BOL 8 Jun (LE). First for fall were 7 at HCR 15 Jul (G&WH). Midsummer reports are not uncommon.
- Ring-billed Gull:** The usual few summer stragglers were noted, as expected, all immatures (JM, JGJ, WRS).
- California Gull:** The only reports were from CLNWR, where 2 were present 3 Jun and one on 13 Jun (CG); reports away from LM in midsummer are unusual.
- Herring Gull:** None were reported; usually a few immatures occur at larger reservoirs.
- Least Tern:** Along with Piping Plovers, 1-2 were at Linoma Beach, Sarpy Co, 2 Jun and 12 Jul (JC, SS); good numbers were along the Platte River between Columbus and Schuyler, with 40 counted by kayak 19 Jul (JGJ) and 7 were between Grand Island and Chapman 19 Jun (PD). A good tally was the 10 in Dixon Co 1 Jun (JJ).
- Caspian Tern:** This species is most often reported in early Jun; one was at Linoma Beach, Sarpy Co, 2 Jun (JC, SS). However, there are few reports from mid-Jun to mid-Jul, and so 2 in Antelope Co 19 Jun (MB) were of interest. A molting adult was in Nemaha Co 25 Jul (WRS).

- Black Tern:** Away from breeding locations, spring migrants are seen well into Jun; as many as 30 were at Jack Sinn 8 Jun (LE) and 5 were at LPB 15 Jun (JR). None were reported between 15 Jun and 21 Jul, when 14 were at LPB (JED) and 20 adults were at North Platte (TJW). Adults usually appear first in fall.
- Forster's Tern:** Reports were during the normal migration period, into early Jun and again in late Jul (JR, G&WH); no reports were received from the breeding sites in the Sandhills.
- Rock Pigeon:** Routine reports were received for this statewide resident.
- Eurasian Collared-Dove:** Routine reports were received for this essentially statewide resident.
- White-winged Dove:** Reports continue apace; although still rare, this species has been reported several times each year for some time now, although breeding records are still few and were lacking this season. Five singles were reported: in Albion on 1 and 6 Jun (D&CN), Grand Island 2 Jun (AC), in Hitchcock Co 3 Jun (TJW), in Lincoln 5 Jul (CR), and at Benkelman 22 Jul (WF).
- Mourning Dove:** Routine reports were received for this statewide summer resident.
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** Discouraging was a report that only 4 birds were found in the 39 Breeding Bird Atlas blocks checked by the reporters in Jun-Jul (D&JP). Nest-building was noted in Hitchcock Co 2 Jun (TJW).
- Black-billed Cuckoo:** A surprising number of reports was received; best for several years. Nine were reported (m. ob.), mostly in the east, but one was westerly in Lincoln Co 28 Jun (TJW).
- Barn Owl:** By far most common in the southwest, most reports were from there (TJW, KD, AK). Elsewhere, one was in Sioux Co 10 Jun (JR, MB), and another was in Loup Co 26 Jun (TJW), the latter in an area where few are reported.
- Eastern Screech-Owl:** Routine reports were received for this statewide resident.
- Great Horned Owl:** Routine reports were received for this statewide resident.
- Burrowing Owl:** The presence of this species in the e RWB continued with successful breeding at Hultine WPA, Clay Co, where a half-grown fledgling was seen 5 Jul (JC, SS, JGJ). Of 8 found in Scotts Bluff Co 31 Jul, 7 were juveniles (KD).
- Barred Owl:** One near Milford on the Little Blue River 22 Jul (JG) adds to data indicating a population in the Little Blue Valley.
- Long-eared Owl:** Nests are rarely reported, although the species apparently breeds statewide. One was incubating in a cedar shelterbelt in Hitchcock Co 3 Jun; 3 young were near the empty nest 16 Jun, and none were present 26 Jun (TJW).
- Short-eared Owl:** None were reported; breeding occurs mostly in the Sandhills.
- Common Nighthawk:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Common Poorwill:** Showing no desire for sleep, the observer (TJW) ran part of his se Lincoln Co BBS route backwards on 28 Jun from 2.30-5.30 am, counting 14 Poorwills in 11 stops, then running the entire route in the right direction for the regular survey! There is clearly a good population in the cedar canyons in Lincoln Co.
- Chuck-will's-widow:** At least one was at the species' northern outpost at Bohemia Prairie WMA in Knox Co 14 Jun (WF), while a good count of 6 was made at ICSP 30 Jun (WRS, PS, SG).
- Whip-poor-will:** Also at Bohemia Prairie were 2 whips 14 Jun (WF), not unexpected at that location. An excellent count was the 30 at ICSP 30 Jun (WRS, PS, SG).

- Chimney Swift:** Routine reports were received for this essentially statewide breeder.
- White-throated Swift:** One at Wright's Gap, ne Banner Co, 19 Jun (AK) was at the east edge of its range in the Wildcat Hills.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird:** Away from the Missouri River Valley, breeding season sightings are spotty; a male was in Gage Co 15 Jun (JGJ), and a single was at Hastings 19 Jun (LR, RH).
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird:** The first hummer for the season in the observer's yard near Mitchell was this species on 20 Jul (KD); it was the only one reported.
- Rufous Hummingbird:** One in Scotts Bluff Co 14 Jul (AK) was rather early, but expected there. A major surprise was an immature male at a Lancaster Co feeder 28-30 Jul (S&RW). This is about the 22nd record for the east, and the earliest on record there. Most eastern records tend to be later in fall.
- Belted Kingfisher:** Reports were routine for this statewide low-density breeder.
- Red-headed Woodpecker:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.
- Red-bellied Woodpecker:** Reports were routine for this species, which breeds statewide except for the Panhandle, where it is scarce.
- Downy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.
- Hairy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.
- Northern Flicker:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.
- Pileated Woodpecker:** Reports were from the two known regular breeding sites at FF (JR, L&BP) and ICSP (L&BP); reports elsewhere are rare, but one was in extreme se Cass and ne Otoe Cos 18 Jul (CNK), an area with apparently suitable breeding habitat.
- Western Wood-Pewee:** This species appears to be undergoing a slow eastward creep; at least one was in the cedar canyons of se Lincoln Co 18 Jun (TJW), where they are present each year now, and another was in Thomas Co 12 Jun (JR, MB), where summering birds are occasionally reported.
- Eastern Wood-Pewee:** One calling in Dawes Co 10 Jun (JR, MB) was a rare find that far west.
- Acadian Flycatcher:** This species has appeared a little farther west and north recently. Singles were reported at FF 5 Jun (JR) and 16 Jun (L&BP) and were at WP 5 Jun (WRS) and 19 Jun (LE).
- Willow Flycatcher:** Ten were counted along the Platte River between Grand Island and Chapman 19 Jun (PD), and 3 were singing loudly from a power line in the Peru bottoms as late as 25 Jul (WRS).
- Cordilleran Flycatcher:** Not often reported in migration, especially east of the w Panhandle, one was at CLNWR 12 Jun (CG). One at Wright's Gap, Banner Co, 19 Jun (AK) may have been a migrant; the only breeding record for the Wildcat Hills was at the WHNC in 2008.
- Eastern Phoebe:** The 8 in Lancaster Co 8 Jun (LE) was a good tally.
- Say's Phoebe:** This species may be in one of its periodic (20 years or so) eastward moves into ne Nebraska; at least one was at Ashfall Fossil Beds SHP, Antelope Co, 6 and 12 Jun (JJ, MB, JR), and one was in Hooker Co 8 Jun (CNK).
- Great Crested Flycatcher:** One at CLNWR 3 Jun (CG) was apparently still on the move in an area lacking breeding habitat. Reports during the breeding period from urban settings such as Lincoln 11-12 Jun (JGJ) and farm groves in se Lincoln Co, where 3 pairs were found 6 Jun (TJW), suggest an increase in numbers resulting in the occupation of apparently less than optimal habitat (TJW).

- Cassin's Kingbird:** One at CLNWR 18 Jun (CG) was east of the usual range and out of its expected habitat, surprising at that date.
- Western Kingbird:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Eastern Kingbird:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher:** As has been the case in recent years, nesting was reported this year also, with sites in Lancaster and Kearney Cos. A single was first seen at BOL 8 Jun (LE, photos 15 Jun ET), and nest-building was underway the same day (JG), but the nest was gone 24 Jun, possibly due to storms (JG). A pair (KS, WF) at a site in Kearney Co since spring (LR, RH, KS, CR) built a nest and the female was incubating by 30 Jun (WF); the nesting apparently failed, however, as no young were present 18 Jul (WF). Two others were reported, singles in Thayer Co 8 Jun (GG) and Johnson Co 8 Jul (LE).
- Loggerhead Shrike:** Numbers appear to be at reasonable levels in Nebraska, despite concern elsewhere in its range. At least 3 pairs with at least one fledged young per pair were in a 5-mile stretch in Dodge Co 15 Jul (D&JP), and "good numbers" were noted in se Cherry Co 9 Jun (CNK).
- Bell's Vireo:** This is another species doing well in Nebraska, especially in the central part of the state, but of concern elsewhere. The "mother lode" was discovered in Nance Co 25 Jul (LR, RH), and a nest was found in Hitchcock Co 2 Jun (TJW).
- Yellow-throated Vireo:** Straggling far to the west was one at CLNWR 12 Jun (CG); this is the first Panhandle record for Jun, and one of only 3 Panhandle records in all, the other two in May.
- Plumbeous Vireo:** Routine reports were received for this species from its breeding range in the northwest.
- Warbling Vireo:** Routine reports were received for this statewide breeder.
- Red-eyed Vireo:** As with Great Crested Flycatcher, observers noted a few in towns (TJW, JR); this may indicate an increasing population, better habitat in towns, etc.
- Blue Jay:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Pinyon Jay:** None were reported. This species is secretive in summer and breeding has been only rarely documented.
- Black-billed Magpie:** The small group in Madison Co along the Cowboy Trail persists; 1-2 were seen there during the period (WF). Numbers are spotty elsewhere, although some signs of recovery include the "first for a while" near Shelton 9 Jun (MM), the observer's first in Custer Co 26 Jun (TH), and the first for this year near where 3 were seen last year in se Lincoln Co 26 Jul (TJW).
- American Crow:** Routine reports were received for this statewide breeder.
- Horned Lark:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Purple Martin:** The large Omaha roost began to reassemble in late Jun; 500 were there 26 Jun (JED) and numbers had built to 12,500 by the end of Jul (JR, JED).
- Tree Swallow:** Two nests, each with 6 eggs, were on schedule in Seward Co 9 Jun (JG).
- Violet-Green Swallow:** Routine reports were received for this uncommon Panhandle canyon breeder.

- Northern Rough-winged Swallow:** Numerous small flocks totaling about 200 birds were in Nemaha Co 25 Jul (WRS).
- Bank Swallow:** Routine reports were received for this locally common statewide breeder.
- Cliff Swallow:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Barn Swallow:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.
- Black-capped Chickadee:** This species also is recovering from a period of low numbers; the observers' first for 5 years were seen on their farm 30 Jul (D&JP).
- Tufted Titmouse:** Reports received were routine for this se Nebraska resident.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch:** Exciting was the sighting 9 Jul of 5-6 birds, including "raggedy juveniles" at Forest Lawn Cem, Omaha, (JR). Up to 6 birds had been seen there Jun-Jul of 2008 and 2009 (JR) as well. These sightings suggest that there is a small breeding population becoming established at the cemetery. A single in Albion 6 Jun (D&CN) was a bit late away from a known breeding area.
- White-breasted Nuthatch:** The Rocky Mountain subspecies breeds in the Pine Ridge, east at least as far as the Gordon area, where 2 were found 9 Jun (CNK).
- Pygmy Nuthatch:** Noteworthy was the presence of 7 in the Wildcat Hills canyons south of Redington 18 Jun (LJH); the eastward extent of breeding in the Wildcat Hills is uncertain.
- Brown Creeper:** None were reported; breeding occurs in very small numbers in Sarpy and perhaps Washington Cos, as well as on the Pine Ridge.
- Rock Wren:** Somewhat northeasterly were 2 reported in spring at Ashfall Fossil Beds SHP, Antelope Co, and seen again 6 Jun (MB, JJ). Another was in Hooker Co 8 Jun (CNK). The eastward extent of the breeding range is uncertain.
- Carolina Wren:** Only a few were reported, as might be expected after the tough weather last winter; none were found in Lancaster Co during the period (LE). Interestingly, reports from the edge of the range continued, with singles in Kearney 9 Jul (KS), Doniphan 14 Jul (JLL), and Hall Co, where one was singing persistently 23 Jul (CNK). One in Dodge Co 30 Jul was only the observers' second on their farm (D&JP).
- House Wren:** An indication of how abundant this species is was the count of 62 at WP 26 Jun (LE), 2nd-highest for a summer count.
- Sedge Wren:** Reports between spring migration and fall influx, that is the period 7 Jun-7 Jul, are scarce; there are a few breeding records for this period, however. A small summering group appears to have established at FF, where 1-2 were present at least through 11 Jun (L&BP). Singing birds in Wayne Co 7 Jun (WF) and Gosper Co 25 Jun (WF) were intriguing; the Wayne Co birds may have been migrants, but there are few reports as far west as Gosper Co. The usual fall influx was noted beginning in mid-Jul (m. ob.).
- Marsh Wren:** Southerly reports are few during the breeding season; single birds were reported at Jack Sinn 5-8 Jun (WRS, LE), one was at FF 12 Jun (L&BP), and one was in se Washington Co 19 Jun (NR). This species also has a fall influx; 5 were at Whitehead Saline Wetlands, Lancaster Co, 12 Jul (JC, SS).
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** One at CLNWR 27 Jun (KS, JLL) was part of the northward expansion in the west. That at least some of these birds are of the western subspecies *Polioptila caerulea obscura*, as might be expected, is

suggested by tape responses in Hitchcock Co 3 Jun, where at least one bird appeared to respond more strongly to western calls (TJW).

**Eastern Bluebird:** The 60+ in se Cass Co 18 Jul (CNK) must have been quite a sight; impressive also was the 47 fledged from boxes at ADF (LF).

**Mountain Bluebird:** A female in canyons s of Redington 18 Jun (LJH) was at the eastern edge of the Wildcat Hills range.

**Swainson's Thrush:** Last one reported was in Scotts Bluff Co 5 Jun (AK), about on time.

**Wood Thrush:** All reports were from se Nebraska, as expected; one in Butler Co 19 Jul (GJ) was nw-most. ICSP had 1-2 singing birds as late as 25-26 Jul (WRS, L&BP).

**American Robin:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.

**Gray Catbird:** One in a yard s of Gering 10 Jul was considered a "surprise" there (AK). Summering birds are rare in the west.

**Northern Mockingbird:** There were numerous reports of this now fairly common species in the south; as many as 12 were in a single Breeding Bird Atlas block in Johnson Co 8 Jul (CNK).

**Brown Thrasher:** This species is abundant in se Nebraska; 24 were in a single Breeding Bird Atlas block in Johnson Co 8 Jul (LE).

**European Starling:** Reports were routine for this common statewide breeder.

**Cedar Waxwing:** A flock of 25 was at FF 5 Jun (JR), typical of this species; such late spring flocks are thought to be migrants from the far s part of the winter range. Two were carrying nest materials in Scotts Bluff Co 26 Jun (AK).

**Tennessee Warbler:** Migrants are not uncommon in early Jun; 4 were reported in the east, last in Washington Co 7 Jun (D&JP).

**Orange-crowned Warbler:** One became yet another spring straggler taking refuge at CLNWR; the 12 Jun sighting (CG) is the 2nd latest on record.

**Nashville Warbler:** The first Jul record for this species in Nebraska was a male in extreme se Cass Co 18 Jul (CNK); next earliest fall record is 10 Aug and latest in spring is 9 Jun.

**Northern Parula:** A surprise was the 3 at Kelley Creek Park, McCook, 6 Jun (CH), but even more surprising was one at Ash Hollow SHP, Garden Co, 26 Jun (KS, JLL), only the 2nd Jun record for the Panhandle.

**Yellow Warbler:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.

**Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler:** Significantly east of the usual range was a presumed late migrant in w. Cherry Co 10 Jun (JR, MB); breeding occurs east to Dawes Co on the Pine Ridge.

**Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler:** Another late spring migrant Yellow-rumped was of this subspecies at CLNWR 12 Jun (CG), 2nd-latest on record for spring.

**Blackburnian Warbler:** One in Omaha 13 Jun (JR) was only the 4th state record for Jun to mid-Aug.

**Yellow-throated Warbler:** Reports were routine, all from the limited range in se Nebraska.

**Cerulean Warbler:** No reports were received; this is a rare summer visitor in the extreme east.

**Black-and-white Warbler:** No reports were received for this uncommon breeder in n Nebraska.

**American Redstart:** Reports were routine for this common breeder in e and n Nebraska.

**Prothonotary Warbler:** A singing male was at FF 5 Jun (JR), one of few known summering sites in the extreme southeast.



- Ovenbird:** Although summering birds are fairly common on the Pine Ridge, one summering at WSR was a surprise; it was the longtime observer's first for summer (HKH). However, this species does breed in "foothill riparian thickets" in Colorado (Andrews and Righter).
- Louisiana Waterthrush:** Somewhat west of the usual se Nebraska range were singles in Thayer Co 14 Jun (GG) and in s Gage Co 30 Jun (CNK, NR).
- Kentucky Warbler:** None were reported; this is an uncommon breeder in se Nebraska.
- Common Yellowthroat:** Reports were routine for this common statewide breeder.
- Yellow-breasted Chat:** Rarely reported in the east, one was in Nemaha Co 19 Jun (CNK); only the 9th eastern record since 1981. Reports from the western two thirds of the state were of good numbers: it was "abundant" in Hitchcock Co 3 Jun (TJW), and "everywhere" around HCR 27 Jun (LR, RH).
- Summer Tanager:** Good numbers continue at ICSP, where 5 were counted 26 Jul (L&BP). An adult male in Morrill Co 11 Jun (DL) was only the 10th Panhandle record.
- Scarlet Tanager:** Best count was 2-3 near the Lewis and Clark Visitor Center, Nebraska City, 12 Jul (JC, SS).
- Western Tanager:** Routine reports were received for this Panhandle pinewoods breeder.
- Spotted Towhee:** Towhees at Niobrara SP, Knox Co, 10 Jul were mostly hybrids by song, but most looked like Easterns (RE). One observer (MB) has indicated that most towhees in Knox Co are phenotypic Spottedts, but there is evidence (Scharf 2005, citation available on request) that the mix can indeed change quite quickly from year to year.
- Eastern Towhee:** Singles in Antelope Co 6 Jun (JJ) and at Fullerton 25 Jul (LR, RH) were near the west edge of the summer range.
- Cassin's Sparrow:** Recent years have seen populations north and east of the generally assumed range in sand-sage prairies of the southwest. Two summered at WSR (HKH), one was at CLNWR 2 Jun, where birds have been present in sand-sage or yucca each of the last 3 years (CG), and 1-4 were s of CLNWR 19 and 27 Jun (CG, KS, JLL). In addition, the 7 in sw Kimball Co 11 Jun (JR, MB) was a good count.
- Chipping Sparrow:** Probably scarcest in summer in the sw, interesting survey data provided by TJ Walker from 21 blocks for the years 2006-2010 show a total of only 5 singing males in Dundy, Chase, Perkins, Hitchcock, Hayes, and Frontier Cos. Even in 20 blocks nearer the North Platte River in Lincoln and Keith Cos, only 12 singing males were found (TJW). A single in Perkins Co 22 Jul (WF) may have been a molt migrant, a phenomenon suggested to occur in this species and other passerines (Ted Floyd).
- Brewer's Sparrow:** Few are reported from their remote w Panhandle habitat; 2 were in w Sioux Co 11 Jun (JR, MB).
- Field Sparrow:** Not numerous in the sw, one was in Hitchcock Co 26 Jun (CH).
- Vesper Sparrow:** Good numbers were found during surveys in Dodge Co and ne Nebraska during the summer (D&JP); this species is most common in the north and northwest, but appears to be adapting to agricultural fields in the east.
- Lark Sparrow:** Reports of this common statewide breeder were routine.
- Lark Bunting:** Routine reports were received for this common western breeder.
- Savannah Sparrow:** Arriving fall migrants were rather early singles at ADF 27 Jul (LF) and in Scotts Bluff Co 31 Jul (KD).

**Grasshopper Sparrow:** This species is doing well in all types of grassland in Nebraska; about 30 were present in a 160-acre prairie in Pawnee Co 5 Jun (WRS), and “dozens” in Nance Co 25 Jul included many young (LR, RH).

**Baird’s Sparrow:** Following sightings of singing birds in May, none were found 1 Jun 2010 (B&DW) in the same area of extreme ne Sioux Co; none were found in Jun 2009 after several singing birds were found in May in the same area.

**Henslow’s Sparrow:** Checks of two prairies in Pawnee Co 5 Jun found 11 singing birds; 5 were in a 3rd year post graze area west of Burchard L WMA (WRS), and 6 were on the north ridge of Pawnee Prairie WMA, also 3rd-year post graze (WRS). At both prairies, none were found in 1st and 2nd year post graze grassland.

**Song Sparrow:** Probably least numerous in summer in the southwest and Panhandle, singles were in Gosper Co 24 and 25 Jun (WF), and at HCR 26 Jun (LR, RH).

**Swamp Sparrow:** Reports were from areas of cen. Nebraska where this species is known to occupy cattail marshes: good numbers were along the Loup River in Loup Co 26 Jun (TJW) and 3 were at Marsh Wren WMA, Howard Co, 17 Jul (LR, RH). Wet meadows are also used; 2 were in such habitat near Milburn 26 Jun (WF).

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Rather late was a black-lored adult at CLNWR 18 Jun (CG, photo); it seems most likely on geographic grounds that this was a Rocky Mountain bird of the subspecies *Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*.

**Dark-eyed (White-winged) Junco:** No reports were received for this fairly common Pine Ridge breeder.

**McCown’s Longspur:** No reports were received for this fairly common western Panhandle breeder.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur:** No reports were received for this fairly common western and northern breeder.

**Northern Cardinal:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide (rare in the Panhandle) breeder.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** Westerly for the date were 2 in Loup Co 26 Jun (TH, WM); only the 3rd mid-Jun through Jul report for the Loup River drainage.

**Black-headed Grosbeak:** An “apparent influx” of presumed late migrants involved 6 birds at Fairmont 10 Jun (JRI); this is somewhat east of the usual migration and summering ranges.

**Blue Grosbeak:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.

**Lazuli Bunting:** Easterly sightings involved a male in se Lincoln Co 19 Jul at the same place one was located in 2009 (TJW), and in Hitchcock Co a phenotypically pure-looking male and two hybrids with white abdomens, one with wing bars, were present 3 Jun with numerous Indigo Buntings (TJW). Some of the latter birds were likely migrants. Young were being fed in ne Banner Co 19 Jul (AK).

**Indigo Bunting:** Reports were routine for this statewide breeder.

**Dickcissel:** This species was again prominent in the west, as has been the case in the last few years. It was “another good year” in se Lincoln Co (TJW), and numbers were increased over the previous 2 years at CLNWR (CG). Westerly singing birds were in the Wildcat Hills 19 and 26 Jun (AK) and s. of Gering 20 Jun-20 Jul (AK), and 1-2 were in Grant Co 24-25 Jun (LJH). As might be expected when numbers are up in the west, the se had good numbers as well: 125 were in se Nebraska 25 Jul (WRS), 58 were in Lancaster Co 2 Jul (LE), and 55 were in Johnson Co 19 Jun (LE).

**Bobolink:** Numbers appeared to be increasing in the far se; 15 were in a Breeding Bird Atlas block in Johnson Co 8 Jul (LE) and a pair was in Pawnee Co 5 Jun (WRS). A surprising 10 were at SCP 20 Jul (KP), likely migrants. Fall flocks form early; a non-vocal flock of 7 was in sw Phelps Co 19 Jul (WF).

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.

**Eastern Meadowlark:** This species is distributed locally in the Sandhills; one was singing in Grant Co 29 Jul (WF).

**Western Meadowlark:** Routine reports were received for this common statewide breeder.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird:** Numbers increase in the se in summers with wet conditions, as this year. LPB hosted 1-2 during the period (SS, JC, JR, L&BP), and 6 were at Jack Sinn 5 Jun (WRS).

**Brewer's Blackbird:** During the last 3 years Scotts Bluff Co has had a few sightings in summer, but this year evidence that the breeding range has extended sw of the Wildcat Hills was found on the Murray L BBS route, which had its first ever record of the species 22 Jun, involving birds at 5 stops, with adults carrying food at two of the stops (KD, AK). Another was carrying food at WHNC 19 Jun (AK).

**Common Grackle:** Reports were routine for this common to abundant statewide breeder.

**Great-tailed Grackle:** The observer's first for the Sandhills was one at Lakeside 24 Jun (LJH), while 1-2 in Perkins and Chase Cos 22 Jul (WF) were noteworthy there.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** Reports were routine for this common statewide breeder.

**Orchard Oriole:** Reports were routine for this common statewide breeder.

**Baltimore Oriole:** Phenotypically pure birds occur in the w Panhandle, mostly as spring migrants; 2 were in a Scotts Bluff Co yard 1 Jun (KD) and another was in the same county 5 Jun (AK).

**Bullock's Oriole:** It has been shown recently that males leave early on molt migration for the sw United States; by 31 Jul the several birds in the observer's yard were females and juveniles (KD).

**House Finch:** No reports were received; numbers may be declining, and reports of summering birds would be welcome.

**Red Crossbill:** Reports were from the usual haunts, Wildcat Hills (LJH, AK) and the Pine Ridge (JR, MB). Only about 7 in all were reported.

**Pine Siskin:** Last to depart the observer's Scotts Bluff Co yard were later than usual on 5 Jun (KD).

**Lesser Goldfinch:** Reports continue for this species, which appears to have expanded into w Nebraska. Possibly Nebraska's first breeding record was of an adult pair at Wright's Gap, ne Banner Co, 19 Jun apparently feeding at least one young bird inside a bush; the young bird was not visible but could be heard "cheeping" (KD, AK). Two were in the observer's Mitchell yard 1 Jun (KD), and a male was in Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co 11 Jun (JR, MB).

**American Goldfinch:** Reports were routine for this common statewide breeder; breeding often doesn't get underway until Jul.

**House Sparrow:** Along with House Finch, this town-dweller may also be declining in numbers, as in Nebraska City (LF).

## My Life in Biology: Paul A. Johnsgard

### Early Years 1931-1949

I was born in 1931 in the very small town of Christine, North Dakota, on the Red River about 20 miles south of Fargo. My granddad owned a general store there, and my father worked in that store for as long as we lived in Christine, which was until 1939. These were the Depression years, and my major memories of that time are of hot dusty streets in the summer and bitterly cold winters, when I had to walk across town to school. I recently determined that it was slightly over a half a mile from our house near the Lutheran church at the western edge of town to school, which was beyond the eastern edge of town.

We lived a few blocks from the railroad tracks. Christine was one of those little whistle-stop towns, and my earliest memories of nature are of walking out along the railroad tracks gathering wildflowers for my mother. She encouraged my bringing back wildflowers and watching local birds like Red-winged Blackbirds. In fact, when I started school, my first-grade teacher, Hazel Bilstead, had a mounted male Red-winged Blackbird in a glass Victorian bell jar, which allowed me to examine that beautiful bird up close. I can remember that as if it were yesterday, and I think that my need to see live birds in detail began at that time. I later dedicated one of my books to Miss Bilstead's memory.

The land around Christine is in the bed of glacial Lake Agassiz and is as flat as a tabletop. There was little natural habitat except along the wooded river itself. The railroad right-of-way had prairie grasses and other prairie plants, and also native prairie birds such as Dickcissels and Western Meadowlarks. I had no field identification guides and there was no library in town, so even though I now know that Roger Tory Peterson's first field guide was published in 1934, I had no knowledge of it then. Mother did have some pocket-sized, illustrated bird books, with covers of different colors and titles like *Birds of Towns*, *Birds of the Country*, *Birds of the Woods*, etc.

In 1940 we moved to Wahpeton, on the Red River about 20 miles south of Christine, where Dad took a job in the county courthouse. He initially worked as an assistant registrar of deeds and later as a state sanitarian. The move to Wahpeton was a very important event for me. Wahpeton is the county seat of Richland County, and it had a population of about 3000 and an excellent public school.

Wahpeton's public library was critically important to me. I can visualize to this day exactly where the bird books were and what was there. In fact, a couple of years ago I went back and saw with pleasure that they still had the copy of T. S. Roberts' two-volume *The Birds of Minnesota* that I used to delight in. The first time I stopped to check on it, I was heartsick when I couldn't find it and assumed it had been disposed of, but then I found it in the reference section. By then the library had some of my own titles, too.

I was very shy as a child. My idea of having fun was going off into the woods and looking for wildflowers or watching birds. I drew almost constantly, mostly

birds. I've had people who knew me back in grade school tell me that the one thing they remember about me was that I was always drawing. My older brother was probably better than I; he reminded me recently that he won quite a number of drawing awards at state fairs.

Another important thing happened shortly after we moved to Wahpeton. In 1943 my mother, who had taken a job in a department store, spent \$750 of her hard-earned money to buy a cottage on Lake Lida near Pelican Rapids. It is about 40 miles from Wahpeton, or almost as far as it was possible to go, given wartime gas rationing. The cottage gave us a wonderful place to go during summer.

Behind the cottage was a square mile of basically undisturbed maple-basswood forest, filled with everything imaginable, including showy lady's slipper, yellow lady's slipper, showy orchid, and all of the other woodland wildflowers one can imagine. The wildflower garden that I moved down out of the woods into a shady site behind our cottage was still thriving when I sold the cottage in about 2005. I was quite content just being by myself and wandering through the woods with my dog.

I was very poor at athletics. I hated baseball and was always the last person to be chosen. I didn't grow tall until late in high school, so I wasn't any good at basketball, either. I was a good student, but I wasn't compulsive about grades. I had only an adequate grade-point average, but it was good enough to get me into the National Honor Society. I saw one of my old teachers from Science School when I was home for my mother's funeral in 2000. He said, "You know, you were my favorite student of all time." I was surprised to hear that, as he must have had thousands of students in his classes.

I read a lot of natural history, especially books about animals, as well as all kinds of popular stories. I was also interested in building model airplanes and collecting rocks and wild plants. Mother encouraged all of my reading and collecting. I also had the good fortune to have what I suppose one would call a rich aunt, my mother's sister Beatrice who lived in Detroit. After she realized I was so interested in birds, she would send me wonderful bird books for Christmas. My copy of Audubon's *Birds of America* came from her in 1939. I still treasure it. In 1940 we took a family trip to Detroit to visit her. It was my first long road trip. She and her husband had a very large, old house and a big backyard and garden. While exploring there I got excited because I saw a tulip tree for the first time. I went running in to tell Mother I'd seen a tulip tree, which of course don't grow in North Dakota. She said, "How in the world did you know that?" I told her it was pictured in Audubon's *Birds of America*; where one of the plates showed some Baltimore Orioles in a tulip tree (*Liriodendron*).

Waterfowl became increasingly important to me because of my mother's cousin "Bud" Morgan, who at that time was a game warden. By the time I was 11 he had started taking me out on his spring duck counts, where he taught me how to identify waterfowl. That, I think, was especially important in directing me toward studying waterfowl. By the time I was 13, I was given a copy of F.H. Kortright's *Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America*, which I practically memorized.

Both of my parents knew the value of education. Following high school, Dad enrolled at the State School of Science (now the North Dakota State College of Science) in Wahpeton, but soon had to go to work with his father for economic reasons. Mother received a teaching diploma from a normal school at Fargo. She taught for a few years in a one-room schoolhouse in the country before she was married. In the end, my brothers, Keith and Larry, and I each earned a Ph.D. or an M.D. Dad told each of us that if we would go to college, he would pay our basic enrollment expenses until we graduated. I thought I would go to college to get a degree in wildlife management. I thought that was a way I could be out in the field and enjoy nature.

#### Undergraduate years and Frank Cassel 1949-1953

I attended the North Dakota State School of Science in Wahpeton from 1949 to 1951. It is a two-year college with a trade school and a liberal arts program, so I got a junior college diploma in liberal arts. There were only two choices for me at that point. One was North Dakota Agricultural College (now North Dakota State University) in Fargo, and the other was the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. Fargo had a program in zoology, so I could get a bachelor's degree in biology, with a major in zoology.

When I transferred to Fargo I was still thinking of a career in wildlife. My advisor was Frank Cassel and during registration I told him that I already had a detailed plan for graduation, with every course listed that I wanted to take in the next two years. He said, "Well, I've never seen a student show up prepared like that before, knowing exactly what he wanted and needed to take over the next six quarters." I think that impressed him, and he soon started pointing me toward pure ornithology, which I hadn't known to be a possible profession. That's how I fell under Cassel's tutelage. I also completed majors in zoology and in botany, and became quite interested in plant ecology, mostly because of a great teacher named Loren Potter.

At about that time I became more concerned about doing well academically, at least in science, and maintained a straight A average in both zoology and botany. In fact, I think the faculty was afraid to give me anything other than an A because they knew it would destroy my four-point average.

While a junior at North Dakota State, I was encouraged by Dr. Cassel to apply for a small scholarship that was given every year to a student who wanted to do a special research project over the summer between his or her junior and senior year. Dr. Cassel encouraged me to do a bibliographic survey of the published and unpublished sources of information on the distribution of North Dakota waterfowl.

I received the scholarship and soon decided that as long as I was assembling the waterfowl data, I might as well include all the other North Dakota birds, too. North Dakota didn't then (and still doesn't) have a state bird book, or even a complete modern list of its avifauna. I drove to most of the state's national wildlife refuges, went through their files, and extracted massive amounts of information about North Dakota birds.

I received \$25 (and a bonus copy of A.C. Bent's *Life Histories of North American Gallinaceous Birds*) for that work. More importantly, Dr. Cassel suggested that I use the data to do a booklet on the waterfowl of North Dakota, which he said he could probably arrange to have published. After I wrote the text, he wanted me also to do drawings for it. I made four sheets of pen-and-ink drawings, showing all of North Dakota's waterfowl plus some other similar water birds such as grebes. I made the drawings in a manner similar to those in the early Peterson field guides and wrote to Roger Tory Peterson to ask if I could use his idea of arrows to point out important field marks. Recently I learned from the curator at the Peterson Institute that they still have correspondence from me dating back to the 1950s, filed under "Correspondence with famous people"! That 16-page booklet was published through a consortium of three local colleges called the Institute of Regional Studies.

That project gave me some confidence that I could write and draw well enough for publication. I'd never had any training in writing or art, and never had any English courses beyond freshman English. The experience probably gave me more confidence about writing than was warranted.

#### Washington State College and Charles Yocom 1953-1956

When asked for advice on graduate schools, Dr. Cassel suggested that I become an ornithologist rather than work for a game commission, so that I could teach ornithology or work for an environmental group. I applied to Washington State, Oregon State and Utah State, all of which had strong programs in waterfowl biology. I was admitted to all of them, so I was able to have my choice. I chose Washington State College (now Washington State University) in Pullman for two reasons. My older brother was there as a graduate student, and more importantly, Professor Charles Yocom was there. He had recently written a book called *Waterfowl and Their Food Plants in Washington*, and he strongly encouraged me to come and study waterfowl ecology. Regrettably, Dr. Yocom took a job at Humboldt State about a week after I arrived at Pullman, so I was left without an advisor for waterfowl research. Furthermore, Dr. Yocom had agreed that I could do a master's in waterfowl ecology, but get my degree in zoology, not wildlife management. That was an oral commitment on his part, which the university later reneged on. The department chair, Herbert Eastlick, insisted that my degree had to be in wildlife management because of its research funding, so that is how my M.S. in Wildlife Management came about.

Professor Donald Farner was at Washington State then, and I worked as an assistant for him one summer, caring for sparrows and recording Zugunruhe activity data. James West was still a student of Farner's at that time. Jared Verner, Alan Wilson and Frank Golley were also student friends. Prof. Rexford Daubenmire had a small cadre of grad students and was the most inspiring of all the teachers I encountered there. I took all of his courses, and he served with George Hudson and I. O. Buss on my graduate committee, with Professor Buss as chairman.

For my master's research I did an ecological study on an area in central Washington called the Potholes, which is an area much like Nebraska's Sandhills, with a high water table and many marshes and wet meadows at the bases of sand dunes. A large dam (O'Sullivan's) was inundating many of those sandy wetlands,

and I was to determine how the changes in water levels were affecting biological populations, especially waterfowl. I did a general study of the ecology of plants and birds relative to the water fluctuations.

While doing fieldwork I also worked on many minor projects. For example, I obtained data on duck sex ratios, which I later published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*. I was also interested in waterfowl courtship activity, and this was the first time in my life I spent hours watching ducks court, and making field sketches. As far as I could tell, some of my observations were new, so I submitted them for publication in the *Condor*. I thought the *Condor* paper was pretty good, but I later had a letter from Professor Charles Sibley, of Cornell University. He basically said, "Well, it was an interesting paper, but you obviously are not aware of the work of Konrad Lorenz, who has published a very extensive paper on courtship behavior in the dabbling ducks. You didn't cite that, and it's a major oversight, because it would allow you to rethink what you saw in a different way." That paper was in an obscure German journal, so I had to get a copy and translate it.

This news was embarrassing, but Dr. Sibley softened it by asking if I was interested in coming to Cornell. I had thought about Cornell ever since Dr. Cassel had recommended that I go there. In fact, I had almost applied to Cornell for graduate school, but I didn't think I would be accepted, and it cost \$25 just to apply.

I finished my master's degree at Washington State in 1955 and stayed a second year, partly so I could marry Lois Lampe, who finished her master's in plant ecology under Rexford Daubenmire in 1956. At that time I decided to go to Cornell and become an ornithologist. With Dr. Sibley now wanting me, I not only was accepted, but was awarded the best graduate fellowship that Cornell had. I had also been accepted to work under Alden Miller at the University of California on a graduate assistantship, so I had to choose between the two.

At some point while I was at Washington State I also became aware of the Wildfowl Trust in England. Peter Scott (later Sir Peter Scott), a famous artist, had developed the Trust after World War II as a place for breeding and conserving as many species of the world's waterfowl as possible. I wrote to Scott, expressing an interest in visiting the Wildfowl Trust to study waterfowl. That was a dream that I would keep in mind for the better part of six years.

#### Cornell University and Charles Sibley 1956-1969

Choosing Cornell was a decision that affected the rest of my life. I was thinking by that time that I would become a teacher or researcher, rather than a wildlife biologist, and Dr. Sibley encouraged me to work on waterfowl behavior. He was then interested in waterfowl as examples of the results of selection against hybridization, and in their associated behavioral isolating mechanisms. I spent three years at Cornell (1956-1959) working on the North American mallard-like ducks, including Mallards, American Black Ducks, Mexican Ducks, Mottled Ducks, and Florida Ducks (a south Florida subspecies of Mottled Duck). I studied their comparative pair-forming behavior and morphology, as well as some protein electrophoresis of blood serum, trying to estimate their relationships and evolutionary history.



Dr. Sibley proved to be the most intellectually stimulating teacher I've ever known, and also one of the most demanding and, at times, tyrannical. His famous temper made all of his students quake in his presence and regard him as a godlike figure to be disobeyed only at one's utter peril. Yet he could also be charmingly funny, and also endlessly interesting. He attracted overflow crowds to his introductory ornithology classes, captivating them with his great lecturing ability and complete command of his subject.



My three years at Cornell were spent on full fellowship, so I never had to act as one of Dr. Sibley's often-suffering graduate assistants; however, I did work for him as a lab technician during the summer of 1958. That summer was a

Postdoctoral passport photo, 1961.

critical one in Dr. Sibley's transformation from species-level taxonomy using whole specimen data to a much more molecular taxonomic approach. He had obtained a one-year National Science Foundation (NSF) grant for a pilot study on the feasibility of evaluating avian blood proteins as a taxonomic tool, using paper electrophoresis. He assigned me the job of running the electrophoretic separations, as well as obtaining a variety of domestic birds from the poultry department and various game birds from the state-operated game farm near Ithaca. I shuttled these birds back and forth, obtaining blood samples and running their serum analyses. These efforts, however, produced extremely disheartening results, owing to great individual variability in the serum profiles. Nevertheless, Dr. Sibley and I co-authored two papers on our blood studies.

While reviewing the waterfowl literature, I encountered a paper written by Robert McCabe and H. F. Deutsch and published in the *Wilson Bulletin* about a decade previously. The study indicated that significant interspecies differences exist in the electrophoretic profiles of egg white proteins from various game birds, and I decided to confirm and extend their findings, using eggs that the birds happened to lay while in our aviary, or that I otherwise could obtain. I had to do this experiment surreptitiously, because I would be dealt with harshly should Dr. Sibley discover my departure from his strict protocol. Near summer's end, Dr. Sibley proclaimed our efforts on blood protein to be a failure and announced that he would not ask for more

NSF money to continue the study. Gathering my courage, I then showed him the results of the egg white samples I had done. Within minutes he grasped their potential, and immediately laid plans for a new grant to undertake a massive survey of North American birds.

Soon after that I began to feel like the sorcerer's apprentice, for the event marked the start of his wholesale egg collecting activities, first in the U.S., and eventually worldwide. He was quite relentless in this, and eventually had serious legal trouble for using egg whites from some endangered species, such as the Peregrine Falcon. However, his work was the first to exploit molecular biology for higher level taxonomy of the world's birds. This led directly to his later studies on DNA-DNA hybridization, which shook the avian taxonomic tree to its very roots.

By going to Cornell, I was fully exposed to Dr. Sibley's interests in evolution, taxonomy, comparative behavior and pure ornithology. Lamont Cole, a famous animal population ecologist, Ari van Tienhoven, a poultry science professor, and Bill Dilger, an ethologist working on thrushes and parrots, rounded out my committee and were all important to me. I also met Ernst Mayr while I was there. He was already a biological icon, but I evidently impressed him enough so that when the first volume of the 2nd edition of Peters' *Check-list of the Birds of the World* was being prepared, he asked me to revise the families Anatidae and Anhimidae (*Anseriformes*, in *Check-list of the Birds of the World*, 1979).

During my last year at Cornell I approached Dr. Sibley and said, "What I want to do now, rather than find a job, is to try to get a post-doctoral grant and spend a year in England at the Wildfowl Trust." Dr. Sibley said, "Well, why don't you let me apply for it as principal investigator, and you can go over as my assistant." I replied, "No, if I can't do it myself, I don't want to do it." So I applied for two post-doctoral fellowships, one from the National Science Foundation, and one from the U.S. Public Health Department, thinking that with great luck I might get one. To my surprise, I got both of them and was thus able to spend two years at the Trust, one after the other, which was absolutely the single most important event of my professional life.

#### The Wildfowl Trust and Peter Scott 1959-1961

The Wildfowl Trust (now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) is in part a zoo, getting much of its income visitors, but it is also a major research organization. At the time I was there it was at the peak of its development, having the largest collection, both in species and numbers, of waterfowl that had ever been assembled. Peter Scott was internationally famous and was actively bringing back rare birds from everywhere in the world. They then had about 120 of the 145 living species of ducks, geese and swans, or more than 80 percent of the entire family Anatidae. So I was lucky to get there just when the Trust was at its very best.

The Trust had a resident staff that was mostly concerned with avicultural problems, such as nutrition and disease. Most of the staff were doing applied research, relative to either the waterfowl collection or to the conservation of waterfowl in Great Britain. However, G.V.T. Mathews was there as science director, Hugh Boyd was their waterfowl expert, and Janet Kear arrived my second year, as assistant director of research.

Only a few weeks after I arrived at the Trust in 1959, there was an Ethological Congress held at Oxford University. I went over on the first day by bus, arriving late in the afternoon. After registering, I was directed to the hall where everybody was already gathered for dinner. The hall was quite crowded, but at its far end I could see Dr. Sibley, sitting at a large table slightly elevated from the rest. With him were Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and a few other people I didn't recognize. There was an empty seat right beside Dr. Sibley, so I walked up and sat down beside him. He stared at me incredulously, and said, "Don't you know this is High Table, and you have to be invited to sit here?" I was greatly embarrassed and quickly got up to leave, but the others laughed and motioned for me to sit. As a result of my ignorance I was able to become acquainted with Lorenz, the author of the duck behavior paper I had overlooked, and Tinbergen, already famous for his work on gull and fish behavior. Both later shared the Nobel Prize, and Lorenz wrote a letter endorsing me for a Guggenheim Fellowship.

I was able to study pure comparative behavioral research and its taxonomic implications full time while at the Trust. Within a year I had about six papers in press, was well into the writing of one book, and had started a second. The first book was an attempt to summarize all the observations I made on the behavior of the birds there, aimed toward developing a world survey of comparative waterfowl behavior. That effort became the *Handbook of Waterfowl Behavior* and was the first comparative behavioral survey of any family of birds. I also began to write a book that was directed to the general public, trying to describe what I thought was most interesting about waterfowl.

By then Lois and I had one child, Jay, and another, Scott, was born during our first year there. Scott was named after Peter Scott, who was not only a great painter but also a national hero for his exploits in World War II. He also is a great hero to me, because of the way he facilitated my life's work. If it had not been for him and the Wildfowl Trust, I'd probably have ended up teaching biology in some obscure school.

#### Nebraska and the University of Nebraska 1961 - present

From the autumn of 1959 until the summer of 1961 I was busily engaged in postdoctoral fellowship research at the Wildfowl Trust. The Trust was a grand place for doing research, but very a poor one from which to look for jobs in America. One day in the spring of 1961 I received a letter from Dr. Sibley saying, "I just learned through my Nebraska contacts that there is a job opening at the University of Nebraska for an ornithologist." He had spent several summers in the Platte Valley during the 1950s collecting hundreds of birds, mainly hybridizing species-pairs such as flickers, buntings, orioles and grosbeaks. Dr. Sibley also noted, "Nebraska is not a bad place to look for another job from."

I didn't know anything about the University of Nebraska or very much about the state. However, I remembered that Al Hochbaum, who was the Director of Delta Research Station at Delta Marsh, Manitoba, had told me that in his opinion Nebraska was second only to North Dakota as a duck production area and as prime waterfowl habitat. I decided that Nebraska might be a good place to study waterfowl ecology.

I was offered the job sight-unseen. They didn't bring me over to interview, so I came without ever having seen the campus, Lincoln or the state. I was to teach general zoology as my major responsibility, and to develop a course in ornithology, plus any other courses I might want to develop. So in 1961 I came to UN-L as an instructor. Dr. Harold Manter, the Zoology Department chair, once told me, "Well, we figured we could probably get you on the cheap, so we thought we might just as well offer you an instructorship rather than an assistant professorship." However, I not only was promoted to assistant professor at the end of my first year, but more importantly received tenure at that time. To my knowledge I am the only person at the University of Nebraska ever to advance from instructor to assistant professor with tenure by the second year.



Photographing a Lesser Golden-Plover at Churchill, Manitoba, 1980.  
Photo by Ed and Jean Schulenberg.

Our department was called the Zoology Department at that time. It was small but growing, and Dr. Manter was a national figure for his parasitology work. Besides Dr. Manter, the department then consisted of about seven people. The physiology department was separate, with two people. We soon merged with physiology. The Botany Department shared Bessey Hall and had a long tradition of excellence with John Weaver, Charles Bessey, and others, but it was by then beyond its prime and also quite small. Eventually we also merged with botany to form a Department of Life Sciences, and later became a separate School of Biological Sciences.

During the first fall I was at UN-L, a student by the name of Roger Sharpe arrived who wanted to work on a master's degree. He was an avid birder and knew many good birding places in Nebraska. It was he who first told me about the Sandhill Cranes of the Platte Valley, so I went out with my ornithology class the

following March. At that time there weren't many cranes near Grand Island, so we drove to Elm Creek before turning off the highway and crossing the bridge over the Platte River. I was astounded by the sight of so many cranes in the adjacent meadows. After that trip I became intensely interested in Sandhill Cranes and the Platte Valley. My first book on cranes was published in 1981 (*Those of the Gray Wind*), and in 1983 *Cranes of the World* appeared. *Crane Music* was published in 1991. My book on the Platte Valley (*Channels in Time*) appeared in 1984.

Roger Sharpe also knew about a Greater Prairie-Chicken lek at Burchard Lake Wildlife Management Area in southeastern Nebraska about 80 miles from Lincoln, and I took my classes there, too. Galliform species soon became very important to me: my first book on grouse appeared in 1973 (*Grouse and Quails of North America*). The second, *Grouse of the World*, followed in 1981, and *Grassland Grouse and their Conservation* appeared in 2001.

I fell in love with Nebraska from the very beginning. I very soon decided I wanted to stay at the University of Nebraska as long as they would have me. With the help of NSF grants I went Alaska in 1963 and studied Spectacled Eider behavior. I went to Australia in 1964 to observe some aberrant Australian ducks such as the Musk Duck and Freckled Duck. Some of those observations were included in my *Handbook of Waterfowl Behavior*. I went to South America in 1965, studying as many populations of the Andean Torrent Duck as possible, to try to establish just how many species exist. When I started working on grouse and quails in the 1970s I went to Mexico on another NSF grant to study some of the rare New World quails relative to my *Grouse and Quails of North America*. I also later observed Rock Ptarmigan in Newfoundland, and both Black Grouse and Capercaillies in Scotland, while preparing my *Grouse of the World*.

A long series of world or continental monographs on bird groups followed, such as on shorebirds, pheasants, quails, raptors, hummingbirds, trogons, pelecaniform birds, and others. There were also books on subjects such as diving birds (*Diving Birds of North America*), desert-adapted birds (*Birds of Dry Places*), the avian social parasites (*Deception at the Nest*) and lek-forming birds and associated aspects of sexual selection (*Arena Birds*).

Over the years, I began studies that led to books on the biodiversity of the state (*The Nature of Nebraska*), the Sandhills (*This Fragile Land*), the Platte River (*Channels in Time*) and the Niobrara River (*A River Running Through Time*). The Great Plains also served as a subject for several books (*Birds of the Great Plains*, *Great Wildlife of the Great Plains*, *Faces of the Great Plains*), as did Plains history (*Lewis & Clark on the Great Plains*, *Wind Through the Buffalo Grass*). Interests in the grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains lead me to write both *Prairie Birds* and *Prairie Dog Empire*.

#### Popular Writing

During the 1960s we had a small faculty club in an old converted sorority house. I often ate there, and one of the many people with whom I enjoyed sitting was Bruce Nicoll, who was then director of University of Nebraska Press. He would regale us with all kinds of stories about the University, and I would just sit there and listen, never contributing much to the conversation.

One day in late 1965 after the *Handbook of Waterfowl Behavior* had been published, I was eating there quietly. Then Bruce Nicoll stormed in, waving a copy of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* which contained a very favorable review of my book, and said, "Damn it, Johnsgard! What's the big idea? What's the idea of publishing a book with Cornell Press, when we've got a perfectly good university press here?" He then added, "What book are you writing now?" I replied that I had a book manuscript in my office files but doubted that it was publishable. Nevertheless, he followed me back to my office, and I dug out the manuscript. He took it with him, and only a day later called back and said, "This is great! We've got to publish this!" He let me include two 16-page signatures of color plates, and it was published in 1968 (*Waterfowl: Their Biology and Natural History*). Almost immediately it won an award from the Chicago Book Clinic. It was chosen by the Association of the English Speaking Peoples to be placed in libraries around the world. It was also named one of the hundred best science books of the year. After that book appeared, I began to think it would be fun to see if I could write a bird book that was popular, but that included a good deal of information on natural history.

Another of the unexpected circumstances that affected my life soon occurred. One day, while signing some copies of *Waterfowl: the Biology and Natural History* at a local bookstore, I learned that John Neihardt had recently signed some copies of *Black Elk Speaks*. I bought a copy and read it that afternoon. I think of all the books that I have read, I was never as mesmerized by any other as I was by it. I stayed awake for hours that night, wondering how I could respond in some real way to that book, in which Snow Geese appeared in several of Black Elk's visions.

I had already been thinking about doing a book on the Snow Goose, and wondered if I could somehow counterpoint what I know about the biology of Snow Geese with the Native American view of Snow Geese. Finally, when it was about 2:30 a.m., I decided that I couldn't sleep, so I might just as well get up and start writing. I wrote more or less secretly for about five weeks, at which time the writing was nearly finished, except for a section dealing with the arctic breeding grounds, which I hadn't previously visited.

With the manuscript essentially finished, I thought I ought to have someone read it critically. I gave it to Vicki Peterson, one of our departmental secretaries, who had done some technical retyping for me, and asked her if she would read it. She brought it back the next day, and said, "This is by far the best writing you've ever done; you've got to publish it." I then decided I would send it to three publishers. Two of them rejected it fairly rapidly, but Doubleday indicated an interest. I replied that I would need a few more months to write the remaining part and would have it done by fall.

In early June of 1973 I went to Churchill, Manitoba, with the aid of a small American Philosophical Society grant. From Churchill I was able to fly to a large Snow Goose nesting colony, which I visited for a few days. While at Churchill, Robert Montgomerie, a biologist whom I met there, showed me some of his friend Paul Geraghty's drawings. I thought that they were the kind of images that I wanted to use to somehow capture the mysticism of the geese in Neihardt's book. So I wrote to Geraghty, sent him a copy of the manuscript, and asked him if he would be interested in illustrating it. He replied that it was exactly the sort of thing he would love to illustrate. It was amazing to see Paul Geraghty sketch; he drew the pen-and-

ink illustrations for *Song of the North Wind*. He could look through binoculars for three or four hours, and then go back to camp and draw for two or three hours, just like he had a videotape playing back images. I could never do anything like that. I think that his illustrations were a critically important part of that book.

My early papers probably helped me get my first NSF research grants during the 1960s. A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1972 gave me most of a year off for writing. After my Snow Goose book appeared in 1974, I decided that I could write popular, but accurate, books and that not only increased my annual income, but also increased my confidence and personal pleasure in writing.

With the appearance of *Song of the North Wind*, my writing life shifted to a somewhat new direction. I decided to write technical books intended for a fairly restricted ornithological audience, but also to write for a much broader audience on general, environmental, and conservation topics. The ultimate in my popular writing was the dragon and unicorn book (*Dragons & Unicorns: A Natural History*), which I wrote with our daughter Karin when she was in high school. I thought that if I was ever going to be fired for writing something frivolous, it probably would be for that, which was mostly a whimsical metaphor on conservation ethics, with some political and religious satire thrown in.

#### Writing Influences

I have often been asked why I am such a prolific writer. Annie Dillard wrote in *The Writing Life* that there are maybe 20 people on the planet who can average writing a book each year. During the 44 years between my first book in 1965 and 2009, I published 51 books. I have at least put myself in rare company.

I would confess that my writing is a total compulsion, but there is another rationalization for my writing, and I've thought about it often. There are few people who can write, draw and photograph well enough to put together a book on some major subject by themselves. When growing up I thought it would be a wonderful thing to have a book about loons, for example, or a book about pheasants. By and large, they weren't available, but now I'm in a position to write those books. It may be that the world as a whole isn't waiting for them, but there might be somebody out there who is.

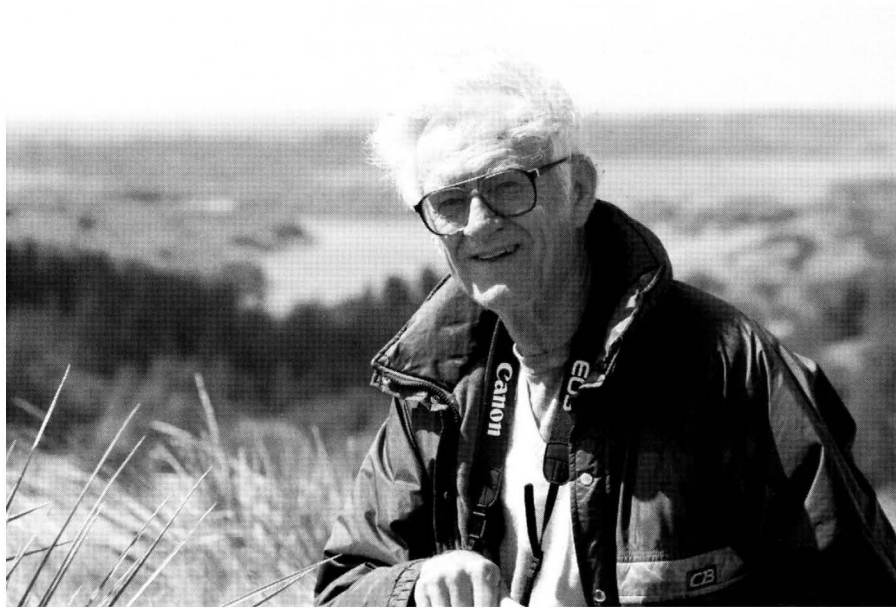
I write three kinds of books: the first is about birds, which represents most of the titles, and the second is about places, such as the Platte, the Tetons, the Sandhills or the Niobrara. The third type is about ideas, like *Dragons and Unicorns: A Natural History*. Most of my books are in the first category, which is

very straightforward writing, just putting the facts together as clearly and as accurately as I can. Almost always I kept at least three book projects going simultaneously because, when working on two or three, they are almost always at different stages.

When writing a reference book on birds, or any of my geographically oriented books, I feel I can write in short blocks of time with a fair number of disturbances without affecting the flow of writing. When I'm trying to write a chapter in something like *Song of the North Wind*, then I'm bothered greatly by interference.

On a Saturday or Sunday, there is usually no disturbance on campus and I can count on having many hours without even having the phone ring. I used to come to campus every Saturday to write, and one year I got over \$120 in fines for parking on campus on football Saturdays. I finally decided that was too expensive, especially after my car was towed away one day. I sometimes came to campus on Sundays, too, and that didn't leave much time for anything else. I didn't make a lot of time to play when our kids were growing up; however, I spent enough time with each of them to encourage their interest in nature.

I always thought that one secret of good speaking was to be able to compose in your mind about as rapidly as you can talk, and I think the secret of good writing is to be able to compose in your mind about as rapidly as you can type. My writing is probably better than it was in my early years of writing simply because it is much easier to modify text on a computer and I work it over more now, but I'm not embarrassed about my early writing.



In the Niobrara River Valley, 2004. Photo by Linda Brown.

### Reading and Literary Models

When I was 18 my parents gave me a copy of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* for Christmas, and it became a kind of bible to me, exemplifying clean, poetic writing about nature. I identified with Leopold because of his background as a wildlife biologist, and I wanted to emulate his writing style. I admire his use of wild creatures and wild events as parables and his ability to see greater lessons in small events, the total being greater than the sum of its parts. He was able to tell a simple story, like cutting down an oak tree, for example, and to describe the history of Wisconsin as represented by the rings of the oak.



Generating large stories from simple events is the same thing that appeals to me so much about Annie Dillard's writing. She will see a frog in a pond, or a shed snakeskin, and somehow make that into a cosmic event, something far greater than just simple observations. I'm just still in awe over her capacity for description. I corresponded with her for a time after two of our books (*Song of the North Wind* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*) were reviewed in the same column of a New York newspaper. She even let me critique a story she was writing for *Harpers* on a trip to the Galápagos Islands.

There were times when I purposefully was anthropomorphic in my writing, even though in my animal behavior class I would rail against anthropomorphism. I don't use it in writing reference books, but I do use it fairly often in popular writing. Aldo Leopold was rather anthropomorphic in some of his writing, and I felt that if he could do it, so could I. I must confess that the longer I live and the more I watch birds, the more I believe that maybe a little bit of anthropomorphism is warranted. I'm absolutely convinced that there is a lot more to what they know and perceive than what humans observe. I honestly think that we are underestimating birds, and certainly other mammals, when we avoid anthropomorphism too rigorously.

#### Drawing and Wood Sculpture

Essentially all my artwork for publication has been done by pen-and-ink. By the time I got to graduate school, we were told we had to do everything for publication with Rapidograph technical pens, using India ink. I used that technique for quite a number of years, simply because I was under the assumption that that was what was needed for reproduction.

Then, maybe by chance, I realized I could start using non-India ink and nylon-tipped pens with very fine points as they became available. I could get fairly dark, if not black, colors that were acceptable to publishers, it was less messy, and I could get graded widths and intensities of line. I also learned how to use scratchboard. The drawings in *Waterfowl, Their Biology and Natural History* were nearly all scratchboard drawings. Most of the hundreds of drawings in the *Handbook of Waterfowl Behavior* came from 16 mm movie film, by taking individual frames and enlarging them. I then made ink drawings based on those frame enlargements, so they weren't based on field sketching.

My woodcarving goes back to Boy Scout days, when I decided to make a neckerchief slide and carved a flying duck. I was probably about 13 years old. I continued to do carvings right up through high school, but then abandoned it in college. My carving didn't start again until the later 1960s and early 1970s when I encountered other carvers and joined with them to form the Central Flyway Decoy Carvers and Collectors Club.

From then until the early 1980s I continued to do decoy and decorative carving, until I had done about 60 and basically filled all the available spaces at home and at my office. My carving was a wintertime activity, almost entirely done when I couldn't get down to the campus to write and felt I needed something physical to do. I also rationalized that I was learning a little about bird anatomy as a result of carving them.

In 1975 the club put on a major exhibit of classic antique decoys at the Sheldon Art Gallery of UN-L, and I produced the catalog of the exhibit that was published in 1976 by the University of Nebraska Press (*The Bird Decoy: an American Art Form*). As the result of a later folk-art exhibit, a large preening trumpeter swan carving of mine was purchased for the gallery's permanent collection.



In a frigatebird and Blue-footed Booby colony, Galápagos Islands, 2005.  
Photo by Josef Kren.

Some of the other art exhibits that I have curated include three at the Great Plains Art Museum in Lincoln. The first was an exhibit that I did in 2002 with Mike Forsberg, using his photos and my drawings and carvings. It was called "Migrations of the Imagination." In 2004 I did a major show of drawings and photos (and wrote an associated book, *Lewis and Clark on the Great Plains: a Natural History*) celebrating the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. In 2009 I assembled (with three other photographers) an exhibit celebrating Charles Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of his *Origin of Species* (*Celebrating Darwin's Legacy: Evolution in the Galápagos Islands and the Great Plains*).

### Teaching

For the first 10 or 15 years I enjoyed teaching enormously, even though I taught large class sessions of general zoology, year after year, and two sessions per semester. That was time consuming, but it was still rewarding; I thought I was influencing at least some students and it was important to me to be a good teacher.

I think eventually that attitude did wear down, as I began to get more enjoyment out of my writing. Over the years, I began to realize that I wasn't influencing that many out of the vast numbers who went through my classes. I was more involved in writing, and so the responsibility of teaching became intrusive.

I've had 12 people finish Ph.D.s, and 13 finished master's degrees. Roger Sharpe, my first graduate student, taught biology at University of Nebraska-Omaha. Mary Bomberger Brown went on from a master's degree with me in 1982 to marry and work with Charles R. Brown on Cliff Swallows. In 2009 she shared the A.O.U.'s Coues Award with him for that work. My last graduate student, Josef Kren, was probably the best of all my teaching assistants. He is now the Chairman of the Biology Department of Bryan Hospital's teaching program. James Tate wrote for *American Birds* for many years, and later was Science Advisor to the Secretary of the Interior during the George W. Bush administration.

Although he never finished a master's degree, the appearance of Tom Mangelsen in 1969 was eventful. He had just graduated from Doane College, and in spite of his having only an average undergraduate record, I accepted him as a graduate student, mostly because he said his dad had a hunting cabin on the Platte River near Wood River. When he enrolled in my ornithology course in 1970 we began spending time in duck blinds on the Platte, photographing any waterfowl or cranes that strayed within range of our cameras. Tom later went with me on trips to the Pacific Northwest and New Mexico, and eventually became one of the foremost wildlife photographers in the world.



Caricature by former Johnsgard student Bob Hall, 2010.

Cedar Point Biological Station 1958-1993; 2008

Cedar Point Biological Station in Keith County, Nebraska, has been one of the best educational opportunities that ever happened to the School of Biological Sciences, and also to me personally. At the time we established the station in 1976 I was deeply involved in several books and didn't want to devote even part of a summer to teaching classes at Lake McConaughy, which I had never seen. Brent Nickol, our first director there, kept after me about it, and by 1978 he convinced me that I should go out and teach ornithology there.

Thus, quite reluctantly, I packed my car and drove out. While driving through Ogallala I was depressed about what a miserable summer this was going to be. Then I drove down the long hill leading to Kingsley Dam and at the bottom of the hill I was suddenly in a deep canyon of junipers and cottonwoods and could hear singing Rock Wrens and screaming Black-billed Magpies. A Great Horned Owl took off from a rocky promontory. It was much like Dorothy landing in Oz. I thought I had suddenly been transported to a magical place. I fell in love with the area that instant and went back every summer for 16 of the 17 next summers. I returned to teach there in the summer of 2008, to see how the bird life and general environment had changed.

Cedar Point became, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, an integral part of my summer activities. I did as much as writing as I could in that environment and I spent more time looking at birds during those few weeks than I did at any other time of the year.

Hunting and Photography

I started hunting when I was about 12 years old and was a duck hunter until I was about 16. I eventually decided I would much rather try to photograph birds than shoot them, and it increasingly bothered me to kill things that I spent hours watching. So I sold my shotgun to obtain a camera. At first I had an Argus C-3, but my mother borrowed it and it was stolen from her. She offered to replace it, and that allowed me to buy my first camera with interchangeable lenses.

My "new" camera was a used Exakta 1 single-lens reflex from the late 1930s in which I had to look down from above to focus (the image was reversed and upside-down). I was lucky just to find something in the frame when trying to photograph birds in flight. As soon as I found the subject I snapped the shutter. My average success rate was about one or two frames out of a 36-exposure roll of black-and-white film that were not simply sky.

If it weren't for hunting, I wouldn't have spent nearly so much time in marshes and wouldn't have become nearly so close to either my older brother or my father. But it's a continuing problem for me to rationalize the social values of hunting against the pain that hunting causes, for no real reason other than entertainment. For some species hunting clearly doesn't affect the populations, but I have real problems with hunting cranes and hunting swans, which are long-lived species that have long pair bonds and limited capacities for reproduction

### Conservation

I don't want to depress my readers by writing about environmental crises, so much of what I have to say about the environment is done on a positive note. Biodiversity is important, and species of any kind are valuable and worth saving. That's a fairly easy message to give.

The passage of the Endangered Species Act in the early 1970s was a decisive stage in the development of the conservation movement. It meant the government was finally moving, and that was encouraging. But it's been pretty much downhill since 1980, and I don't know if there's going to be any turnaround in the near term.

### Religious Beliefs

I still get chills up and down my spine in situations such as watching flocks of geese or cranes at sunset. It still affects me just as much as it ever did. I think watching birds is the most spiritually rewarding thing I do. I'm attracted to the mystical, the unknown. I don't like to give the unknown a name, but I like the sense of mystery. Embracing mystery is counter to science, in fact it's absolutely counter to science, and I guess that's an anomaly in my thinking. Perhaps it goes back to the Native American concept of an overall natural spirit, even though one may not give that spirit a name.

I think science can be an adequate substitute for religion, in that it can satisfy a pervasive human need for some sort of belief system. Science is fallible, we know that, and so I'm sure that science will never provide us with all the answers. Yet, I would strongly recommend it over religion.

Although now officially retired for a decade, I am still writing. My newest book, *The Sandhill and Whooping Cranes: Ancient Voices over America's Wetlands*, should appear by March, 2011, and two other book manuscripts are under consideration by a publisher. One is a natural history of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (to be photographically illustrated by Tom Mangelsen), and the other reviews the birds of, and birding opportunities in, the northern Rocky Mountains. I am also in early phases of writing a book on the wetlands of Nebraska, and I intend to collaborate with Dr. Jackie Canterbury on a review of the birds of Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains. And there are always more things to learn and write about cranes...

The Comprehensive Vita and Bibliography for Dr. Johnsgard may be found at the Digital Commons University of Nebraska - Lincoln website:

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/biosciornithology/25/>

A Review of Modern Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)  
Nesting Records and Breeding Status in Nebraska

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The recovery of the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) in North America during the 20th century is a conservation success story. Once threatened with extinction, the species now is common throughout much of its range (Buehler 2000). Federal and state laws such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544) that were used to protect Bald Eagles and important habitats used by eagles are considered key actions that fostered the species' recovery. In 2007, the Bald Eagle was formally removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species (50 CFR Part 17). The following year, the Bald Eagle was removed from the Nebraska state list of threatened and endangered species.

Bald Eagles have been a species of high conservation concern, and therefore a substantial amount of attention and resources has been directed toward monitoring Bald Eagle numbers over the past 50 years. Of particular interest were initial breeding records and subsequent increases in states where the species bred historically, but was extirpated. Nebraska is one such state in which Bald Eagle breeding records have increased since protection.

Prior to 1900, the Bald Eagle was a regular, albeit low-density, breeding species in Nebraska (Ducey 1988). Breeding records from this period occurred in present-day Dixon, Gage, Cherry, and Garden Counties and near the Douglas-Washington County line (Rapp et al. 1958, Ducey 1988, 2000). John James Audubon also observed a nest in southeast Nebraska along the Missouri River in 1843 (Ducey 2000). By the late 1800s, Bald Eagles had become scarce. In the Omaha vicinity, White (1893) commented, "Of late years [Bald Eagles] have become very rare". Bruner et al. (1904) concluded that Bald Eagles "probably formerly bred" in Nebraska and "it is likely that a few still do so." As there were no additional breeding records after this time (Rapp et al. 1958, Ducey 1988, Sharpe et al. 2001), it appears that the Bald Eagle had been extirpated as a breeding species by around 1900. Unregulated shooting of Bald Eagles was likely a primary source of early declines (Buehler 2000). Bald Eagles were rare to uncommon migrants and winter visitors in Nebraska throughout most of the 1900s (Rapp et al. 1958, Johnsgard 1980).

By the end of the 20th century, Bald Eagles were again breeding in Nebraska. Relevant state agencies, such as the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission), and federal agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

(USFWS) and National Park Service (NPS), collected nesting and breeding activity data. The Commission's Nongame Bird Program coordinated statewide surveys and compiled and maintained a database of all known nesting and breeding observations. Breeding records from the early and mid-1990s were previously summarized by Lackey (1997). In this note, we use all collected information to 1) summarize modern nesting and breeding records during the period 1950-2009, 2) summarize the pattern of increase observed in Nebraska, and 3) provide information about nest site use and distribution in Nebraska.

## METHODS

Bald Eagle breeding information was compiled from formal surveys conducted by the Commission, NPS, USFWS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nebraska Public Power District, and trained volunteers. This information was supplemented with information from 1) reports from public forums (e.g., NEBirds internet discussion group), 2) incidental reports, and 3) a literature review. Data from all sources were entered into an electronic Microsoft Access database and were then summarized according to nest activity level and associated variables.

For formal surveys, nest sites were generally visited at least twice during the breeding season. The first visit usually occurred in March or April to determine if a nest was active. Active was defined as a nesting pair engaged in breeding activity (i.e., incubation of eggs, tending of young). The definition of active used here does not include pairs constructing dummy or practice nests. Active nests were then determined to be productive (fledging of young) or unproductive (no fledged young produced). Personnel approached nests by vehicle, on foot or by boat, and observed nests with binoculars or spotting scopes from a distance that would not disturb nesting birds. Observers recorded date, time, nest status, number of adults, number of young and relevant comments during each visit. When possible, nest locations were recorded with a GPS unit during initial visits. Surveys were generally concluded by the end of June, corresponding with the period in which young eagles leave the nest.

## RESULTS

The first modern report of Bald Eagle breeding activity in Nebraska was in 1973, when a pair built a nest in Cedar County (Lock and Schuckman 1973). The pair was observed copulating but eventually deserted the nest (Lock and Schuckman 1973). Similar situations occurred along the North Platte River near Lewellen, Garden County, from 1987-1993 (see also Rosche 1994) and along the Platte River near Maxwell, Lincoln County, in 1989. Eagle pairs were observed either building or in proximity to previously constructed nests, but nests were deserted each year with no evidence that eggs were ever laid. Additional nests near Woodcliff, Saunders County, and Paxton, Lincoln County, were located after they were constructed and deserted; no eagles were observed at these nests.

The first active modern nest was near Valley, Douglas County, in 1991 (Farrar 1991). This was the first successful nesting attempt in the state; an eaglet nearly fledged or did fledge, but was later found dead. The following year the number of

active nests increased to 5. One of these nests, located along the Middle Loup River in Sherman County, fledged two young capable of sustained flight (Lackey 1997). The number of active nests slowly increased in subsequent years (Figure 1), reaching 10 in 1996, 20 in 2000, and 55 in 2007. The number of active nests dropped to 48 in 2009.

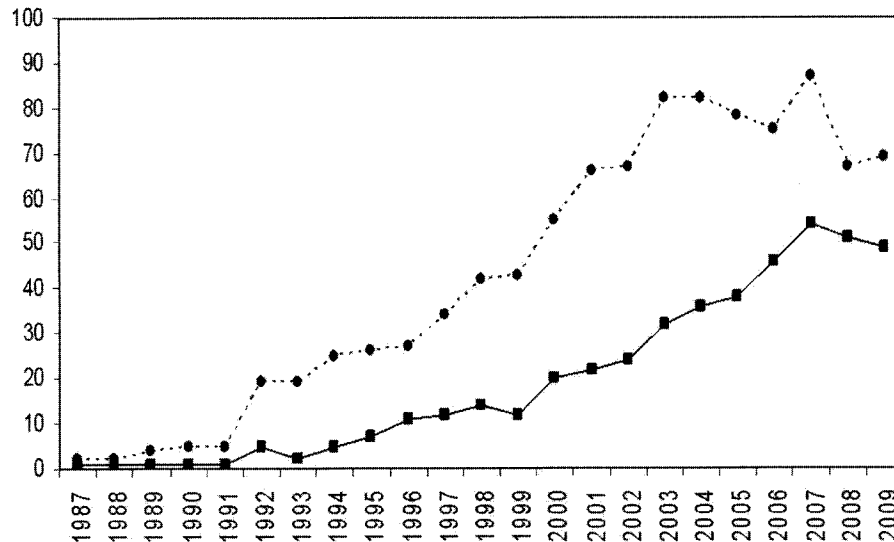


Figure 1. Number of Bald Eagle nests surveyed (dashed line) and number of active nests (solid line) in Nebraska 1987-2009.

Bald Eagle nests have been recorded statewide (Figure 2). Nests were recorded in 62 of 93 counties. Most nests have been located in the north and east. More than 80% of active nests in 2009 ( $n=49$ ) were found along or north of the Platte River and east of Lincoln and Cherry Counties. Only a single nest, located at Medicine Creek Reservoir, Frontier County, has been found south of the Platte River and west of Harlan County. Bald Eagles were recorded at this nest from 2001-2005, but the nest was never observed to be active. Most Bald Eagle nest sites in Nebraska have been associated with riparian corridors. Of 221 nests observed during the years 1973-2009, 85% occurred along rivers. Of these nests, large numbers were observed along the Platte ( $n=42$ ), Missouri ( $n=37$ ), and Elkhorn ( $n=15$ ) Rivers. Approximately 11% of nests have occurred beside lakes or reservoirs.

Active Bald Eagle nests in Nebraska have been very productive; 649 young have fledged from 440 active nests with known outcomes (1.48 fledges/active nest) from 1991-2009. A primary cause of nest failure is nests being blown down during storms or periods of strong winds. A minimum of twenty-four active nests have been blown down.



## DISCUSSION

Within the past two decades, increases in the number of Bald Eagle breeding pairs in Nebraska have been remarkable. Nebraska, as part of the Northern States Recovery Plan (USFWS 1983), originally had a recovery goal of ten active breeding pairs. This goal was met in 1996 and surpassed in years thereafter. In addition, the 1.48 fledges per nest recorded in Nebraska is greater than the 1.0 fledgling/nest objective outlined in the Northern States Recovery Plan (USFWS 1983). There are annual instances of Bald Eagle mortality caused by gunshot wounds, lead poisoning, electrocution, and power line strikes (Jorgensen 2008). These sources of mortality and other threats do not appear to be inhibiting increases in breeding Bald Eagle numbers.

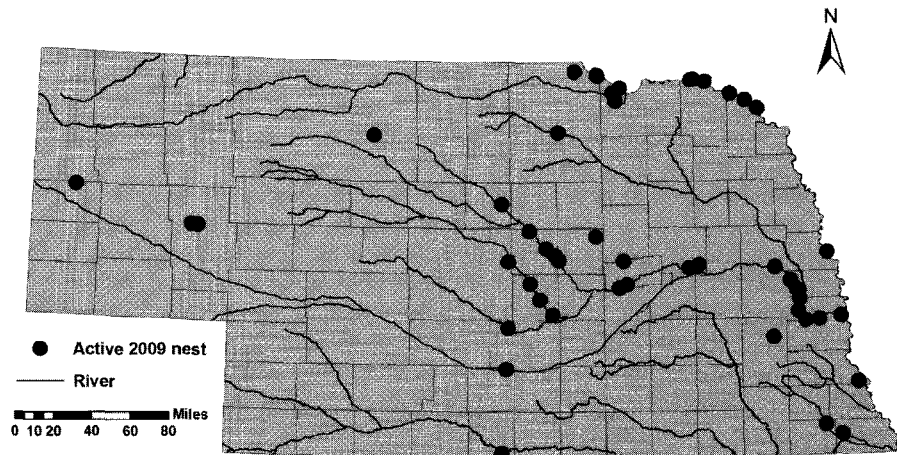


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of active Bald Eagle nests (eagle icon) in Nebraska in 2009.

The number of Bald Eagle breeding pairs is expected to continue to increase in Nebraska in the foreseeable future. The decline in the number of active nests in the last two years of the study period is attributed to decreases in survey effort rather than an actual decline in nesting pairs. Therefore, an obvious question is how many breeding pairs may ultimately exist within the state. While it is difficult to know what may be the proximate limiting factor(s) on Nebraska's breeding population, it does not appear that general habitat requirements is one of them. Most Bald Eagles in Nebraska nest along rivers, and large portions of Nebraska's extensive network of rivers remain uncolonized by Bald Eagles. It seems possible that Nebraska may ultimately have a few hundred Bald Eagle nesting pairs.

As recently as 2001, the Bald Eagle was described as a "locally rare regular breeder (resident?) statewide" and a "Rare casual summer visitor statewide" (Sharpe et al. 2001). Based on the information provided here, we recommend that the species status be revised to "uncommon breeder and summer visitor statewide".

Past declines and low numbers raise concerns about the long-term security of Bald Eagle populations. However, the persistence of an overall increase in nesting numbers as observed in recent records will make comprehensive annual nest monitoring more challenging due to resource limitations. Some level of monitoring of breeding numbers remains important in order to determine whether increases over the past two decades will be sustained. At this time, it appears that the Bald Eagle will be a fixture of Nebraska's avian breeding community.

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