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The Nebraska Bird Review

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WILLIAM F. RAPP, JR., Editor

HENRY E. BAUMGARTEN, Assistant Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Birds of Prairie Island | 18 |
| A Reply To: When the Bird Watcher Reads | 20 |
| The Avocet in Nebraska | 22 |
| Editorial—How Well Do We Know the Birds of Nebraska? | 26 |
| General Notes | 27 |
| Communications | 28 |
| Book Reviews | 29 |

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Birds of Prairie Island

by Blanche M. Swanson

Prairie Island is a strip of land, about nine miles long by about three miles wide, in southeast Merrick county. At one time this area was an island in the Platte River, but the south fork of the river is now closed off, and the Platte flows to the north of Prairie Island. However, the old river bed with its thick growth of trees still remains. The area next to the river bed has never been farmed; the land is used for grazing, and a line of gravel pits follows the old channel bed.

Seven years ago in the heart of this virgin woodland, we built a cabin next to one of the sandpits. Nearly all of our weekends from early spring until late fall are spent here. Thus, my husband, two sons, a daughter, and myself have had an excellent opportunity to study the birdlife in this part of the Platte Valley.

Since this strip of woodland is bordered in places by rolling pasture and prairie, we have within our area birds that like the deep woods and edge as well as prairies. There is a small sparkling stream that runs from sandpit to sandpit, connecting nearly all the sandpit lakes in the old river bed. This stream never freezes completely over, so there is open water all winter. Because of this and the dense growth of red cedar that supplies both food and heavy cover, Prairie Island is a favorite winter spot for many birds.

Robins and Chickadees are by far the most numerous of the winter birds. At dusk on a winter's day, robins by the hundred fly in to roost. We have seen them coming in flocks too large to count for a continuous hour. With this large winter population of Robins one would think a few would stay to nest, but with the coming of spring they all leave us. Another bird that winters here is the Eastern Bluebird. While they like to nest and spend their summers on the woodland's edge, in the cold of winter they move into the denser trees. Once we were fortunate enough to see about 25 of these beautiful birds in one flock. Occasionally, a small flock of Red-wings try to brave out the winter. Last year in late December we saw a flock of eight, but in January they were not to be found. The Tree Sparrows and Juncos are plentiful in the thickets of plum, buffalo berry, and choke cherry. Now and then we see a lone Song Sparrow. More often heard than seen are the overwintering Goldfinches and Pine Siskins. A Kingfisher or two usually stays around the open stream all winter and most of the time one can see a Red-tailed Hawk high in the sky. Other permanent residents of Prairie Island include: Red-shafted Flicker, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Great Horned Owl, and Cardinal.

Spring migration is an exciting time on Prairie Island. First come the water and shore birds. Ducks are usually in abundance. Among these are: Lesser Scaup, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Redhead, Pintail, and Shoveler. Of these a pair of Mallards, a pair of Redheads, and several pairs of Shovelers have nested. Coot occasionally breed here. The wild geese pass overhead, preferring to settle on the surrounding corn and wheat fields. Early spring also brings the American Merganser. Two years ago we were favored with a visit from the Common Loon. Last spring a White Pelican sat down in our territory.

As spring advances the shore birds, gulls, and their allies move in. The Herring, Ring-billed, and Franklin's Gulls are represented. Among the shore birds we have found: Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Golden Plover, and Dowitcher. The Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper spend the summer here. Attracted to our marshland and sandpit lakes are Wilson's Phalarope, Pied-billed Grebe, Little Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, and American Bittern. The Herons and Bittern remain until fall.

Early April bring the Phoebe, Cedar Waxwing, and Whip-poor-will. The call of the Whip-poor-will has always been a familiar sound to us on Prairie Island, but it was not until last September 4th that we first saw this elusive bird. I have tried many times to locate it when its call was close, but always failed to do so. However, when I finally saw my first Whip-poor-will, I was not even hunting it. At dusk I was sitting quietly by our cabin, when I happened to see a slight movement on what appeared to be a part of a dead branch just above my head, and there was the bird. I quietly summoned my family, but my caution was unnecessary. Since the bird felt that it was well hidden, it made no effort to move. After studying it for some time, we decided that we should like to see it in flight. We yelled and jumped up and down, but it just hugged the branch closer. Finally it tumbled off and immediately disappeared.

The Sparrows feast on weed seeds that are always near the edge. Species include: Savannah, Lincoln, Harris, White-throated, Clay-colored, and Chipping. Sparrows, however, are more often seen in large numbers during fall migration. Last October a Fox Sparrow was seen.

Late April brings the Swallows, Rough-winged, Bank, and Cliff. Arriving about May 1 are the Chimney Swifts. Although houses are some distance from our sandpits, the swifts are nearly always among the swallows that are constantly dipping over the water to pick up the insects that hang just above the surface.

May finds the trees literally alive with warblers. The elms are often heavily infested with canker worms, bad for the trees, but a feast for the birds. Among the warblers seen here are: Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Yellow, Myrtle, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Mourning, Wilson's, Redstart, Yellow-breasted Chat, Northern Yellow-throat, and last summer we had a small flock of Prothonotary Warblers. This was the first time I had ever seen this bird, but his coloring was unmistakable. The Yellow Warbler, Yellow-throat, and occasionally, the Yellow-breasted Chat nest in this area.

May also brings our summer residents: Brown Thrasher, Catbird, Red-eyed Vireo, Great-crested Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, and Eastern Kingbird. I cannot ever recall having seen a Western Kingbird near our cabin, although they are in the nearby country. House Wrens nest in every nook and cranny on Prairie Island.

We also have Yellow and Black-billed Cuckoos. Near the forest edge in tall cottonwoods, we find the Baltimore and Orchard Oriole and the Warbling Vireo. In the shrubs and low bushes, Bell's Vireo, Blue Grosbeak, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak nest. In the same area one finds the Towhee. Every marsh is home to the Red-wing and in the prairie marshlands one finds the Bobolink. Moving out into the grassland we find Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, Upland Plover, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Dick-

cissel, and now and then a Horned Lark. Here, too, are Quail, Pheasant, and sometimes Prairie Chicken. Other birds include: Marsh Hawk, Cowbird, Screech Owl, Blue Jay, Mourning Dove, English Sparrow, Starling, and Crow.

Finding a bird that is rare in a certain area is always a thrill. Last summer we had just such a thrill when a pair of Scarlet Tanagers nested near our cabin. Three years ago we found the Sora Rail in a marsh near one of the sandpits. Last fall we enjoyed a visit from a Willet. Aurora, Nebraska.

A Reply To: When The Bird Watcher Reads

by William Youngworth

The very fine article, "When the Bird Watcher Reads," by Mrs. Lorene D. Heineman (*Nebr. Bird Rev.*, 21, 1953: 42) invoked a great deal of interest in the writer and, on second reading, brought out the fact that there are several facets to what the Bird Watcher reads.

In my case on rereading I was startled to find that my meager bird book library did not contain a single title listed by Mrs. Heineman—or even a book by any of the authors of the books listed. In fact if I had any books on my shelves by *one* of the authors listed, I would probably go to book-burning. This is not meant as a reflection on any of the other authors, for with one exception they and their works are well above criticism and many of the authors are leaders in the several avenues of approach to bird study. Frank M. Chapman was a leader in his field fifty years ago and today we look on Roger Tory Peterson as carrying the same mantle. Many of the other authors have written engagingly and well. I know this personally, because I have read most of them, scanned a couple, and left one closed. Why didn't I buy them and add them to my book shelves and use them for reference? Well, for one thing some of these books are pleasant reading but don't give much information; others contain very little that I hadn't read years ago by other authors; and still others were not considered as good or better than standard works which I already had. Furthermore, I am strictly a small-fry bird watcher with my base of operations, the Upper Missouri Valley, and probably should be but am not greatly interested in bird watching elsewhere.

I belong to that old and honored group of private scientific collectors, a group that will soon pass out of existence. Collecting is now almost strictly confined to permit holders from qualified museums and historical societies. Collecting by individuals is being curtailed to the point where there is only one lone private collecting permit in existence in the entire state of South Dakota today. We are something like old fire horses, we carried our own weight and pulled the load until progress caught up with us and passed us by. We uncovered many interesting things about range and habitats of birds and we usually saw the expense come out of our own pockets. For this reason I have bought books to fit the need and didn't load up with surplus.

Identification of the collected specimens is taken care of beautifully by Elliott Coues' "Key to North American Birds," Dana Estes & Co., 1903. For local migration dates, local ranges of nesting and migrating birds for this area, the indispensable books are T. S. Roberts' "The Birds of Minnesota," The University of Minnesota Press, 1932. Another very helpful set of books, giving good migration dates, ample life histories and beautiful colored plates is E. H. Forbush's "Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States," 1929. W. L. Dawson's "Birds of California," South Moulton Co., 1923, is not a must for the serious student in this area, but is a wonderful help in looking up disturbing data on so many of our western birds, which, although probably found in California, also pass through Nebraska and the Dakotas. Dawson's flowery style is relaxing to read after digging something out of Coues, for example. After Birds of Minnesota the most often referred to set of books owned by this writer is the unmatched series of books by Arthur Cleveland Bent, "Life Histories of North American Birds," United States National Museum. I am probably prejudiced, but to me some of Bent's prose is beautiful and many an evening I have spent reading these volumes. I will pick up one at random and the result is that I have read most of them at least twice. Each time I am pleased to learn something that I have missed the time before. My favorite passage is the very first paragraph of the first book, "Diving Birds." I suppose this is because I enjoyed an experience similar to that described many years ago with Wesley Kubichek in the Fort Sisseton Lakes country of South Dakota.

Thus, it is almost inconceivable to me that anyone with an intense desire to really learn of the bird life of Nebraska doesn't own or at least have access to Bent's "Life Histories," which are replete with migration and nesting records from Nebraska and the neighboring states.

I think that the serious bird student in this area should be fairly well supplied with the various other state bird books and lists, which are usually modest in price and give helpful migration data, nesting areas, names of observers, bird collections, etc. I constantly refer to state birdbooks from the states of Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and others. Handy also to have is P. A. Taverner's "Birds of Eastern and Western Canada," and a little volume by B. J. Hales, "Prairie Birds," which covers pretty well the birds of the Canadian prairies.

As a person goes about the study of ornithology, he cannot help but brush against the many other segments of nature, and the writer thinks that each bird student should fortify himself with at least one good source book on animals and plants. So often you see animals on a trip and many is the time that a bird is actually nesting in a plant that you wish you knew the name of. Many years ago my good wife heard me bemoaning the fact that I didn't have a good botany book, so unbeknown to me she ordered that fine three volume set by Britton and Brown, "Illustrated Flora of the Northern States and Canada." Since then it has been a lot of fun to try to key out the various plants that we see on our trips. In regard to animals I find that a relatively inexpensive volume by H. E. Anthony, "Animals of America," is written in simple enough language for the non-expert student of nature like myself to understand and yet is accurate enough to serve its purpose.

In summation I would like to state that the bird watcher can get a lot of pleasure and background for present day bird watching by occasionally going back and reading the works of some of the old masters like Washington Irving ("A Tour of the Prairies"), Theodore Roosevelt ("Hunting Tales of the West"), the Audubon biographies by Harris or by Buchanan or others, or if you will, as I occasionally do, go back and spend an evening with Thoreau at Walden Pond. In a strictly prejudiced vein some very pleasant, spicy, yet minutely accurate local bird study is to be found in the recently published "Birds of an Iowa Dooryard," by Althea R. Sherman, which was reduced from a mass of material to a very readable book by Fred J. Pierce, editor of Iowa Bird Life.
Sioux City, Iowa.

The Avocet In Nebraska

by William F. Rapp, Jr.

The Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) is one of the largest shorebirds occurring in Nebraska. It belongs to the family Recurvirostridae which contains 12 species, for the most part, distributed throughout the warmer parts of the world. The only other species of this family which occurs in Nebraska is the Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*).

Distribution

Avocets are interior shore birds, found most commonly west of the Mississippi River. Chapman (1937:291) gives the following as the range of the Avocet: "Breeds from eastern Washington, southern Alberta, southern Manitoba south to southern California, southern New Mexico, southern Texas, and northern Iowa (formerly Wisconsin, Illinois and New Jersey). Winters from central California and southern Texas to southern Guatemala; casual in British Columbia, southern Mackenzie, Ontario, and New Brunswick to Florida and the West Indies, but rare east of the Mississippi River." Thus, one can see that Nebraska is well within the breeding range of the Avocet.

Haecker, Moser, and Swenk (1945:14) state that the Avocet in Nebraska is: "An uncommon migrant. A rare breeder in the sandhills regions." This general statement, unfortunately, gives a mistaken impression of the actual distribution of the bird in Nebraska today, because a survey of the published literature shows that the bird has been reported throughout the entire state.

Historically the Avocet has long been known in Nebraska, as both Thomas Say and John James Audubon recorded the bird in their explorations of the Missouri River Valley. Bruner (1896:72) quotes many of the prominent Nebraska ornithologists of the 1890's as saying that the bird is an abundant migrant, but a rare summer resident. Bruner, Wolcott and Swenk (1904:37) say of the Avocet: "A rather common migrant over the state and a frequent breeder in the sand-hill region."

In 1915 Harry C. Oberholser, then an Assistant Biologist with the old Bureau of Biological Survey, spent the month of June studying the various waterfowl breeding grounds in Brown, Cherry, Garden, and Morrill counties.

During October of the same year many of the lakes were revisited; a trip was made to the lakes of the North Platte Irrigation Project, near Scottsbluff; and a careful examination was made of a considerable section of the Platte River between Grand Island and Silver Creek. As a result of this field work Oberholser states the following (Oberholser and McAtee 1920:34): "The Avocet, though formerly occurring over all the sandhill region was not observed, except at the lakes of Garden and Morrill Counties. Here it was tolerably common in summer, though irregularly distributed." All of Oberholser's observations were made in June with one exception: one bird was seen at Reno Lake, Garden County, October 14, 1915.

Within more recent years the late Mrs. A. H. Jones (Jones 5:107, 8:86, 22:11) who made roadside counts along Highway 2 in Grant and Sheridan counties always reported large numbers of Avocets.

After finding these summaries on the bird's distribution, the author made a detailed search for published locality records of the Avocet in the *Proceedings of the Nebraska Ornithologist's Union* and in *The Nebraska Bird Review*. Basically, his conclusions on the present distribution of the Avocet in Nebraska

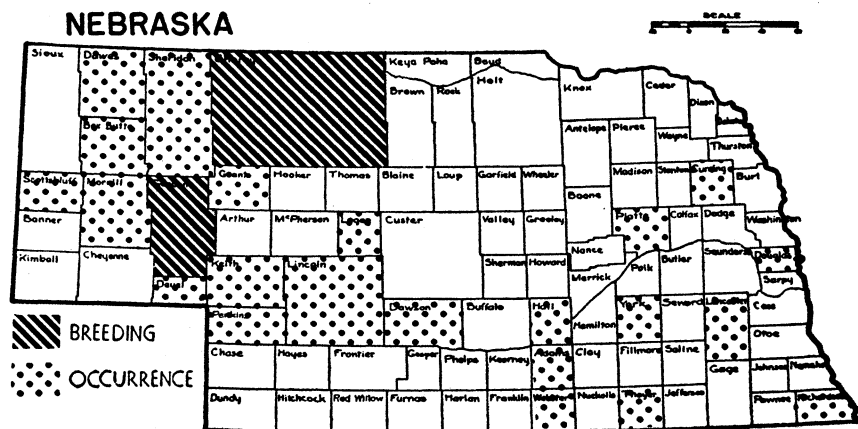


Fig. 1. Distribution of the Avocet in Nebraska.

agree with those of Bruner, Wolcott, and Swenk as set forth in 1904: namely, that this bird is a common migrant throughout the state and a frequent breeder in the sandhills. The largest number of Avocets have been reported in the western half of the state with the preponderance in the sandhill lake regions of Garden, Morrill, Sheridan and, possibly, Cherry counties. Unfortunately, although there are a large number of published records for this species, it is difficult to give estimates of the populations in various parts of the state. Figure 1 is a map showing the distribution of the Avocet in Nebraska based upon published records and the author's personal observations. It should be remembered that because the bird is not recorded from a given

county does not necessarily mean that Avocets cannot or have not been there. It may mean that no one has seen the bird in that area or that no one has published the record. A good field ornithologist working in the proper ecological niche should sooner or later find the bird in every area of the state.

Avocets frequent shores of lakes, ponds and shallow pools. In general, they are rare along our larger streams, such as the Platte, Missouri, Republican and Blue Rivers, although the author and Thomas B. Thorson observed Avocets on a sandbar in the Platte River in Dawson County in 1949. In areas of the state where suitable habitats are not found, Avocets are rare. This is well illustrated by the fact that Ludlow (1935:7) in 25 years of field work at Red Cloud, Webster county, had only one record for the Avocet. Glandon (1948:8) who has been studying the birds of the Stapleton area for over 30 years calls the Avocet: "An uncommon but regular migrant." On the other hand, Tout (1947:62) stated: "The Avocet is a regular migrant and summer resident in Lincoln county." At the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Garden county, Avocets are considered to be common birds.

Migration

Although the Avocet can be called a common migrant in Nebraska, at the present time, we have no knowledge as to the number which pass through the state during spring and fall migrations. Rapp (1952:43) summarized the spring migration records from 1925 to 1949. During this period the Avocet was reported a total of 37 times from six stations, the largest number of spring occurrences being reported from Stapleton. The earliest spring migration date is also from Stapleton, where it was reported on March 21, 1947. The Avocet can be expected to appear in Nebraska sometime between April 20 and May 1. Since 1949 the number of cooperators in the Annual Cooperative Spring Migration Report has increased and we now have spring Avocet migration records from Alexandria, Chadron, Columbus, and Scottsbluff. Unfortunately, we have no migration records from the sandhill lake region where the Avocet reaches its peak population in Nebraska.

Little information is available on the fall migration of the Avocet in Nebraska. As with most species of shorebirds the Avocet is one of the first birds to start southward. Baumgarten (1953:24) has reported the bird on ponds north of Lincoln, Lancaster county, from August 23 to 30, 1952, and also on September 5, 1952. David Cutler (Rapp and Baumgarten 1953:23) reported seeing 15 Avocets at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge on September 8 and 9, 1952. There is also a record for September 4, 1952, on the Kernan Lagoon, near Hastings (*Nebr. Bird Rev.* 1:20). Oberholser's (Oberholser and McAtee 1920:34) date of October 14, 1915, at Reno Lake, Garden county, is the latest fall migration date for Nebraska. A fall field day on the first weekend in October has been held since 1951, but to date no Avocets have been reported.

Breeding

According to the range given by Chapman (1937:291) all of Nebraska lies within the accepted breeding range of the Avocet. However, a survey of the literature discloses very few breeding records for the state. All known breeding records are from either Cherry or Garden counties. Bruner (1896:72) quotes Isadore S. Trostler as follows: "breeds in Dewey Lake Township,

Cherry County." Bruner, Wolcott and Swenk (1904:37) reported: "found by Wolcott breeding at Clear Lake, Cherry county, in June, 1902." Both of these lakes are located in the east central part of Cherry county. Whether or not the Avocet still breeds in this area is not known. Tout (1938:2) found the birds nesting at the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Garden county, June 22-26, 1937. It is interesting to note that Tout stated: "the nest was nicely made of grass, leaves, and rushes." Chapman (1937:291) says that the nest is: "a slight depression in the ground, near water." At the present time, the Avocet is considered a common nesting bird at the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge and any time after June 1 nests may be found. Unfortunately, very little field work is being done in the sandhill lake regions of Brown, Cherry, Sheridan, Garden, and Morrill counties. If good field work were done in these areas, more nesting areas for the Avocet would probably be found.

Summary

The Avocet is well distributed in Nebraska, but reaches its greatest numbers in the western part of the state, particularly in the sandhill lake regions. Spring migration records indicate that the birds cross the state over its entire length and that there seems to be no definite migration routes. The birds usually arrive during the latter part of April. Very little is known about the fall migration. The bird has been known to breed in east central Cherry county and at the present time is a common breeder in Garden county. In general, the Avocet may be found in Nebraska wherever suitable lakes, ponds, and pools exist.

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191 pp.
Crete, Nebraska

EDITORIAL

How Well Do We Know the Birds of Nebraska?

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, founded in 1899, is one of the oldest state bird organizations in this country; yet, in many respects we know less about the birds of Nebraska than the members of other state organizations know about the birds in their state, even though they have had a formal organization for a shorter period of time.

We do know that we have a very large state list. Actually, this has little scientific value unless there is additional information to go with it. For example, we do not know for certain what birds breed in the state. What few breeding records we have are based upon work done in the 1900's. A review of our publications would show that the Robin has never been known to breed in either Douglas or Lancaster counties or any other county for that matter.

We have spent a great deal of time looking for rare birds and have forgotten about the birds which are around us all the time. Let us take the Kingfisher. Can we truthfully answer these questions?

1. What is its distribution in Nebraska?
2. Does it nest in Nebraska?
3. When does it nest in Nebraska?
4. How many broods does it have per year?
5. When does it arrive in the spring?
6. When does it leave in the fall?
7. How big an overwintering population of Kingfishers do we have?

Of these seven questions we can at this time answer truthfully only one, when it arrives in the state, for we do have good spring migration data. We can only guess at the answers to the other six.

We need to know the answers to simple questions such as these, if we wish to really know the birds of Nebraska.

The Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting

The Iowa Ornithologists' Union, the South Dakota Ornithologists' Union, and the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union are attempting to arrange a joint meeting of all three organizations which will be held at Sioux City, Iowa, in May, 1955.

The Fifty-Third Annual Meeting

VALENTINE, MAY 21-22, 1954

The Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union will be held at Valentine and will give the members an opportunity to visit the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. This is the first time that a meeting has been held in the sandhills.

On Friday morning the paper reading session and annual business meeting will be held. The following will present papers:

Wesley E. Lanyon, University of Wisconsin on Meadowlark Studies

Mrs. John Lueshen of Wisner on Birds around Wisner

Goodman Larson of Grand Island on Bird Study for Young People

George Wiseman of Valentine on Bird Life of the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

Remainder of the program:

Friday Afternoon—Local field trip

Friday Evening—Annual Banquet—Roy E. Coy of the St. Joseph Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri

Saturday—All day field trip to the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

The meeting headquarters will be at the Marian Hotel. Reservations for the hotel or motels should be made through Mrs. Retha L. Shamis, Marian Hotel, Valentine.

All questions regarding the meeting should be addressed to Miss Doris B. Gates, 4 South Willow Street, North Platte. Miss Gates is program chairman for the 53rd Annual Meeting.

Kansas Ornithological Society

The K.O.U. will hold its annual meeting at Hays, Kansas, May 1 and 2. All members of the N.O.U. are invited to attend.

GENERAL NOTES

BIRDS OF A NEBRASKA DOORYARD.—The following birds were seen from the lot and alley of 806 D Street, Fairbury, in 1953. Jan. 1, Cardinal, Crow, Chickadee, Screech Owl; Jan. 3, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers; Jan. 9, Slate-colored Junco, Starling, Red-bellied Woodpecker; Jan. 12, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue Jay, Brown Thrasher; Jan. 20, Brown Creeper, Robin; Jan. 27, Golden-crowned Kinglet; Jan. 31, Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Feb. 11, White-breasted Nuthatch; Feb. 26, Mourning Dove; Mar. 1, Red-breasted Nuthatch; Mar. 15, Grackle; Mar. 20, Pheobe, Red-winged Blackbird; Apr. 1, Olive-backed Thrush; Apr. 5, Lincoln's Sparrow; Apr. 12, Goldfinch; Apr. 15, Pine Siskin; Apr. 17, Yellow-headed Blackbird; Apr. 21, Yellow-shafted Flicker; Apr. 23, House Wren, Maryland Yellowthroat, Chimney Swift; May 1, Orchard Oriole, Nighthawk, Myrtle Warbler; May 2, Franklin's Gull, Black and White Warbler; May 4, Magnolia Warbler, Black-poll Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak; May 5, Tennessee Warbler; May 6, Song Sparrow.—Susie and Agnes Callaway, Fairbury, Nebraska.

SPRING NOTES FROM BLADEN.—On the afternoon of May 24, 1953, while taking my usual weekend stroll, I came to the edge of a field-lagoon. This "flat" had grown up to some species of water-weed during the 1952 season when a marsh-like condition prevailed. There was no water present in 1953 but the ground was quite damp. When a small bird flew out from the weeds I assumed it to be a Grasshopper Sparrow. However, I soon noticed that its actions were quite different and that it refused to leave the weed patch. Before losing track of it, I was able to observe the bird clearly. I had already decided that it was a Marsh Wren from the fact that it persisted in keeping close to the ground. The buffy color of the under-tail feathers (coverts) and the lack of the white eye strip identified it as a Short-billed Marsh Wren.

Between May 3 and June 9, 1953, Baird's Sparrows were seen quite regularly about the fields where I was performing my farming operations. It was possible to get some good views of these birds at times, so identification was not in doubt.

Although it was uncertain at the time, I am now convinced that there was one or more Sprague's Pipits among the hundreds of Lapland Longspurs that were present nearby on February 22, 1953. Later in the season, I became more familiar with these birds than in former years and could recognize them by their call notes, which were quite similar to those described in my field notes for the unidentified birds seen in February.—Harold Turner, Bladen, Nebraska.

FALL NOTES FROM BLADEN.—On November 7, 1953, as I was returning homeward from a hike, I came to a weedy flat. The ground was covered with snow; it was late in the afternoon; and the sky was clouded. Hearing a rather loud, clear bird call, which I did not recognize, I immediately began to investigate and soon was able to locate the bird. It was a Short-billed Marsh Wren. This was my second record for this species, the other being in the spring of 1953 (*vide supra*), at which time, however, I did not hear the call note.

While observing a Prairie Falcon on November 16, 1953, I noticed that it suddenly took flight from its perch almost immediately after alighting, making a "bee-line" to the westward. I soon discovered the reason, for from the east came a falcon of similar size in hot pursuit of the Prairie Falcon. Fortunately, I caught sight of the second bird in time to get a distinct view of its dark coloration (a sooty brown). It is my opinion that the pursuer was an immature Duck Hawk.

On November 27, 1953, while hunting squirrels two miles southwest of Holstein, Nebraska, I heard the call of a Red-bellied Woodpecker. It was in immature plumage and was my second record of this species for this region.—Harold Turner, Bladen, Nebraska.

Communications

(Here are recorded those observations reported to the editors which are too brief or otherwise unsuited for inclusion in the General Notes but which represent useful additions to our knowledge of Nebraska birds.)

Mrs. Lorene Heineman (Plattsmouth) reports hearing for the first time the song of an Eastern Kingbird. It was just before dawn, and for about one-half hour the Kingbird sat on a dead oak branch and repeated time after time its unmusical score of a series of short notes all on the same pitch, followed by two emphatic higher notes—all sharp and strident. . . Mrs. Heineman also reported two Carolina Wrens who stayed in the Plattsmouth area for over a month in the fall of 1953. . . Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd S. Seabury observed a Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding on a bunch of wild grapes in a willow tree overgrown with wild grape vine. The bird was seen on October 23, 1953, at Bazil Creek, approximately five miles north of Center, Nebraska. . . Eight Red-bellied Woodpeckers were seen by the Hastings Christmas Census takers. The members of the Brooking Bird Club, who took the census, say that the bird, which was rare ten years ago, is becoming increasingly common. . . Another bird seen on the Hastings census was the Magpie, another species that appears to be extending its range but to the east. . . A tardy Olive-backed Thrush was inadvertently captured by Mrs. Hallie J. Allen. On November 8, 1953, she found the thrush in her garage and released it to join the earlier migrants. . . Mrs. Grace Spidel suggests to N.O.U. members making the spring migration to Valentine that they examine the wealth of bird life between Theftord and Valentine: Great Blue Herons, Upland Plovers, Long-billed Curlews, Chats, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Willets, all kinds of ducks, and—at the McKelire ranch—a heron rookery. . . Miss Mary Elsworth reports seeing several hundred Pied-billed Grebes in a close massed flock cruising about in the waters of Lake Manawa (on October 3, 1953). . . An Ovenbird was seen in Cozad during the week of May 11, 1953, by Mrs. Hallie J. Allen. This species is only rarely seen in this area.

Book Reviews

KNOW YOUR BINOCULARS. Robert J. and Elsa Reichert. A reprint available from the Mirakel Repair Company, Mount Vernon, New York. \$.10.

A competent, informative discussion on the choosing and using of binoculars reprinted from the Jan.-Feb. and Mar.-Apr., 1951, issues of Audubon Magazine. Recommended for anyone about to buy a binocular or who wishes to learn more about the mode of operation of the binocular already at hand.—HEB

BIRDS OF MASSACHUSETTS. BIRDS OF THE EVERGLADES. Henry H. Collins, Jr. Blue Heron Press, Bronxville, N. Y., 1952, each 16pp. \$.25 each.

Pamphlets describing *some* of the principal birds of the regions indicated with a complete check of regularly occurring birds. Illustrated by drawings taken from the Peterson "Field Guides," the Audubon Magazine, and possibly other sources, all by Roger Tory Peterson. The cover of "Birds of the Everglades" is one of unusual beauty that is hardly dimmed by the inferior reproduction.—HEB

AN ALBUM OF SOUTHERN BIRDS. Photographs by Samuel A. Grimes. Text by Alexander Sprunt, Jr. University of Texas Press, Austin 12, Texas. 1953: 108 pp., 101 plates. \$8.75.

If you want an excellent book of bird photographs, this is the book you should buy. Samuel Grimes is one of the best bird photographers in this country and this book represents his best work. Mr. Sprunt has written a text that has added much to the excellent photographs. Mr. Grimes has added the photographic data to help other bird photographers. To those who are interested in bird photography this book will be an inspiration and a must.—WFR.

POCKET GUIDE TO THE BIRDS. Allan D. Cruickshank. Dodd, Mead & Company, 432 Fourth Avenue, New York, New York, 1953: 216 pp. \$2.95.

This small book teaches the basic principles of bird identification. During his work at Audubon summer camps, Allan Cruickshank has probably taught more beginners how to identify birds than any other American ornithologist. In this book he has set down in a simple and very readable style the points he stresses in his elementary field course in identification.

Instead of urging you to recognize one bird after another, this book shows you how to distinguish broad groups, families, and types. Cruickshank shows you simple ways of separating vireos from warblers or gulls from terns.

There are many excellent black and white drawings by Don Eckelberry and 72 excellent natural color photographs taken by Helen Cruickshank.—WFR.

THE LIVES OF WILD BIRDS. Aretas A. Saunders. Doubleday and Company, Inc., 575 Madison Avenue, New York 22, New York. 1954: 256 pp. \$3.50.

This text shows how amateur bird students can contribute to ornithology. Mr. Saunders outlines just what the birdwatcher should look for and how to go about the study of wild birds.

There are very excellent chapters on: Keeping Notes and Records, Watching Migration, The Nesting Cycle, Finding and Studying Birds' Nests, Ecology, and many others. The chapter entitled: "Finding and Studying Birds' Nests" is one that should be carefully studied by all of us here in Nebraska, because we need a great deal of field work on our breeding birds.

Mr. Saunders has written a useful guide to field work and one that the serious bird student will want.—WFR.

WILD FLOWERS OF AMERICA. H. W. Rickett. Crown Publishers, 419 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, New York, 1953: 71 + 400 plates. \$10.00.

This work was originally published in a limited edition by the Smithsonian Institution and priced at \$500 per copy. In the present edition the original plates by Mary Vaux Wolcott are included plus additional paintings by Dorothy Falcon Platt. Dr. Rickett has written the introduction and descriptions.

The wild flowers are well illustrated in their natural colors and have been well reproduced by the printer. It is hard for this reviewer to justify a book of this type. If you are interested in natural history books which contain beautiful paintings, by all means, buy this book. If you are interested in identifying wild flowers in Nebraska, this book will not be of much help.—WFR.

HAMMOND'S NATURE ATLAS OF AMERICA.—E. L. Jordan. C. S. Hammond and Company, New York, 1952: 256 pp. \$7.50.

The contents of this rather heterogeneous book include 320 paintings of rocks, trees, wildflowers, birds, animals, reptiles, fishes, and insects, 104 range maps for the flora and fauna illustrated, large-scale sectional maps showing national parks, game refuges, etc., natural distribution maps showing vegetation, temperature, rainfall, etc., tables of wildlife refuges, and a glossary. It requires little perception to recognize that the cramming of all of the above into 256 pages (albeit large ones) will necessitate a rather meager treatment of some features of the book. Indeed, 2560 pages probably would not suffice for the treatment the subject matter of this book deserves, and it is the rather abbreviated treatment of much of the contents that is the major fault of this atlas. The choice of species to be pictured has been made as well as might be expected considering the relatively limited total number included. The illustrations vary from mediocre to excellent (the pictures of minerals and rocks are especially poor); those of the animals appearing to this reviewer to come off with top honors. The illustrations of birds are not up to the standards set by Peterson, Eckleberry, Sutton and the N.O.U.'s own C. G. Pritchard; however, they are entirely adequate (although the poor Chickadee is apparently suffering from the mumps complicated by gastritic swellings and the Mockingbird is obviously an aberration from the thousands this reviewer had seen in Texas). The maps, as might be expected, are very good and should prove to be very useful to many readers. Just who will use the fact-jammed (yet incomplete) classification key is hard to fathom, for it seems doubtful that the reader who will be satisfied with the rather cursory glance at nature given by the major portion of the book will display any enthusiasm over the revelation that the flounders and halibuts belong to the family, Hippoglossidae (a fact disclosed by any good dictionary).

For all its shortcomings the Nature Atlas may fulfill one important niche in the family library, that of an introduction to nature for children. The wealth of color in the illustrations should appeal to the youngsters and the choice of species and the text seem better suited to the tastes of the young. The maps will be of interest to the elders in planning the introduction of the children to Nature as she really is.—HEB

FUNDAMENTALS OF ECOLOGY. Eugene P. Odum. W. B. Saunders Company, West Washington Square, Philadelphia 5, Pennsylvania, 1953: 384 pp. +119 figs. \$6.50.

Dr. Odum in his preface admirably summarizes the purpose of this book: "to serve as a textbook in a college course, and also as a reference for the naturalist." The book is divided into three parts, the first of which deals with basic ecological principles and concepts, taking into consideration both plants and animals. Part two describes the various types of habitat in which plants and animals live, and the last part deals with applied ecology. An outstanding feature of this book is the index with reference glossary of explanations of the various ecological terms.

This is a fine book for the bird student who desires a good reference work on ecology.—WFR.