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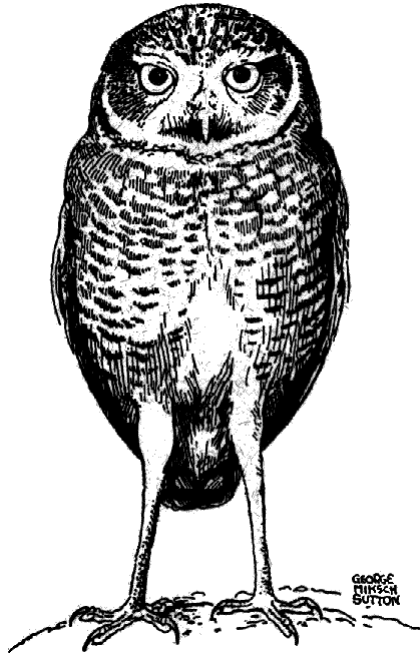
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# ***The Nebraska Bird Review***

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## SUMMER FIELD REPORT, June-July 2021

Compiled by W. Ross Silcock  
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### INTRODUCTION

Last summer my opening sentences were: “Overall, this was a fairly routine summer although birders in Nebraska know that ‘routine’ still holds promise of a few happenings out of the ordinary. The summer season primarily examines new breeding records, range expansions, and changes in numbers, up or down.” This summer was also rather routine but had its share of startling events.

Foremost among these were only the second colony breeding of American White Pelicans, involving 1200 on nests; two, possibly the same, male Evening Grosbeaks in the southeast; record late by about a month Townsend’s Solitaire; two Lincoln’s Sparrows together also about a month late; a male Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler about a month early in Sarpy Co; and Louisiana Waterthrushes breeding at Fort Falls, Fort Niobrara NWR, with Northern Parula in the same area, both about 200 miles west of previously known breeding sites.

Encouraging on the breeding front were five successful Sandhill Crane pairs, two confirming previously suspected locations; a new nest site for Osprey in Cass Co; increasing early summer breeding Sedge Wrens; continuing success for Common Merganser in the Niobrara Valley Preserve; apparent breeding Tufted Titmouse in Lancaster Co; possible continued summer presence of Sage Thrasher and Ash-throated Flycatcher in southwestern Kimball Co; and a new Sioux Co breeding location for Savannah Sparrow in the area where Common Ravens continue and also possibly bred.

Additional noteworthy records were an obviously brown Common Nighthawk suggestive of western subspecies *Chordeiles minor howelli* or *C. m. henryi*; two sub-adult Mute Swans that appear to be wild birds; a record late White-winged Scoter; near-record late Swainson’s Thrush detected overhead at night; 5<sup>th</sup> spring Panhandle Ruby-throated Hummingbird; spring Broad-tailed Hummingbirds at two Panhandle locations; a Broad-winged Hawk on the Pine Ridge; and a Least Flycatcher in Lancaster Co.

Surveys in the Rainwater Basin yielded good numbers of American and Least Bitterns along with Virginia Rails, pointing up the value of systematic surveys targeting species in remote or difficult-to-access locations.

On the negative side, no Dark-eyed (White-winged) Juncos were reported, nor were any Little Blue Herons or Loggerhead Shrikes reported in the northeast third of the state.

I very much appreciate the 134 observers whose sightings, recordings, and photographs I included in this report, and the many more whose sightings, while extremely valuable in providing context that make more obvious those of significance, did not quite make this seasonal summary.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BBS: Breeding Bird Survey  
BOL: Branched Oak Lake SRA, Lancaster Co  
CLNWR: Crescent Lake NWR, Garden Co  
CSP: Chadron SP, Dawes Co  
FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co  
GPD: Gavins Point Dam, Cedar and Knox Cos  
ICSP: Indian Cave SP, Nemaha and Richardson Cos  
LM: Lake McConaughy, Keith Co  
LNB: Lakes North and Babcock, Platte Co  
LO: Lake Ogallala, Keith Co  
LSWNP: Lincoln Saline Wetlands Nature Park, Lancaster Co  
m.ob.: multiple observers  
MWCW: Marsh Wren Community Wetlands, Lancaster Co  
NGPC: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
NM: National Monument  
NNF Bessey: Nebraska National Forest, Thomas Co  
NOURC: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee  
NWR: National Wildlife Refuge  
OPPD: Omaha Public Power District, 13 cos in eastern Nebraska  
PRSP: Platte River SP, Cass Co  
PSP: Ponca SP, Dixon Co  
RA: Recreation Area  
RWB: Rainwater Basin, including several south-central and southeastern playa basins  
SCP: Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co  
SHP: State Historical Park  
SP: State Park  
SRA: State Recreation Area  
WHNC: Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Scotts Bluff Co  
WMA: (State) Wildlife Management Area  
WP: Wilderness Park, Lancaster Co  
WPA: (Federal) Waterfowl Production Area  
WTP: Water Treatment Plant

## OBSERVERS

Michael Autin (MA)	Ed Brogie (EB)
Meena Balgopal (MBa)	Lee Brogie (LB)
Paul Bedell (PB)	Mark Brogie (MB)
Nikki Berry (NBe)	Barbara Brown (BBr)
Jeremy Birket (JB)	Nolan Bunting (NB)
Taylor Bobowski (TB)	Alex Burdo (AB)
Jessica Bolser (JB)	John Carlini (JC)
Bekkah Bond (BB)	George Cheek (GC)
Emily Brhel (EBr)	Colleen Childers (CCh)

Mary Clausen (MC)  
Jen Corman (JCo)  
Kelly Corman (KC)  
Zac Cota (ZC)  
Colin Croft (CC)  
David Cunningham (DC)  
Olivia DaRugna (OD)  
Kathy DeLara (KD)  
Roger Dietrich (RD)  
Thane Dinsdale (TD)  
Paul Dougherty (PD)  
Laura Dykstra (LD)  
Boni Edwards (BE)  
Larry Einemann (LE)  
Dave Ely (DE)  
Gregory & Susan Estep (G&SE)  
Linda Ferring (LF)  
Erich & Luella Fickle (E&LF)  
William Flack (WF)  
Rita Flohr (RF)  
Tom Gannon (TG)  
Liz Garcia (LGa)  
Lucy Gardner (LG)  
David George (DG)  
Joseph Gubanyi (JG)  
Tim & Lisa Hajda (T&LH)  
Jan Hansen (JH)  
Robin Harding (RH)  
Dave Heidt (DH)  
Troy & Marla Hibbitts (T&MH)  
Jane Hollst (JHo)  
Weldon & Paula Hoppe (W&PH)  
Ami Horowitz (AH)  
Bill F. Huser (BFH)  
Esa Jarvi (EJ)  
Jan Johnson (JJ)  
Jenny Jo Johnson (JJJ)  
Laura Johnson (LJ)  
Joel G. Jorgensen (JGJ)  
Joan Junkin (JJu)  
Lynette Keeshan (LK)  
Mark Keller (MK)  
Rich Kerns (RK)  
Ted Keyel (TK)  
Caden Klanderman (CK)  
Coen Kliewer (CKI)  
Steve Kruse (SK)  
Kirk & Kate LaGory (K&KL)  
Josh Lefever (JL)  
Megan Long (ML)  
Morton Massey (MM)  
Alastair McCandless (AMc)  
Paddy McCarthy (PM)  
Henry Meade (HM)  
Amanda Medaries (AMe)  
Andrew Meiborg (AM)  
Christian Narby (CN)  
Christine Nelson (CNe)  
Kyrie Newby (KN)  
Ben Ockree (BO)  
Patrick O'Connor (POc)  
Paul Ode (PO)  
Dylan Osterhaus (DO)  
Paul Pearson (PP)  
Serena Pedane (SP)  
Alex Phelps (AP)  
Jason K. Pietrzak (JKP)  
David Provencher (DP)  
Susan Quinn (SQ)  
Lanny Randolph (LR)  
Neal Ratzlaff (NR)  
Edward Raynor (ER)  
Ben Ream (BR)  
Larry Richardson (LRn)  
Linda Riesberg (LRi)  
Justin Rink (JR)  
Gabriel Rivera (GR)  
Jeff Rodgers (JRo)  
Paul Roisen (PR)  
Ruby Rolland (RR)  
Stephen Rossiter (SR)  
Cheryl Samusevish (CSa)  
Dave Sandahl (DS)  
Shari Schwartz (SS)  
Kathy Schwery (KS)  
Scott Seier (SSe)  
John Sidle (JSi)  
W. Ross Silcock (WRS)  
Matthew Sittel (MSi)  
Randy Skaggs (RS)  
Gavin Stacey (GSt)  
G Stacks (GS)  
Ruthie Stearns (RSt)  
Matt Steffl (MSt)

Kristal Stoner (KSt)	Moni Usasz (MU)
Caleb Strand (CS)	Matthew & Cynthia Van Den Broeke (M&CV)
Robyn Stubbendick (RSb)	Lucy Vick (LV)
John Sullivan (JS)	Alison Wagner (AWa)
Linda Sullivan (LS)	T. J. Walker (TJW)
Michele Swartout (MS)	Gordon Warrick (GW)
Jim & Linda Swenson (J&LS)	Bruce White (BW)
Dakota Swisher (DSw)	Juanita Whittecar (JW)
Jason Thiele (JTh)	Elizabeth Winter (EW)
Jerry Toll (JT)	Anne Winters (AW)
Renee Tressler (RT)	Rachel Woodard (RW)
Joshua Uffman (JU)	Donna Yates (DY)
Ted Uhlemann (TU)	
Stella Uiterwaal (SU)	

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck:** Only two were reported, one at Krause WPA, Fillmore Co, 3 Jun (CS), the other at Cody Park, Lincoln Co, 5-14 Jun (BW, m. ob.).

**Snow Goose:** Routine reports.

**Ross's Goose:** None were reported of this rare eastern and central summer visitor.

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Two were documented, one along the Missouri River in Nemaha Co 9 Jun (SMa, BR) the other at Charlie's Pond, Douglas Co, 14 Jun (SMa).

**Cackling Goose:** The only report was of a one at Kissinger Basin WMA, Clay Co, 30 Jun claimed as "Taverner's" subspecies (*Branta hutchinsii taverneri*) (CS photo). Because of variation and apparent interbreeding in Cackling (*Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*) and Canada (*Branta canadensis parvipes*) Geese breeding in the area where Taverner's Cackling Geese originate, identification of single birds, especially in summer in Nebraska, is difficult at best. It seems best to consider this report unproven pending further reports.

**Canada Goose:** Routine reports.

**Mute Swan:** An intriguing report was of two one-year-old birds at GPD, Cedar and Knox Cos, 7 Jun-1 Jul (EB, m. ob.). Non-breeding subadults are known to disperse in spring, which raises the possibility these were wild birds; the report will go to NOURC for a determination on provenance. A pair with five young at Yanney Heritage Park, Buffalo Co, 11 Jun was part of the long-established managed population there (ML).

**Trumpeter Swan:** The pair at Ravenna, Buffalo Co, continued through at least 26 Jun but no young were seen (WF, RF). One with an apparent broken wing summered on LO, last reported 11 Jul (JS, m. ob.).

**Wood Duck:** Good tallies were the 92 at Cunningham Lake, Douglas Co, 16 Jul (SMa) and 90 at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 17 Jul (JTh); both counts were boosted by numbers of broods.

**Blue-winged Teal:** Routine reports.

**Blue-winged Teal x Cinnamon Teal:** The only report was of one in York Co 1 Jun (LK).

**Cinnamon Teal:** Easterly were singles in Clay Co 3 Jun (JGJ) and York Co 19 Jun (CS). Breeding has not yet been confirmed in the RWB.

**Northern Shoveler:** Routine reports.

**Gadwall:** Routine reports.

**American Wigeon:** Two in Cherry Co, some 20 miles south of Valentine, 3 Jul (CN, NB) were potential breeders; this species breeds only rarely in the state.

**Mallard:** Routine reports.

**Northern Pintail:** Routine reports.

**Green-winged Teal:** Routine reports.

**Canvasback:** One in Lancaster Co 4 Jun (JJJ) was a tardy migrant. Singles near Cody, Cherry Co, 4 Jun (JS, LJ, LS) and Lord Lake, Cherry Co, 7 Jun (AM) may have been tardy migrants or possible breeders. Likely breeding were as many as eight at CLNWR 2 Jun-11 Jul (JS, m. ob.).

**Redhead:** Probable non-breeding yearlings linger rather late in spring away from breeding locations, even into Jul; up to five (two males, three females) were still present 27 Jun at Salerno Marsh/N 264<sup>th</sup> St, Douglas Co, (JH, SMa, m. ob.) and a male was there 19 Jul (JH, SMa). Tardy away from breeding areas were singles at Plainview WTP, Pierce Co, 18 Jun (SMa) and at Tecumseh WTP, Johnson Co, 20 Jun (SMa).

**Ring-necked Duck:** As with Redhead, lingering birds can occur into Jul; a male was at Salerno Marsh/N 264<sup>th</sup> St, Douglas Co, through 19 Jul (SMa), and another male was at Cunningham Lake, Douglas Co, 16 Jul (SMa).

**Lesser Scaup:** A female lingered at Cunningham Lake, Douglas Co, through 16 Jul (JH, SMa), and a male was tardy in Pierce Co 18 Jun (SMa).

**White-winged Scoter:** Providing the latest spring date on record was an immature at CLNWR 2 Jun (JS, LJ, LS, photo).

**Bufflehead:** Rare and less than annual in summer, five were at Goose Lake, CLNWR, 2 Jun (JS, LJ, LS) and 1-2 lingered there through 24 Jun (SML, K&KL).

**Hooded Merganser:** Likely a locally fledged brood, a pair with three juveniles was at Salerno Marsh/N 264<sup>th</sup> St, Douglas Co, 19-27 Jun (SMa).

**Common Merganser:** Breeding continues in the Norden Bridge area, Keya Paha and Brown Cos, where two broods were found; a female with six young 1-2 weeks old on 6 Jun (GW) and a brood of 11 large flightless young 2-3 miles below Norden Bridge 16 Jul (GW). Tardy female types, likely non-breeding immatures, were singles in Douglas Co 2-13 Jun (SMa, JH), Fort Robinson SP, Dawes Co, 14 Jun (PD), and Scotts Bluff Co 14 Jun (SML).

**Ruddy Duck:** Tardy were three at Holmes Lake, Lancaster Co, 20 Jun (JJu), and singles at Conestoga Lake, Lancaster Co, 21 Jun (TG) and Wagon Train RA, Lancaster Co, 1 Jul (LE). Mid-Jul and later records away from breeding areas may be early-dispersing males, such as singles in Madison Co 10 Jul (JTh) and at Stagecoach RA, Lancaster Co, 17 Jul (RF). Additional Jul reports unidentified to sex were of singles in Platte Co 13 Jul (EB, LB) and in Adams Co 24 Jul (WF).

**Northern Bobwhite:** Routine reports.

**Wild Turkey:** Routine reports.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse:** Routine reports.

**Greater Prairie-Chicken:** Rare in the Panhandle, the small population at CLNWR continues; two were heard 9 Jun (SMI) where four were found in Apr.

**Gray Partridge:** The only report was of one calling in southwest Pierce Co 2 Jun (JTh), a little south of the currently expected summer range and suggestive of range expansion.

**Ring-necked Pheasant:** Routine reports.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** Routine reports.

**Eared Grebe:** Large numbers were counted at Goose Lake, CLNWR: 530+ on 2 Jun (JS, LJ, LS) and a near-record 1105 on 9 Jun (SMI). Potential RWB breeders were singles in Seward Co 25 Jun (CS) and Clay Co 17 Jun (CS). Unusual in Jul away from the expected breeding range were four at North Platte WTP, Lincoln Co, 10 Jul (MM).

**Western Grebe:** Routine reports.

**Clark's Grebe:** The four reports were of 1-2 at LM, where expected but rare in summer (CKI, CCh, LG).

**Rock Pigeon:** Routine reports.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** Routine reports.

**Diamond Dove:** One in a Lincoln, Lancaster Co, yard 15 Jul (RK fide MU) was an obvious escaped or released bird.



Common Nighthawk at Crescent Lake NWR, Garden Co 9 Jun 2021, photographed by Steven Mlodinow. This bird is overall brown, including the underparts, and is a good candidate for western subspecies *Chordeiles minor howelli* or southwestern subspecies *C. m. henryi*.



**White-winged Dove:** Reports of increasing numbers of this species were statewide: 1-5 birds from nine locations although no breeding was reported (m. ob.); notable were five at a Saunders Co location where breeding has occurred in previous years (JHo).

**Mourning Dove:** Routine reports.

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

**Black-billed Cuckoo:** As expected, the three documented records were from the northeast: singles in Antelope Co 5 Jul (MB), Keya Paha Co 13 Jul (JJ), and at Fort Falls Trail, Cherry Co, 28 Jul (RT).

**Common Nighthawk:** Photographs of an overall evenly brown individual at CLNWR 9 Jun were convincing for subspecies *Chordeiles minor henryi* or *C. m. howelli* (SMI). (See photo on previous page.) For comparison, nighthawks in the Nebraska Sandhills are the expected pale subspecies *C. m. sennetti*, an excellent photograph of which was taken at CLNWR 2 Jun (JS, LJ, LS).



Common Nighthawk at Crescent Lake NWR, Garden Co 2 Jun 2021, presumed pale subspecies *Chordeiles minor sennetti*. Photographed by John Sullivan and group.

**Common Poorwill:** A population occurs in rocky habitat in south-central Nebraska; two were heard near Franklin, Franklin Co, 2 Jun (JGJ) and one was recorded near Red Cloud, Webster Co, 3 Jun (JGJ).

**Chuck-will's-widow:** One was recorded at the northernmost known location in the state at South Shore, Knox Co, 28 Jun (CS, MB).

**Eastern Whip-poor-will:** West of the expected summer range was one at Yellowbanks WMA, Madison Co, 5 Jul (WF). Only one was reported at the Oak Glen WMA, Seward Co, disjunct location, on 7 Jul (JG).

**Chimney Swift:** Routine reports.

**White-throated Swift:** Routine reports.

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird:** Westerly were presumed migrant singles in southeastern Dawes Co, a female 6 Jun (JW photo) for the 5<sup>th</sup> spring Panhandle record, and at Fort Falls, Cherry Co, a male 2 Jun (SB, photo). One in Hall Co 18 Jul (SR) was likely a fall migrant, but two at Bassway Strip WMA, Buffalo Co, 22 Jun (MBa, PO) and a male in Hall Co 30 Jun (RF) suggested possible breeding.

**Black-chinned Hummingbird:** The two reports, fewer than in the last couple of years, were of a male at the Croft feeders, Scotts Bluff Co, 11-14 Jun (CC, EB, LB, SMI) and a puzzling bird with a strongly decurved bill present in Lincoln, Lancaster Co, 30 Jun-17 Aug (fide MW) that was determined to be this species by Sheri Williamson albeit having a bill that was “on the decurved end of the bell curve”.

**Calliope Hummingbird:** The two reports were of fall migrants in the DeLara yard, Scotts Bluff Co: a rather early male 17-18 Jul and a female 28 Jul (KD).

**Rufous Hummingbird:** A female was rather early near Mitchell, Scotts Bluff Co, 10-11 Jul (KD). Quite easterly was one at a Seward Co feeder 24 Jul (LGa, photo); oddly, this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rufous in five years at this feeder, along with a Calliope in 2018.

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird:** Spring reports continued at a Dawes Co feeder; a male and a female were there 11-19 Jun (JW, videos). Surprising was one in a Mitchell, Scotts Bluff Co, yard 17 Jun (KD); although the observer considered it a very early fall migrant, it seems as likely to have been a spring migrant. The same yard hosted an expected fall migrant 28 Jul (KD).

**Virginia Rail:** Surveys of RWB sites in 2015-2017 found only small numbers, but this year surveys of 13 sites tallied 60+, best count 14 at Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, 2 Jul (CS).

**Sora:** As with Virginia Rail, RWB surveys yielded important numbers: 22 were found at eight sites, best count five at Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, 2 Jul (CS). Overall best single-site tally was 11 at Mallard Haven 3 Jun (CS), which may have included migrants. At unexpected breeding season locations were singles at Oliver Reservoir, Kimball Co, 28 Jun (PR), Kiowa WMA, Scotts Bluff Co 14 Jun (SMI), northern Antelope Co 7 Jul (CS), and three at Memphis Lake SRA, Saunders Co, 11 Jul (DY).

**Common Gallinule:** The only two reported were singles in the RWB, near Shickley, Clay Co, 2 Jun (CS) and at Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, 3 Jun (CS).

**American Coot:** At an unexpected breeding season location were 2-3 at Oliver Reservoir SRA, Kimball Co, 29 Jun and 11 Jul (SP, MM). One at Kramper Lake, Dakota Co, 28 Jun (MS) was also a little out of summer range. A “white-shielded” variant was at Cunningham Lake, Douglas Co, 16 Jul (SMa).

**Sandhill Crane:** Exciting were continuing pairs at five locations where breeding had been previously confirmed or was confirmed this summer; the latter locations were near Lake Wanahoo in the Colon area, where adults with a colt were seen 13 Jun-19 Jul (W&PH), and near North Platte, where adults with one colt were observed 9-10 Jun (BE) and adults with two colts 18 Jul (BE). The two North Platte locations are about three miles apart, indicating two

breeding pairs. Other sightings at known breeding locations, all of two adults, were at Agate, Sioux Co, 14 Jun (SML, DS), where breeding has occurred for about five years (fide SML), near Bassett, Rock Co, 8 Jul (KC), and in Knox Co 20 Jul (RR). Probable non-breeding sub-adults were a group of five at Ayr Lake, Adams Co, 12 Jun (SMa), and one at County Line Marsh WPA, Fillmore Co, 5 Jul (CS), where breeding has occurred previously.

**Black-necked Stilt:** The only breeding evidence reported was in the RWB, where one was on a nest in York Co 14-30 Jun (LE, m. ob.); a pair was at Harvard WPA, Clay Co, 18 Jun (SMa). Likely non-breeding immatures were 1-5 at North Platte WTP, Lincoln Co, 5-20 Jun (BW, SML, EW, BE). Nesting in Cherry Co is not yet documented; two were a few miles south of Merritt Reservoir 5 Jun (T&MH).

**American Avocet:** One near Wallace, Lincoln Co, 15 Jun (CS) may have been a spring straggler.

**Black-bellied Plover:** The only report was of two in Clay Co 2 Jun (JGJ).

**American Golden-Plover:** The only report was of one rather late in Clay Co 3 Jun (JGJ).

**Killdeer:** Routine reports.

**Semipalmated Plover:** Tardy were two in Clay Co 3 Jun (JGJ).

**Piping Plover:** All reports were from known nesting areas. Best tally was 21 on the Missouri River, including multiple young, 29 Jun (CS, MB).

**Mountain Plover:** Routine reports.

**Upland Sandpiper:** Migration was underway by late Jul; local birds had departed at Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, by 31 Jul (RT).

**Long-billed Curlew:** Routine reports.

**Hudsonian Godwit:** None were reported of this fairly common eastern and east-central spring migrant with last expected dates 5-6 Jun.

**Marbled Godwit:** An early fall migrant, a flock of 18 was at CLNWR 24 Jun (K&KL); four were there 11 Jul (CCh).

**Ruddy Turnstone:** None were reported of this uncommon spring migrant east and central with expected last dates 4-6 Jun.

**Stilt Sandpiper:** Tardy spring migrants were singles at MWCW 4 Jun (BB, AP) and at North Platte WTP 9 Jun (SML); such birds are likely non-breeding one-year-olds.

**Sanderling:** The only reports were of five in Clay Co and two in Cherry Co, all on 2 Jun (JGJ, SB).

**Dunlin:** One tardy in Clay Co 2 Jun (JGJ) was the only report.

**Baird's Sandpiper:** Last expected spring dates are 7-8 Jun, but none were reported in Jun. Fall reports were routine.

**Least Sandpiper:** One at BOL 15 Jun (SK photo) may have been a spring tardy or a fall early, in either case a mid-summer (7-30 Jun) rarity.

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** Routine reports.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** The only report was of two at a sod farm at US 275/77 and L Road, Dodge Co, 31 Jul (LE).

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** Tardy in spring were singles at each of two Thayer Co locations 12 Jun (SMa), and early in fall a group of 19 near Winnetoon, Knox Co, 7 Jul (CS, MB) and two at LNB 9 Jul (CS).

- Semipalmated Sandpiper:** Routine reports.
- Western Sandpiper:** None were reported of this uncommon statewide fall migrant with early expected dates 23-26 Jul.
- Short-billed Dowitcher:** One in Fillmore Co 4 Jul was quite early (CS, recording).
- Long-billed Dowitcher:** One in Fillmore Co 4 Jul (CS) was quite early.
- American Woodcock:** West of the expected summer range, one was heard "peenting" at close range from the ground within about 800 yards of riparian habitat by an experienced observer at Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, 10 Jul (RT). Another was flushed at Bohemia Prairie WMA, Knox Co, 20 Jun (WRS, JC, SS).
- Wilson's Snipe:** Reports from the southeast, including the RWB, in the breeding season are few. Thus, of interest were singles at Father Hupp WMA, Thayer Co, 12 Jun (SMa) and Troester WPA, Hamilton Co, 8 Jul (OD).
- Spotted Sandpiper:** Routine reports.
- Solitary Sandpiper:** Routine reports.
- Lesser Yellowlegs:** Rather early for fall were singles at Lakeside, Garden Co, 17 Jun (BE) and in Keith Co 19 Jun (LRi).
- Willet:** One in Lancaster Co 1 Jun (TG) was a spring tardy. Early in fall away from breeding areas were three at LO 26 Jun (MA).
- Greater Yellowlegs:** One at North Platte WTP, Lincoln Co, 9 Jun (SMI) was likely a straggling non-breeding immature.
- Wilson's Phalarope:** Although only one nest was found, that at Prairie Marsh WMA, Thayer Co, 12 Jun (SMa, photo), there were 10 reports in all for the RWB 12 Jun-4 Jul (m. ob.), including territorial flying at Lindau WPA, Kearney Co, 25 Jun (JB) and "many pairs" among the 17 birds at Hultine WPA, Clay Co, 18 Jun (CS).
- Laughing Gull:** The only report, about the 31<sup>st</sup> for the state, was of an alternate adult at LNB 2 Jun (fide SK, photo).
- Franklin's Gull:** Routine reports.
- Ring-billed Gull:** A good count was the 301 at LM 31 Jul (CKI).
- California Gull:** Surprising was one flying over Chadron, Dawes Co, 24 Jun (SMI).
- Herring Gull:** None were reported, surprisingly; this species is an expected albeit uncommon summer visitor at LM.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Unexpected was the group of five first cycle birds at LM 1 Jun (JS, photo). Possibly one of these was the individual present 10 Jul (GSt, photo).
- Least Tern:** Reports were from or near known breeding areas. Good tallies were 20, including a fledgling, at a private sandpit lake near Valley, Douglas Co, 19 Jul (SMa) where 18 were counted 13 Jul (JH), and 18 on the lower Platte River, Cass Co, 21 Jun (JGJ, SB).
- Caspian Tern:** Routine reports.
- Black Tern:** Routine reports.
- Forster's Tern:** Routine reports.
- Common Loon:** Summering birds, usually immatures, are rare in the east; singles were at Two Rivers SRA, Douglas Co, 12-15 Jun (TG, m. ob.) and Stagecoach Lake SRA, Lancaster Co, 8-17 Jul (SK, m. ob.).

**Double-crested Cormorant:** Some 250 nests were located on an island in Wolf Lake, Garden Co, associated with 1200 American White Pelican nests (see that species) photographed 6 Aug (JSi). In addition 75-100 nests were at Island Lake, CLNWR, associated with a large colony of American White Pelicans, found by Marlin French.

**Neotropic Cormorant:** Now annual in occurrence, but rare, there were three reported, singles at 264<sup>th</sup> St, Douglas Co, 8-27 Jun (SMA, m. ob.), Cody Park, Lincoln Co, 9 Jun-31 Jul (CCh, m. ob.), and Wagon Train RA, Lancaster Co, 16-31 Jul (EJ, m. ob.).

**American White Pelican:** Very exciting was the discovery of two large nesting colonies in Garden Co, only the second and third records of colony nesting for Nebraska. In late May John Sidle found a colony of some 1200 birds on nests on an ephemeral island in Wolf Lake, Garden Co, (see photo). Soon after, in mid-Jun, Marlin French found a colony of 75-100 nests at Island Lake, CLNWR; young were hatching 7 Jul. The only prior record of colony nesting was of about 37 adults at CLNWR in 2018.



American White Pelican nesting colony at Wolf Lake, Garden County, Nebraska, photographed by John Sidle 19 Jun 2021. The colony consisted of about 1200 pelican nests and 280 Double-crested Cormorant nests.

**American Bittern:** Good numbers were detected during RWB surveys, a total of 20 birds at eight locations 1 Jun-4 Jul (CS); best tally was six at Mallard Haven WPA, Clay Co on both Jun 2 and 3 (CS).

**Least Bittern:** Six were found on RWB surveys at three locations, Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, Harvard WPA, Clay Co, and Kissinger Basin WMA, Clay Co, 3 Jun-10 Jul (CS, RF, DC). Elsewhere, 1-2 were near Niobrara, Knox Co, 12-21 Jun (CS, MB, RD) and two at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 30 Jun (JTh).

**Great Blue Heron:** Routine reports.

**Great Egret:** Rare in the Panhandle in summer, two were at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 25 Jul (LV). Numbers were generally low during the period.

**Snowy Egret:** The four reports for a total of five summer visitors were as expected in southeastern Nebraska.

- Little Blue Heron:** This species has been rarely reported in recent years and none were reported this year. Current status is "Uncommon regular summer visitor east and central, rare casual west."
- Cattle Egret:** Rare in the Panhandle, six were near Goose Lake, CLNWR, 9 Jun (SMI). Numbers were generally low.
- Green Heron:** Routine reports.
- Black-crowned Night-Heron:** Breeding season reports outside the breeding range are rare; an adult was Chappell Lake, Deuel Co, 29 Jun (E&LF), and one was in north Lincoln, Lancaster Co, 2 Jul (AW, JKP). Best tallies from breeding locations were 13 near Goose Lake, CLNWR, 9 Jun (SMI) and seven at Harvard WPA, Clay Co, 17 Jun (CS).
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron:** The only reports were of single immatures in Fillmore Co 4 Jul (CS) and Saunders Co 31 Jul (SK, DC).
- Glossy Ibis:** The two reports were of singles at Green Wing WMA, Clay Co, 3 Jun (JGJ, CS, MC) and at Lakeside, Garden Co, 11 Jul (BE, CCh).
- Glossy x White-faced Ibis (hybrid):** The only report was of one at CLNWR 9 Jun (SMI).
- White-faced Ibis:** Somewhat out of breeding range for the dates were singles in Perkins Co 15 Jun (CS) and Madison Co 24 Jun (WF). Rather early fall migrants were one at Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jul (KD) and seven at Scottsbluff WTP, Scotts Bluff Co, 19 Jul (ZC).
- Turkey Vulture:** Best count was 65 kettling over Gibbon, Buffalo Co, late afternoon 10 Jul (RW), presumably immature non-breeders preparing to roost.
- Osprey:** Nesting continues in the North Platte and Missouri River Valleys. The "Berggren" nest in Scotts Bluff Co had a pair with three young 19 Jul (KD). Up to three were in the Keystone-LO area, Keith Co, through mid-Jul (m. ob), and an adult with two young was at the OPPD nest site, Blair, Washington Co, 22 Jul (SMa). Exciting was a new nest site on a cell tower at Liquid Trucking in Cass Co; incubation was apparent 6 Jul (RS, SMa, MC, DC).
- Golden Eagle:** Two near Oshkosh, Garden Co, 5 Jul (SMa) were at the eastern edge of the summer range.
- Northern Harrier:** An adult male, unusual in the east in summer, was in Pierce Co 29 Jul (JTh), possibly a failed breeder. Two near Randolph, Cedar Co, 30 Jul (MB), one at PSP 12 Jun (CK), and one in Burt Co 27 Jun (PM) were easterly also, possible non-breeding immatures.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Sightings in early summer in northern and western Nebraska may be non-breeding one-year-olds but are quite rare. One was near Mitchell, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SMI), and additional sightings likely of this species were of singles seen in the same area at Fort Robinson SP, Dawes Co, 14 and 20 Jun (PD), and one in western Cherry Co 2 Jul (NB, CN).
- Cooper's Hawk:** Routine reports.
- Bald Eagle:** Routine reports.
- Mississippi Kite:** The now numerous western and southern breeding locations continued, encouragingly in Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff Co, a fairly new location (SP, m. ob.). Notable was the count of 21 at North Platte, Lincoln Co, 10 Jul (BE). Easterly, there were sightings at incipient summering

locations in Fairbury, Jefferson Co, (SMA) and Lincoln, Lancaster Co, (JGJ, M&CV). One was over Arbor Lodge SHP, Otoe Co, 6 Jun (SMA). Interestingly, two observers noted groups of three flying northeastward over Lincoln, Lancaster Co, on 14 Jun (JGJ) and 16 Jun (M&CV), possibly related to the known southern movement in the Missouri River Valley in fall.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** No documented records were received of this rare southeastern resident.

**Broad-winged Hawk:** Reports away from the expected summer range in the southeast were of an immature straying as far northwest as Harrison, Sioux Co, 4 Jun (JS, LJ, LS) and an adult at a known breeding location near Crofton, Cedar Co, 11 Jun (MB, CS).

**Swainson's Hawk:** Rare easterly in summer, possible breeders were sightings of singles a few miles apart in Pierce Co 18 Jun (JTh) and 20 Jul (MB).

**Red-tailed (Eastern) Hawk:** Routine reports.

**Red-tailed (Kridler's) Hawk:** Rare in summer, two were reported. One in Wheeler Co 10 Jun (JTh) was easterly, possibly a non-breeding immature. Another was near the summer range in Kimball Co 13 Jun (TK photo).

**Red-tailed (Western) Hawk:** One identified as this subspecies was quite late in Kimball Co 13 Jun (TK), likely a non-breeding immature.

**Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk:** A light morph juvenile/immature was near Harrison, Sioux Co, 13 Jun (ER), presumably another immature non-breeder.

**Ferruginous Hawk:** A nest in Dundy Co was not active for the first time in several years (JGJ).

**Barn Owl:** Four reports were from Garden Co nest boxes 5 Jun-11 Jul (m. ob.), and one was a bit northerly at Fort Robinson SP, Dawes Co, 17-19 Jun (BO).

**Eastern Screech-Owl:** A rare red morph was one of the parents of three fledged juveniles at Pepperwood Park, Douglas Co, 13-17 Jun (SMA, m. ob.).

**Great Horned Owl:** Routine reports.

**Burrowing Owl:** At the eastern edge of the summer range were three at a prairie dog town in Hall Co 26 Jun (RF). None were reported from the RWB.

**Barred Owl:** Continuing sporadic reports westward in the Niobrara River Valley were two along River Road, Keya Paha Co, 13 Jun (KSt).

**Long-eared Owl:** The only report was of one at Steer Creek Campground, Cherry Co, 2 Jun (SB).

**Short-eared Owl:** None were reported of this rare statewide resident.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl:** None were reported of this rare western breeder.

**Belted Kingfisher:** A good tally was eight southeast of Arcadia, in Sherman Co, 25 Jun (RS).

**Lewis's Woodpecker:** The only reports were of one at a regular site near Coffee Park, Sioux Co, 2 Jul (MSt) and one unexpected at the Hudson-Meng Bison site, Sioux Co, 23 Jun (KN).

**Red-headed Woodpecker:** Routine reports.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** At the west edge of the Nebraska range (and the west edge of the state) was one at Stateline Island, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SMI). An early juvenile was in Cass Co 9 Jul (EW photo).

**Downy Woodpecker:** Routine reports.

**Hairy Woodpecker:** Routine reports.

**Northern Flicker:** Routine reports.

**Pileated Woodpecker:** Routine reports.

**American Kestrel:** Routine reports.

**Merlin:** This species nests rarely on the Pine Ridge; one of very few summer reports was of one along Buckley Road, Sioux Co, 11 Jul (CC photo).

**Peregrine Falcon:** There were two reports away from southeastern Nebraska. Surprising was an adult at Niobrara, Knox Co, 6 Jul (RR photo), and a wandering immature non-breeder was in Banner Co 2 Jul (SMA photo). Four chicks, three males and a female, fledged from the OPPD, Douglas Co, site by 17 Jun (JT).

**Prairie Falcon:** Routine reports.

**Olive-sided Flycatcher:** None were acceptably reported; expected last dates are 4-6 Jun.

**Western Wood-Pewee:** The 38 at CSP 24 Jun (SMI) was an excellent tally.

**Eastern Wood-Pewee:** Routine reports.

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:** None were reported of this rare eastern spring migrant with last expected dates 2-3 Jun.

**Acadian Flycatcher:** Northerly was one in Dakota Co 1 Jun (BFH). Perhaps a little west of the expected summer range was one at PRSP 7 Jun (JJu, photo, recording).

**Alder Flycatcher:** Routine reports.

**Willow Flycatcher:** Routine reports.

**Cordilleran Flycatcher:** Routine reports.

**Least Flycatcher:** This species is quite rare anywhere in the state in summer, thus startling was one as far southeast as BOL 25 Jun (TG recording). Singles reported at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 10 and 29 Jun (PD, TG) were less surprising.

**Eastern Phoebe:** Routine reports.

**Say's Phoebe:** One in Dixon Co 27 Jul was at the same location one was found in Apr and may have bred there (JTh). Also away from expected breeding areas were one in Saline Co 1 Jun (TJW) and one in northern Cherry Co 4 Jun (SB).

**Ash-throated Flycatcher:** At least one was photographed (BE, CCh, m. ob.) and recorded (SMI) near Exit 1 on I-80, Kimball Co, 19-28 Jun; this is the 5<sup>th</sup> Nebraska record, the last four since 2010 at this site.

**Great Crested Flycatcher:** A good find far westerly was one at Stateline Island, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SMI). At isolated western Sandhills locations were two at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 10 Jun (PD), one there 29 Jun (TG), and one at CLNWR 9 Jun (SMI).

**Cassin's Kingbird:** Routine reports.

**Western Kingbird:** Other than a nest with eggs 18 Jun built on a driveway basketball backboard in Seward Co (JG), reports were routine.

**Eastern Kingbird:** Routine reports.

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher:** Following the appearance of a single on 28 May along 626 Ave near 712 Trail, Pawnee Co, all Jun-Jul reports but one were from that Pawnee Co site. Nest building was underway 6 Jun (MC) and a group of four plus a single were seen on 5 Jul (PP). A report of nestlings 18 Jul (DSw, NBe)



suggests a second pair nested or a second attempt by the 6 Jun pair. A belated report was of one near Doniphan, Hall Co, 24 May (AMe fide JGJ).

**Bell's Vireo:** Rare in summer in the Panhandle, the two reports were of three near Harrison, Sioux Co, 4 Jun (JS, LJ, LS) and one at Fort Robinson SP, Dawes Co, 14 Jun (PD).

**Yellow-throated Vireo:** Singles at Fort Kearney SRA, Buffalo Co, 12 Jun (BBr) and Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, 20 Jul (EBr) were westerly migrants.

**Plumbeous Vireo:** The presence of as many as four singing birds in the Wildcat Hills, Scotts Bluff Co, 14-20 Jun (SML, CK, DS, KN) suggest continuing establishment there since the mid-2000s; breeding is yet to be proven.

**Warbling Vireo:** Western subspecies *Vireo gilvus brewsteri* migrates a month later than eastern *V. g. gilvus*; thus apparent migrants away from the Pine Ridge breeding range were four at Scotts Bluff WTP, Scotts Bluff Co 14 Jun (SML) and one singing (compared with singing *V. g. gilvus*) at Ash Hollow SHP, Garden Co 9 Jun (SML).

**Red-eyed Vireo:** Routine reports.

**Loggerhead Shrike:** Startling, and a continuation of a recent trend in the northeast, was the paucity of reports east of Cherry Co and north of the Platte River; only four birds were reported, in Knox, Greeley (two), and Custer Cos (JTh, RSt, T&LH).

**Pinyon Jay:** Notoriously unpredictable in summer, there were two reports: a flock of 12 was at Smiley Canyon, Sioux Co, 26 Jun (NR), and a single was at West Ash Creek, Dawes Co, 4 Jul (SMA).

**Blue Jay:** Routine reports.

**Black-billed Magpie:** Reports were from expected locations, including one in Stanton Co 5 Jun (JTh); best count was eight in northeastern Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff Co, 31 Jul (JU). Encouraging was a juvenile in Smiley Canyon, Sioux Co, 14 Jul (CCh) photo).

**American Crow:** Routine reports.

**Common Raven:** Exciting was the continuing presence of two along Buckley Road, Sioux Co, 13-14 Jun (ER, SML); one was carrying a toad for at least a mile 14 Jun, presumably feeding young (SML).

**Black-capped Chickadee:** A good tally was 23 at CSP 24 Jun (SML).

**Tufted Titmouse:** Reports of breeding in Lancaster Co are increasing. Reports were from four locations: 1-2 family groups were in a Lincoln neighborhood 9-10 Jun (JGJ), an apparent family group was at Densmore Park 2-21 Jul (RSt, recording), and singles were at WP 17 Jun (RSt) and near Roca 15 Jun (SQ).

**Horned Lark:** The abundance of this species in summer in the southwest was indicated by the count of "at least" 75 in ¼ mile in central Kimball Co 6 Jun (PB).

**Bank Swallow:** The 420 resting in a parking lot at Weigand Marina, Knox Co, 8 Jul (MB, CS) was a good tally.

**Tree Swallow:** The 110 at Lake Yankton, Cedar Co, 28 Jun (CS, MB) was a good tally.

**Violet-Green Swallow:** Five easterly at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 10 Jun (PD) were likely migrants.

- Northern Rough-winged Swallow:** The 60 at Enders Reservoir, Chase Co, 6 Jun (J&LS) was a good count.
- Purple Martin:** No roosts were reported by the end of the period; flocking at LSWNP had 112-148 birds 25-29 Jul (LS).
- Barn Swallow:** Routine reports.
- Cliff Swallow:** The 700 at a bridge near Roscoe, Keith Co, 17 Jul (DG) was a good tally.
- Cedar Waxwing:** A nest in a sycamore was closely tracked in central Lincoln, Lancaster Co; incubation was underway by 8 Jul, nestlings present 17-27 Jul, and first fledging was 27 Jul (SS, JC). In Polk Co, nestbuilding was observed 22 Jun (WF).
- Red-breasted Nuthatch:** There were more easterly reports than usual, notably in Madison Co, where breeding occurred at one location and possibly at two others. The nesting birds at the NGPC offices there continued with sightings of 1-2 through 15 Jun (JTh), and a group of four with apparent juveniles was at New Lutheran Cemetery, Madison Co, 27 Jul (MB). During Jul a Norfolk feeder hosted 3-4 birds; that feeder had had at least one Red-breasted Nuthatch for 53 straight weeks well into Aug (DH). Lincoln, Lancaster Co, has hosted this species for a few years; singles were reported 1 Jun (DO) and 6 and 25 Jul (JGJ). One was at a Sarpy Co feeder 25 Jun-21 Jul (MC), and one was at Chalco Hills RA, Sarpy Co, 7 Jul (GR). Farther west but away from known breeding locations were singles in Buffalo Co 2 Jul (TU), Lincoln Co 12 Jun (CNe) and at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 10 Jun (PD).
- White-breasted Nuthatch:** The presence on the Pine Ridge of eastern *Sitta carolinensis carolinensis* was documented by photos of two pairs in riparian habitat near the entrance to CSP 25 Jun (SML) and by a recording along Squaw Creek Road, Dawes Co, 4 Jul also in riparian habitat (SMa). A *S. c. carolinensis* carrying food at Chadron Creek WMA, Dawes Co, 24 Jun (SML) was thought to be the same bird seen there in winter with a *S. c. nelsoni* (SML).
- Pygmy Nuthatch:** Routine reports.
- Brown Creeper:** Rare in summer, the three reports were from the north: two at Smith Falls SP, Cherry Co, 7 Jun (PD), one at nearby Fort Falls, Cherry Co, 14 Jul (AMc), and two at CSP 2 Jun (CK).
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** Nesting was reported at Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, during the period (RT).
- Rock Wren:** The 10 at Scottsbluff NM, Scotts Bluff Co, 22 Jun (CK) was a good count.
- House Wren:** Excellent counts were 71 at CSP 24 Jun (SML) and 60 at FF 24 Jul (JL).
- Sedge Wren:** Early summer breeding (late May-11 Jul) has been rare in Nebraska but is increasing. Up to five birds were at Flanagan Lake, Douglas Co, through 1 Jul (SSe, m. ob.) and up to four at Frank Shoemaker Marsh, Lancaster Co, through 29 Jun (SB, m. ob.). Late summer breeding usually occurs after a mid-Jul increase in numbers, but no such increase was noted this summer.
- Marsh Wren:** A singing single of the eastern subspecies *Cistothorus palustris palustris* in Scotts Bluff Co 14 Jun (SML) was most likely a westerly and tardy migrant.

- Carolina Wren:** Northerly was one at South Shore, Knox Co, 20 Jun (JBi) and westerly were singles at Minden, Kearney Co, 18 Jul (LR, RH) and in Adams Co 19 Jul (SR). At the edge of the expected range were 1-2 at Beaver Creek Park, York Co, 21-22 Jun (WF).
- Gray Catbird:** One at Bridgeport SRA, Morrill Co, 5 Jul (SMa) was in a section of the North Platte River Valley with few prior records. Good counts were 21 at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 18 Jun (SMa) and 20 at FF 13 Jun (G&SE) and again 24 Jul (JL).
- Brown Thrasher:** Routine reports.
- Sage Thrasher:** One was near Exit 1 on I-80, Kimball Co, 22 Jun (ER photo), where breeding has occurred previously, and probably the same bird was there on 24 Jul (AB). The only other report was of one near Bushnell, Kimball Co, 30 Jul (HM), probably an early fall migrant.
- Northern Mockingbird:** The 13 near Exit 1 on I-80, Kimball Co, 23 Jun (SMI) was an excellent count.
- European Starling:** Large flocks of hatch year birds mixed with adults appear around mid-Jun; surprisingly large however were flocks of 1100 at Harvard WPA, Clay Co, 17 Jun (CS) and 650 at Pintail WMA, Hamilton Co, 21 Jun (CS).
- Eastern Bluebird:** The weather-related losses in spring were reflected in “much lower than normal” occupancy in a 50-box operation in Washington Co; only five boxes were occupied 12 Jun (LF).
- Mountain Bluebird:** Routine reports.
- Townsend’s Solitaire:** One photographed at LO 8 Jun (SU) was latest on record by about a month.
- Swainson’s Thrush:** One detected by call overhead at night in York Co 19 Jun (CS) was one of the four latest on record for the south and east.
- Wood Thrush:** The 15 at ICSP, Nemaha Co, 17 Jul (LD) was a good count for the date.
- American Robin:** Good summer tallies were 78 at Bay Hills Golf Course, Cass Co, 14 Jun (KS) and 75 at Sutherland Reservoir, Lincoln Co, 15 Jun (CS).
- House Sparrow:** Routine reports.
- Evening Grosbeak:** Almost unprecedented away from the Pine Ridge was the appearance of perhaps the same male at feeders about 10 miles apart in Otoe Co, both photographed. One was near Avoca, Otoe Co, 3 Jun (RSb) and the other at Unadilla, Otoe Co, 6 Jul (JRo fide JGJ). Away from the Pine Ridge, the only other Jun record is for Thomas Co in 1965, and earliest in fall in the west 14 Jul 2006 in Scotts Bluff Co (Birds of Nebraska – Online).
- House Finch:** Charlotte Croshaw (photos) documented a nesting and renesting in Dodge Co; nestlings were present 1 Jun but appear to have been predated, upon which the adults rebuilt at the same place with nestlings present 30 Jun and young fledged 5 Jul.



This Evening Grosbeak was at a feeder near Avoca, Otoe County, 3 June 2021, here photographed by Robyn Stubbendick.

**Purple Finch:** A male photographed (see photo on next page) 12 Jun at WHNC Scotts Bluff Co (MSi) was unexpectedly tardy and westerly. It had some features suggestive of an excessively red-pigmented House Finch (lack of auricular patch, rounder head shape) but most key features favored Purple Finch (deeply notched tail, straight culmen, unstreaked flanks). It was identified as of the eastern subspecies of Purple Finch (MB).

**Red Crossbill:** One was easterly in Knox Co 1 Jun (MB). There were three reports from northeastern Cherry Co, including adults feeding mobile young among 11 birds at feeders near Valentine for two weeks up until 2 Jul (GW), five at Smith Falls SP 7 Jun (PD), and one near Crookston 4 Jun (SB). Only the expected Type 2 song type was reported (SP, SMI, PD).

**Pine Siskin:** Tardy in the east were singles at different Lincoln, Lancaster Co, locations 8 Jun (M&CV), 6 Jun (RSt), and 5 Jun (RSt). Easterly mid-summer reports were of singles in Sarpy Co 12 Jul (MC), possibly an early fall disperser, and Hall Co 29 Jun (BW). Few were at WHNC, best tally only 10 there 29 Jun (KD).



This male Purple Finch was photographed at Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Scotts Bluff County, 12 Jun 2021 by Matthew Sittel. Note the deeply notched tail, straight culmen, and lack of flank streaking.

**Lesser Goldfinch:** Apart from regular locations at WHNC and Exit 1 on I-80, Kimball Co, reports were of one at Oliver Reservoir, Kimball Co, 2 Jul (SMa) and four on CR57, Banner Co, including both green- and black-backed males, 2 Jul (SMa).

**American Goldfinch:** Routine reports.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur:** One near Fort Niobrara NWR headquarters, Cherry Co, 13 Jun (AH photo) was at the southern edge of the north-central summer range.

**Thick-billed (McCown's) Longspur:** Routine reports.

**Cassin's Sparrow:** Reports were from expected locations, north to Angora, Morrill Co, 23 Jun (2; CK) and east to 10 miles north of Oshkosh, Garden Co, 9 Jun (2-4, SMI). Best count was eight near Exit 1 of I-80, Kimball Co, 19 Jun (BE, CCh). None were found for the first time in several years on a Benkelman, Dundy Co, BBS Route 13 Jun (JGJ).

**Grasshopper Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Lark Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Lark Bunting:** A bit easterly in the south were two at Red Willow Reservoir, Frontier Co, 20 Jun (CNe).

**Chipping Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Clay-colored Sparrow:** Two were tardy at NNF Bessey, Thomas Co, 4 Jun (CK).

**Field Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Brewer's Sparrow:** Stretching the summer range were four near Angora, Morrill Co, 23 Jun (CK); Cassin's Sparrows were in the same area. Another at Scotts Bluff NM, Scotts Bluff Co, 21 Jun (CK) also seemed a bit out of place.

**Dark-eyed (White-winged) Junco:** Surprisingly, none were reported of this fairly common Pine Ridge resident.

**Vesper Sparrow:** Routine reports.

**Henslow's Sparrow:** All eight reports were from the same location along Bennet Road southeast of Denton, Lancaster Co, and near SCP; up to three were reported 2 Jun-17 Jul (CSa, m. ob.).

**Savannah Sparrow:** The very few known breeding locations are located in the Panhandle; a potential new location was along Buckley Road, Sioux Co, where one was photographed 13 Jun (ER).

**Song Sparrow:** Evidence for consolidation of summering in the Panhandle, where rare, was of two singing at Agate Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, 14 Jun (SMI), six at Stateline Island, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SMI) and one there 18 Jul (GS), and one at Scotts Bluff NM, Scotts Bluff Co, 26 Jun (POc). Two singers were reported at Smith Lake WMA, Sheridan Co, 29 Jun (TG), where there have been several prior sightings.

**Lincoln's Sparrow:** A major surprise was a pair photographed in suitable breeding habitat at Agate Fossil Beds NM, Sioux Co, 14 Jun (SMI); based on their territorial behavior, these birds were likely nesting.

**Swamp Sparrow:** Singles at Bittern's Call WMA, Dawson Co, 13 Jul (WF) and in Fillmore Co 31 Jul (DC) may have been edge of range breeders.

**Spotted Towhee:** Routine reports.

**Spotted Towhee x Eastern Towhee:** Good descriptions and photographs were provided for most of the eight reports of this hybrid (m. ob.); their distribution accurately fits the presumed location of a putative hybrid zone running from northeast to southwest across the state.

**Eastern Towhee:** Westerly were two in Nuckolls Co 3 Jul (DE) and a single in Boone Co 7 Jul (RSt).

**Yellow-breasted Chat:** The 19 along Old Stage Road, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SMI) was a good tally. One was easterly at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 12 and 30 Jun (JTh).

**Yellow-headed Blackbird:** An indication of the abundance of this species at CLNWR was the estimated 400 at Goose Lake 9 Jun (SMI).

**Bobolink:** In the Panhandle, the six reports were of singles, suggestive of wandering pioneering males, with the exception of the four at Agate Fossil Beds NM, Sioux Co, 30 Jun (AH).

**Eastern Meadowlark:** Routine reports.

**Western Meadowlark:** Routine reports.

**Orchard Oriole:** Routine reports.

**Bullock's Oriole:** East of the expected Panhandle range, two were near Merritt Dam, Cherry Co, 13 Jun (TB).

**Bullock's Oriole x Baltimore Oriole (hybrid):** The four reports, all 1-29 Jun, were towards the eastern edge of the Bullock's Oriole range as expected (MK, EB, MB, TG).

**Baltimore Oriole:** Rare in the Panhandle, the six reports were surprising, and might suggest increasing numbers westward. All were singles, 2 Jun-13 Jul (m. ob.).

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Excellent RWB estimates were 500 at Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, 2 Jun (CS), 300 there 8 Jul (MC), and 300 at County Line WPA, Fillmore Co, 5 Jul (CS).

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** Flocks begin to form in late Jun and are joined by adults in Jul; quite large for the date was a flock of 320 in Cuming Co 31 Jul (LE).

**Brewer's Blackbird:** An adult male and female at Ogallala, Keith Co, 23 Jul (DP) were easterly.

**Common Grackle:** Large numbers, presumably mostly hatch year birds, were counted early morning and late evening at RWB roost sites; best tallies were an amazing 3000 at Mallard Haven WPA, Fillmore Co, 10 Jul (DC) and 800 at Hansen WPA, Clay Co, 1 Jul (CS).

**Great-tailed Grackle:** Reports were statewide as this species continues to consolidate in the state. Northerly were one near Niobrara, Knox Co, 12 Jun (CS), one at Valentine, Cherry Co, 19 Jun (AWa, ZC), and three at Walgren Lake, Sheridan Co, 22 Jun (DS).

**Ovenbird:** Routine reports.

**Louisiana Waterthrush:** The amazing discovery of a breeding pair at Fort Falls, Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, 31 May (RT) was followed up by recordings 6 and 14 Jun and the presence of two fledglings there 6 Jun (RT). Amazingly, two territorial singing males were found at nearby Smith Falls SP, Cherry Co, 7 Jun (PD). It is becoming clear that surveys of spring branch canyons in the area will likely find a significant population of Louisiana Waterthrushes; it is yet to be determined, however, whether this species occurs between the eastern limits of spring branch canyon habitat and Ponca SP, Dixon Co, the nearest known regular breeding location. Westernmost in the south was one along Rose Creek near Hubbell, Thayer Co, 5 Jun (SMa).

**Black-and-white Warbler:** Reports have increased in recent years in the northeast although breeding has not yet been confirmed. This summer two were at PSP 15 Jun (DS), two at Mulberry Bend Overlook, Dixon Co, 9 Jun (CK), and one at Bow Creek RA, Cedar Co, 8 Jun (DS). These may all have been tardy migrants.

**Prothonotary Warbler:** The only report was from an expected lower Missouri River location; one was onshore at river mile 532, Nemaha Co, 7 Jun (SMa, BR; photo).

**Tennessee Warbler:** None were reported of this eastern and central migrant with last expected dates 2-3 Jun.

**Kentucky Warbler:** Routine reports.

**Common Yellowthroat:** The 45 at Nathan's Lake, Boyer Chute NWR, Washington Co, 17 Jul (SMa) was a high summer tally, likely including a few early migrants.

**American Redstart:** Confirmed breeding is limited to Missouri River Valley locations in the east, and so likely a tardy migrant was one in Pawnee Co 12

Jun (SB); singles in Dodge Co 25 Jun (CCr) and Antelope Co 27 Jun (PR) were puzzling, however. Fall movement apparently begins in mid-Jul; there were four such reports in the east 11-15 Jul, including five in Saunders Co 15 Jul (LE). One at Fort Falls, Cherry Co, 18 Jun was singing a song with a rise in pitch evocative of a Northern Parula's song but with a somewhat slower trill (JCo recording).

**Cerulean Warbler:** None were reported of this rare eastern summer visitor.

**Northern Parula:** Akin to Louisiana Waterthrush in terms of an apparent major range extension westward in the Niobrara River Valley were 1-2 at Fort Falls, Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, through at least 23 Jun (SB, m. ob.); the nearest known breeding is at PSP, 200 miles to the east. Also out of range in summer was one at Fairbury City Park, Jefferson Co, 5 Jun and 3 Jul (Sma, SQ).

**Yellow Warbler:** High counts were at opposite ends of the state: 43 at Wood Duck WMA, Stanton Co, 18 Jun (Sma) and 40 at Chadron Reservoirs, Dawes Co, 24 Jun (SML).

**Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler:** An extraordinary record was of an apparent adult male in Sarpy Co 29 Jul (MC, photo), possibly a "fire refugee" (JR).

**Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler:** Breeding probably occurs in the Wildcat Hills, Scotts Bluff Co, but is as yet unconfirmed. Reports from Wildcat Hills SRA were of singles, possibly the same territorial male, 20 Jun (CK, DS).

**Yellow-throated Warbler:** Surprisingly none were reported of this rare but regular southeastern breeder.

**Summer Tanager:** A male near Verdigre, Knox Co, 13 Jun was at a "known location" (MB, CS), where summering and likely breeding has occurred for the last five years (MB). A "blotchy" male was far westerly at CSP 24 Jun (SML).

**Scarlet Tanager:** An adult male at Fort Falls, Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, 10 Jul (RT) was west of the expected summer range in the Niobrara River Valley.

**Western Tanager:** Breeding is as yet unconfirmed in the Wildcat Hills, Scotts Bluff Co; there were four reports of singles 3-28 Jun (JS, m. ob.).

**Northern Cardinal:** Routine reports.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** Westerly were singles near Sparks, Keya Paha Co, 13 Jun (KSt), near Burwell, Rock Co, 2 Jun (JCo), and at Victoria Springs SRA, Custer Co, 14 Jun (LRn).

**Black-headed Grosbeak:** Easternmost probable summering birds were singles at Fort Falls, Fort Niobrara NWR, Cherry Co, 28 Jul (RT) and near Maxwell, Lincoln Co, 16 Jul (GC).

**Blue Grosbeak:** Routine reports.

**Lazuli Bunting:** The 11 along Old Stage Hill Road, Scotts Bluff Co, 14 Jun (SML) was a good tally.

**Lazuli Bunting x Indigo Bunting (hybrid):** A total of eight were reported from three Pine Ridge locations 9-29 Jun (PD).

**Indigo Bunting:** Good counts were 22 at FF 24 Jul (JL) and 20 at Neale Woods, Douglas Co, 10 Jun (TD). Westerly were two males at Fort Robinson SP, Dawes Co, 14 and 29 Jun (PD).

**Dickcissel:** In recent years this species has become widespread in the west; for example, it was noted that on a Benkelman, Dundy Co, BBS route Dickcissels have become more common (JGJ).



## Diminishing Returns: Results of Black Rail Surveys in Nebraska

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The Eastern Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis*) is a small, secretive marsh bird that was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in November 2020 (85 Federal Register 63764). Nebraska was included in the species' geographic range in this recent listing. As a result of the federal listing, the species also automatically became state listed as threatened under the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act (§37-801-811), as that statute requires all federally listed species to also be state listed.

By all accounts, the Black Rail's status and distribution is poorly known, especially in the interior of North America where it occurs sparingly and locally (Kane 2011, Eddleman et al. 2020). Many purported sightings are brief glimpses of flushed birds or involve instances where a bird is heard calling. Many reports are erroneous due to misidentification or confusion with other species. Other observations have no or limited supporting information which makes discerning their credibility challenging. At the same time, the species is undoubtedly overlooked and undetected where it does occur because of its secretive nature.

In Nebraska, various authors (Bruner et al. 1904, Johnsgard 1980, 2018, Bray et al. 1986, Sharpe et al. 2001, Smith-Patten and Patten 2012, and Silcock and Jorgensen 2021) have reviewed the Black Rail's status, which is confused and controversial. Johnsgard (1980, 2018) considered it "apparently very rare spring and fall migrant and a possible breeder". Others have generally been more conservative and only used reports with extant documentation. In their revision of Sharpe et al. (2001), Silcock and Jorgensen (2021) accepted only two records: audio recordings of calling birds in Knox County 25 May 1986 (Brogie and Brogie 1987) and at Harvard Waterfowl Production Area, Clay County 16 June 2016 (McGregor et al. 2016). The two records are also the only ones accepted by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (NOURC; Mark Brogie, chair, personal communication). Along with the accepted records, there are about two dozen other reports, several of which are very suggestive and/or reported by experienced observers.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has only contributed to the confusion regarding the species' status in Nebraska because of their inconsistent treatment of data. The Black Rail Species Status Assessment (SSA; USFWS 2018), which is the document on which the federal listing decision was based, relied heavily

on an extensive literature review by Smith-Patten and Patten (2012) and Watts (2016) in describing the Black Rail's status in the interior United States (pages 26-27). In Nebraska, Smith-Patten and Patten (2012) reviewed eighteen Black Rail reports and accepted one, the Knox County record cited above, rejected five reports and listed the remaining twelve reports as hypothetical. This review occurred prior to the 2016 Clay County record. The SSA (page 72), though, shows eight reports from Nebraska as "credible" without providing justification, thus apparently accepting reports as valid which other authors, including Smith-Patten and Patten (2012) and the NOURC, set aside. Unlike Nebraska, the USFWS chose to follow decisions of South Dakota Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee in the SSA (USFWS 2018, pgs 26-27). The SSA also does not mention Wyoming even though there is a May 2010 record near Laramie accepted by the Wyoming Bird Record Committee (Andrea Orabona, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, personal communication).

The uncertain status of the Black Rail in Nebraska is problematic. Different authors have interpreted existing reports differently resulting in varying conclusions about the species' status. The exercise of deciphering the limited details of existing reports and litigating their credibility is of little value. The Black Rail is now a threatened species and there is almost no published information on whether it occurs regularly in Nebraska. Furthermore, the species has not been searched for in any consistent form or systematic manner. Without information and understanding about the species' occurrence, taking actions to benefit and protect this species will undoubtedly be difficult for government and non-governmental agencies or for interested individuals who want to do so.

Since 2013, the Nongame Bird Program at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has conducted surveys focused on secretive marsh birds throughout the state. Although up to eight species were targeted in these specialized surveys, a primary objective was to determine the presence/absence and/or abundance of Black Rails. Here, we report the results from our survey efforts to detect Black Rails in Nebraska.

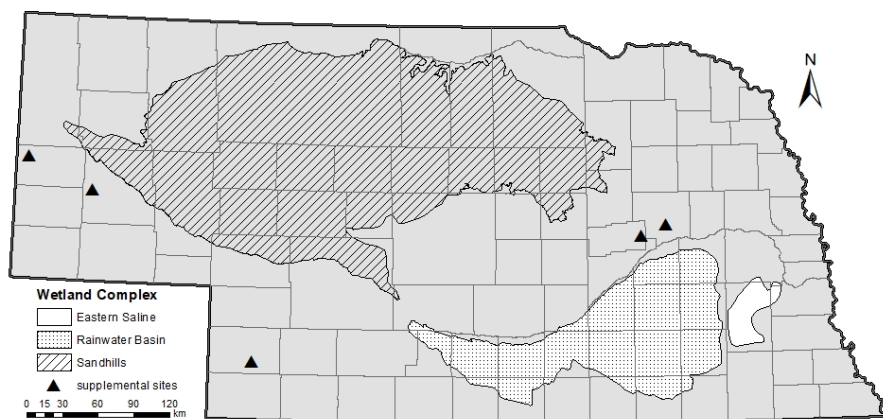
## **METHODS**

We conducted surveys in multiple years (2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021) and our methodology and effort varied from year to year. The majority of our surveys were designed and conducted following methods outlined by Conway (2011) and modified by Harms and Dinsmore (2012, 2013, 2014).

### Study area and site selection

Nebraska was our overall study area but we focused on three major wetland complexes; the Eastern Saline Wetland (ESW) complex primarily in northern Lancaster and southern Saunders Co, the Rainwater Basin (RWB) in south-central Nebraska, and the Sandhills in north-central Nebraska (Figure 1). To simplify access for surveys, only wetlands on publicly owned lands were considered (Harms and Dinsmore 2012). We used ArcGIS (ESRI Inc. 2013-20, Version 10.2-10.8, Redlands,

CA, [www.esri.com](http://www.esri.com)), the National Wetlands Inventory (USFWS 2009) and the RWB Wetland Vegetation Map (Nugent et al. 2015) to select our sites. Only palustrine wetlands, which are usually marshes with emergent vegetation, (Cowardin et al. 1979, LaGrange 2005) were included in our selection process as these are the wetland classes that possess habitat (used by Black Rails and other marsh birds (Harms and Dinsmore 2012)). Following recommendations by Conway (2011), we created random survey point locations in ArcGIS within wetland areas and these were located at a minimum of 400 m apart.



**Figure 1.** Location of major wetland complexes plus supplemental sites where Black Rail surveys were conducted in Nebraska 2013-2021.

In 2013, we surveyed available public sites in the ESW complex. In 2016-17, we conducted surveys in all three major wetlands complexes and randomly selected sites using four size classes: 1)  $\leq 15$  ha, 2) 16 – 60 ha 3) 61 – 150 ha, and 4)  $> 150$  ha. We attempted to select an equivalent number of points from each size class but were forced to select higher proportions of some size classes when others were not available. Survey site size classes were determined by calculating the total area of wetland habitat (including only wetlands within the lacustrine and palustrine systems) within each survey site. In 2020-21, we only conducted surveys in the RWB. In 2020, we randomly selected sites that possessed  $> 35$  ha of palustrine wetland. In 2021, we again surveyed sites that were used in 2016-17. In 2016, 2017, and 2021, the majority of points were surveyed twice: once from 15 May to 14 June and again from 15 June to 15 July. In 2013, a minority of points were surveyed twice. All points were only surveyed once in 2020.

In addition to public sites within major wetland complexes, supplemental surveys were conducted at the following sites: Fleisbach Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Morrill County, Don Dworak WMA in Nance Co, Wilkinson WMA in Platte County, Enders WMA (upper end of Enders Reservoir) in Chase County and Kiowa WMA in Scotts Bluff County. These sites were selected because they possess wetland habitat similar to those sites in the major wetland complexes.

### Surveys

We used call broadcast point counts focused on up to eight marsh bird species that included Black Rail. Other species surveyed included Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*), King Rail (*Rallus elegans*), Sora (*Porzana carolina*), American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*), Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*), and Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*). Broadcasting the calls of species increases detection probabilities for these secretive species (Conway 2011). At each survey point, we conducted a 13-minute call broadcast sequence provided by the North American Marsh Bird Monitoring Program coordinator (Conway 2011). Calls were broadcast using a compact speaker (e.g. JBL Flip 5 blue-tooth speaker) held approximately 1 m from the ground. The call broadcast sequence consisted of a 5-minute silent listening period followed by 30 seconds of calls and 30 seconds of silence for each focal species. Although our surveys involved multiple species, we are only reporting our results for Black Rail here. We were prepared to record all Black Rails detected (visually and aurally) during each one-minute interval throughout the entire 13-minute survey sequence. Surveyors were instructed to record vocalizations or photograph, if possible, any Black Rails detected. All surveys were conducted either in the morning, 30 minutes before sunrise to three hours after sunrise, or in the evening, three hours before sunset to 30 minutes after sunset (Harms and Dinsmore 2012, 2013, 2014). All surveys were conducted between 15 May-15 July. We did not conduct surveys during periods of sustained rain, heavy fog, or when wind speed was greater than 12 mph as recommended by Conway (2011).

For supplemental surveys, we surveyed wetlands using only a Black Rail call and listened for responses. We deliberately walked short distances (< 20 meters) during 30 seconds of silence and then stopped during the 30 seconds of Black Rail call playback or used continuous call playback and listened for a response. At some sites, we also stopped at specific point locations and played Black Rail calls and also listened for responses. All supplemental surveys were conducted between 15 May-15 July and during the same daytime periods as call broadcast point count surveys.

### **RESULTS**

We completed 1,354 call broadcast marsh bird and eight supplemental surveys across Nebraska from 2013-2021 (Table 1). A majority (54%, n = 735) of call broadcast point counts were completed in 2016-17. A majority (68%, n = 928) of the point counts were conducted in the Rainwater Basin. Supplemental surveys were completed at Fleisbach, Don Dworak and Wilkinson WMAs in 2016. In 2018, only one supplemental survey was conducted at Enders WMA. In 2020, supplemental surveys were completed at Fleisbach and Kiowa WMAs. Supplemental surveys were completed twice at Kiowa WMA in 2021. We detected only a single Black Rail during all surveys across all years. This documented detection consisted of a single bird that called in response to call-playback at Harvard Waterfowl Production Area on 15 June 2016 and is previously described in McGregor et al. (2016) and discussed above.

**Table 1.** Number of call broadcast point counts (CBPCs) and wetland sites (parenthesis) surveyed, as well as supplemental surveys, completed by year and by wetland complex in Nebraska 2013-2021. A proportion of points and wetlands were surveyed multiple times so totals do not represent a sum of unique points/wetlands.

Year	ESW	RWB	Sandhills	Total CBPCs	Supplemental
2013	24 (17)			24 (17)	
2016	30 (4)	186 (22)	163 (24)	379 (50)	3 (3)
2017	25 (4)	147 (20)	184 (24)	356 (48)	
2018					1 (1)
2020		297 (52)		297 (52)	2 (2)
2021		298 (27)		298 (27)	2 (1)
<b>Total</b>	79 (25)	928 (121)	347 (48)	1354 (202)	8 (7)

## DISCUSSION

Although Black Rails have been reported on multiple occasions since 1873 (Silcock and Jorgensen 2021) and occurrences have been documented twice in Nebraska over the past 35 years, the species status has been unclear. Our focused survey efforts in Nebraska over a nine-year period represents the first large-scale directed effort to detect Black Rail in the state. Our results, and especially our detection rate when compared to survey effort, indicates Black Rails rarely occur in the state during the breeding season. Furthermore, we found no evidence that Black Rails occur regularly anywhere in Nebraska. The specific point and site (Harvard WPA) at which a Black Rail was detected was surveyed multiple times following the detection in 2016 and Black Rails were not detected again. Our surveys did not encompass spring and fall migration periods so we are unable to make conclusions about the species occurrence during those periods. However, Nebraska does not lie between any known breeding and wintering areas (Eddleman et al. 2020), so regular migrants are not expected.

Our surveys in 2016-17 also included wetland sites within Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (CLNWR) where there were multiple Black Rail reports in 1995-96. We completed 108 total call broadcast point counts during those years with most points being surveyed four times. These surveys followed targeted searches at Goose Lake, within the CLNWR, in 1997 and 2001 (Silcock and Jorgensen 2021). Thus, the evidence available at this time does not indicate Black Rails occur at CLNWR or at wetlands in the western Sandhills in the summer. Like many Black Rail reports in the state, we are unable to judge the validity of the earlier reports in 1995-96 because of the lack of extant documentation. Thus, these reports are of limited value.

Although the use of call-playbacks greatly increases the probability of detecting Black Rails, its use does not ensure birds present will be detected (Legare et al. 1999). Detection rates are affected by environmental variables such as wind speed, cloud cover and moon phase (Legare et al. 1999, Tolliver et al. 2019). Detection rates of Eastern Black Rails has been estimated in a range of 0.19-0.20, meaning a single survey only has approximately a 20% probability of detecting a Black Rail if present (Legare et al. 1999, Butler et al. 2015, Tolliver et al. 2019). Furthermore, Tolliver et al. (2019) showed that the survey effort required (number of surveys to have a 0.95 probability of detection the species) was 8 surveys on the Gulf Coast of Texas. However, given that only one Black Rail was detected during all of our surveys, it would appear that continuing to survey for breeding Black Rails in the state is unnecessary and will be unproductive unless additional evidence is obtained suggesting the species may be regularly present at sites or specific habitats in the state.

Black Rails do regularly occur and presumably breed as close to Nebraska as central Kansas (Thompson et al. 2011) and southeastern Colorado (USFWS 2018), but they are only casual transient and accidental summer visitors in Missouri (Robbins 2018). Black Rails are considered accidental in Iowa (Kent and Dinsmore 1996) and Minnesota (Janssen 2019), and there is one record from southern Wyoming mentioned above. There are no accepted records for South Dakota (Tallman et al. 2002, USFWS 2018) or North Dakota (Stewart 1975; Sandra Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Dept, personnel communication). Thus, this is additional evidence Nebraska is primarily north and west of the regular breeding range of this species.

Black Rails generally occupy wetland areas of dense vegetation, such as spikerush, sedges and grasses, that are < 1 m tall (Eddleman et al. 2020, USFWS 2018). In central Kansas, southeastern Colorado and western Oklahoma, Black Rails regularly use sites with cattails (USFWS 2018). However, Black Rails are sensitive to water levels, generally preferring wetland areas with persistently moist soils to shallow water < 3 cm deep with scattered deeper pools (USFWS 2018, Atlantic Coast Joint Venture 2020, Eddleman et al. 2020). Most of Nebraska wetlands, such as those in the RWB, are dynamic and water levels are variable (LaGrange 2005). Many wetlands in the state, such as those associated with riverine systems and which are influenced by water tables, also have altered hydrology (LaGrange 2005). Thus, Nebraska may generally lack adequate suitable habitat for the species. Extensive wetland areas in the western Sandhills, such as sites within CLNWR where the species was reported in the 1990s, that possess short vegetation and relatively stable water levels seemingly appear to meet the basic habitat requirements for the species, but other variables may preclude Black Rails from occupying these habitats.

The USFWS has listed the Black Rail as threatened and included Nebraska as part of the species' geographic range, even though the species is not known to occur regularly in the state. This study provides additional support that the species does not regularly breed in the state and only occurs in Nebraska as a casual migrant or vagrant. Until there is evidence suggesting or indicating Black Rails occur anywhere in Nebraska regularly, it seems the probability of anyone or any entity impacting this

species, either negatively or positively, is next to nothing. Therefore, at this time, we do not see any justification for the Black Rail to be a conservation priority in Nebraska.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Support for this project was provided by the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, Nebraska State Wildlife Grant Program and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. We thank field technicians Cody McGregor, Eric Bruster and Derek Kane. We also thank several individuals for assistance gaining access to sites, including staff of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Wildlife Division, Management Section, Marlin French and Brian DeVries with Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Juancarlos Giese and Melvin Nenneman with Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, John Denton and Tim Horst with Ducks Unlimited, Jeff Drahota and Brad Krohn with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District, and Tom Malmstrom with the Eastern Saline Wetland Conservation Partnership. Mary Bomberger Brown contributed to this project in 2016-17, but passed away in August 2019 prior to its completion and preparation of this manuscript.

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A Brown-capped Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*)  
in Sarpy County, Nebraska

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Beginning 31 May 2021, Phil Swanson captured a series of videos and photos of an apparent family group of Black-capped Chickadees (BCCH). Five birds were seen together through 2 June, 2-4 through 6 June, and 2-3 through 9 June, during which all sightings included begging. Thereafter 1-2 birds per day were seen but without interactions between them.

One of the family group had a brown cap (Figures 1, 2), and was presumably a juvenile based on its propensity for begging for food and partial replacement of its greater coverts (Pyle 1997). This condition has been described as “rare” (Sibley 2011), “anomalous” (Pyle 1997), or “aberrant” (van Grouw 2006).



Fig 1. Photo of a brown-capped chickadee in Sarpy County, NE by Phil Swanson 29 May 2021.



Fig 2. The same brown-capped chickadee depicted in Fig 1, here accompanied by a black-capped individual, likely a brood mate. Photo taken in Sarpy County, NE by Phil Swanson 29 May 2021.

We were able to find only one other documented occurrence of a brown-capped BCCH, that of a bird coming to the Catherine Sandell feeders in Seneca County, NY during July 2004, initially thought to be a Boreal Chickadee (*P. hudsonica*) but later confirmed as a BCCH (Fig 3; Jay McGowan, <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/brown-headed%20chickadee.htm>).

McGowan cited two additional reports of chickadees with reduced black coloration in their crowns, but these were subsequently determined to have exhibited varying degrees of leucism, as suggested by their overall paler appearances than the Seneca County, NY bird, whose overall plumage matched that of a normally colored BCCH except for its brown cap.

Black and brown coloration in birds results from the relative levels of two melanin pigments, eumelanin, which is black, and pheomelanin, which is brown (Sibley 2011, Davis 2007, van Grouw 2006). Presence of eumelanin masks the pheomelanin effects, leading to black plumage, but reduced levels or absence of eumelanin allow expression of the brown pheomelanin pigment. This appears to be the case in the Sarpy County and Seneca County birds.

Absence of eumelanin, a condition described as aeumelanism, is an “abnormal” condition inherited as a sex-linked recessive trait. Van Grouw (2006) described this inherited trait as involving incomplete oxidation of eumelanin resulting

in black feathers turning dark brown and noted that “a brown mutant with two normally coloured parents is always a female.” For the brown-capped bird to be a male, it would have had to inherit two copies of the recessive acromelanistic gene, one from each parent, and his mother would also have had a brown cap. The fact that none of the other BCCHs in the group in Sarpy Co. had brown caps is strong evidence that the brown-capped bird was a female.



Fig. 3. Photo of a brown-capped chickadee in Seneca County, NY by Jay McGowan 19 July 2004.

One question remains, however: why in both the Sarpy and Seneca Co. BCCHs is the bib black, while the cap is brown? Acromelanism is an inherited condition involving temperature dependent deposition of pigment resulting in more melanin deposited in cooler areas of the body such as the crown than warmer ones such as the bib (Sibley 2011), but this is the opposite of what the Sarpy and Seneca Co. birds exhibit. Based on van Grouw (2006), who stated that incomplete oxidation of eumelanin resulted in brown feathers, it appears that differential rates of melanin oxidation may be occurring in developing cap and bib feathers. Although the brown cap is likely due to acromelanism, the cause of the difference in cap and bib coloration remains unknown.

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**2020 (32nd) REPORT OF THE NOU RECORDS COMMITTEE**

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The functions and methods of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (NOURC) are described in its bylaws (NOURC 2010). The committee's purpose is to provide a procedure for documenting unusual bird sightings and to establish a list of all documented birds for Nebraska. Species for which the NOURC seeks documentation (NOURC Review List) can be found at the NOU website [www.NOUbirds.org](http://www.NOUbirds.org).

Starting in 2020, the NOURC will deal mainly with those species deemed as Accidental on the "Official List of the Birds of Nebraska". Casual species and out-of-range species will continue to be summarized in the "Seasonal Reports" of the *Nebraska Bird Review* and will be evaluated by Nebraska eBird reviewers (if submitted on that platform).

All records mentioned here are available to interested persons at the NOU archives at the University of Nebraska State Museum (UNSM), Lincoln, NE. Interested parties should contact the current NOU Librarian, whose address can be found in the latest issue of the *Nebraska Bird Review* (NBR).

**NOURC Criteria for Accepted Records:**

In order for a record to be accepted, a minimum of six votes in favor is required with no more than one dissenting vote (NOURC 2010). Records in the following categories are classified as accepted:

I-S - a diagnostic, labeled specimen exists

I-P - diagnostic, labeled photographic evidence exists

I-R - a diagnostic, labeled recording exists

II - three or more independently written diagnostic documentations of the same bird exist

III - one or two independently written diagnostic documentations of the same bird exist

Each account of an accepted record includes a brief statement noting the species, class, date, location, and initial(s) of observers. This report summarizes all records accessioned in 2020, discusses any new additions to the state list, and reports any changes in firmness of data (i.e., placement in the above acceptance categories) of Nebraska birds. Additionally, the list reflects changes in frequency of occurrence, as determined by the NOU Records Committee, which reviewed records of bird occurrences in Nebraska for 2011 - 2020. Frequency of occurrence is indicated by the following terms (NOURC 2017):

Regular - acceptably reported in 9-10 of the past 10 years.

Casual - acceptably reported in 4-7 of the past 10 years.

Accidental - acceptably reported in 0-2 of the past 10 years.

Extirpated - not acceptably reported in the past 50 years.

Extinct - no longer found alive anywhere in the world.

The frequency of occurrence for any species that is acceptably reported in 3 or 8 of the last 10 years is discussed by the committee and placed in a category felt most appropriate by the committee.

With this report, the following changes are made to the “Official List of the Birds of Nebraska: 2017” (NOURC 2017).

### **Nebraska State List:**

The following includes all revisions made by the American Ornithological Society (Chesser et al. 2020) in 2020 including scientific name changes and taxonomic realignment that affect the current published “Official List of the Birds of Nebraska: 2017” (NOURC 2017, [www.NOUBirds.org](http://www.NOUBirds.org)). This report includes all accounts submitted during the 2020 calendar year covering 29 records with accession numbers 2258 – 2286.

### **2020 Additions/Deletions to the “Official List of the Birds of Nebraska”:**

Two new species were added in 2020.

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*)

1. A single bird was photographed (Class 1-P, TL) 26 April 2020 at the Morrill Sandpits, Scotts Bluff County. Accession # 2262.
2. The above bird was rediscovered and photographed (Class 1-P, KD) later in the afternoon. Accession # 2261.

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

1. A single bird was photographed (Class 1-P, SMc) 03 May 2020 at a bird bath in Barneston, Gage County. Accession # 2263.

With these additions the “Official List of the Birds of Nebraska” stands at **465** species.

**Changes Involving Nebraska Species Due to Taxonomic Revisions (2020):**

The Sixty-first Supplement to the American Ornithological Society’s Checklist of North American Birds (Chesser et al. 2020) effected the following changes to the “Official List” of Nebraska Birds.

This year, there were no lumps or splits affecting the Nebraska checklist. There are some changes in sequence involving the pheasant family – Phasianidae, the *Selasphorus* hummingbirds, the rail family, and the cormorants.

The linear sequence of Nebraska Phasianidae has changed to the following:

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)  
Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)  
Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)  
Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)  
Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*)  
Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*)  
Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)  
Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

The linear sequence of Nebraska hummingbirds in the genus *Selasphorus* has changed to the following:

Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*)  
Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)  
Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*)

The new sequence for the Nebraska members of the rail family will be:

Clapper Rail (*Rallus crepitans*)  
King Rail (*Rallus elegans*)  
Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*)  
Sora (*Porzana carolina*)

Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*)  
American Coot (*Fulica americana*)  
Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinicus*)  
Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)  
Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*)

The Cormorant family will now follow Anhingas and has a reshuffle in species order.

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)  
Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

### **NOURC Accepted Records (Received in 2020):**

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*)

1. Photographs (Class I-P, BK via MWi) were received of an adult bird that was shot 28 October 2020 at Clear Creek WMA, Keith County. Accession # 2278. This represents the second confirmed record for this species in Nebraska.

Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*)

1. Photographs (Class I-P, SL) were received of a dark morph bird observed 17 August 2020 on a sandbar in the Missouri River upstream from Ponca State Park, Dixon County. Accession # 2273.

Common Crane (*Grus grus*)

1. Photographs (Class I-P, KW) were received of a single bird found northwest of Lewellen, Garden Co., 12 March 2020. Accession # 2266.
2. Photographs (Class I-P, KW) of a 2019 sighting were received of a single bird found east of Lewellen, Garden Co., 09 April 2019. Accession # 2286.  
This species is considered casual in Nebraska, although the number of individuals represented is unknown.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

1. Photographs (Class I-P, MP via JGJ) were received of adult female that was found dead 11 November, 2020, north of Gothenburg, Dawson County. Accession # 2279.  
Of the multiple Nebraska *Fregata* records, this is only the second that has been identifiable to species.



*Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea)*

1. A first-winter bird was photographed (Class 1-P, MAB) above Gavins Pt. Dam, Cedar County Nebraska/Yankton County, South Dakota, 15 October 2020. Several days later this bird was joined by another bird (2<sup>nd</sup> winter/adult). These birds were seen by many observers in both Knox and Cedar Counties of Nebraska and Yankton County, South Dakota, although the only photograph of the bird actually in Nebraska appears to be the above record. Both birds continued at this location through 21 October 2020. Accession # 2276.

*Yellow-billed Loon (Gavia adamsii)*

A single bird found 18 November 2020 at Sutherland Reservoir, Lincoln County, was well documented.

1. Photographs (Class 1-P, SMI) by the initial observer. Accession # 2280.
2. Photographs (Class 1-P, JN) 18 November 2020. Accession # 2281.
3. Photographs (Class 1-P, MW) 18 November 2020. Accession # 2283.

*Harris's Hawk (Parabuteo unicinctus)*

1. A juvenile bird was photographed (Class 1-P, SH) 13 April 2020 in Bellevue, Sarpy County. The question arose if this bird may have been the Sarpy Co. Harris's Hawk (Accession # 2236) that was captured and then released in November 2019. Photos were sent to a Master Falconer (TB) who identified the 2019 bird as an adult and the 2020 bird as less than one-year old. Accession # 2260.

*Gray Flycatcher (Empidonax wrightii)*

1. A description (Class III, SMI) was received of a single bird observed 25 August 2020 along Old Stage Road in the Wildcat Hills, Scotts Bluff County. Accession # 2274.

*Worm-eating Warbler (Helmitheros vermivorum)*

1. A photograph (Class 1-P, DL) was received of a bird observed 18 May 2020 at Wilderness Park, Lancaster County. Accession # 2268.

*Prairie Warbler (Setophaga discolor)*

1. A singing male was photographed/recorded (Class 1-P, SMI) 05 June 2020 at Oliver Reservoir, Kimball County. Accession # 2270.

**NOURC Unaccepted Records:**

Records in the following categories are considered unaccepted (NOURC 2010):

IV - probably correct, but not beyond reasonable doubt.

V - a record with insufficient evidence to support the identification claimed.

VI - a probable released or escaped bird or mistaken identification.



Each account of an unaccepted record includes a brief statement noting the species, class, date, location, and reasons for the committee's non-acceptance of the record.

#### **NOURC Unaccepted Records (Received in 2020):**

##### Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Several committee members questioned the following records, due to the lack of detailed descriptions and features of the bird relating to possible wild origin.

1. A single bird observed 23 February 2020 near Prairie View Gardens, Kearney, Buffalo County. Class VI - Accession # 2258
2. An adult bird was photographed 13 March 2020 at North Park Lake, Holdrege, Phelps County. Class VI - Accession # 2259.

##### Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*)

1. Photographs of a single bird taken 18 November 2020 at Sutherland Reservoir, Lincoln County, were deemed inconclusive to species identification. Class IV - Accession # 2282.
2. A description of a bird observed 20 November 2020 at Sutherland Reservoir, Lincoln County, was lacking in detail for approval. Class IV - Accession # 2284.

##### Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*)

1. A report of a bird observed 06 December 2020 on Toadstool Road, north of Crawford, Dawes County, was very suggestive of the species, although lacked in detail for approval. Class IV - Accession # 2285.

##### Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

1. A description of a bird observed 11 October 2019 at Zorinsky Lake, Douglas County, lacked conclusive details for acceptance. Class V - Accession # 2277.

##### Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

1. A report of bird seen 13 May 2020 along I-80 near Lexington, Dawson County, was lacking in detail for acceptance. Class V - Accession # 2265.
2. A report of a bird observed 22 May 2020 just south of Mullen, Hooker County, was deemed inconclusive as to species identification. Class V - Accession # 2269.

##### Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

1. A report of a bird observed 20 June 2020 at Cedar View Campground, Lake McConaughy, Keith County, lacked detail for approval. Class V - Accession # 2272.

##### Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*)

1. A description of a single bird seen 02 October 2020 at Swanson Reservoir, Hitchcock County, was suggestive of the species but lacked in detail for acceptance. Class IV - Accession # 2275.

**Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*)**

1. A report of a bird observed 09 May 2020 at Bellevue, Sarpy County, lacked detail for approval. Class V - Accession # 2264.

**Virginia's Warbler (*Leiothlypis virginiae*)**

1. A report of a bird heard singing 05 June 2020 in Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff County, was deemed inconclusive as to species identification. Class IV – Accession # 2271.

**Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*)**

1. A report of a bird observed 18 May 2020 at Wilderness Park, Lancaster County, was very suggestive of the species, although lacked in detail for approval. Class IV -Accession # 2267.

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The 2020 NOURC would like to thank the following observers who contributed records included in this report:

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**2020 NOURC Members:**

Mark A. Brogie (chair), Joe Gubanyi, Bill Huser, Joel G. Jorgensen, Sam Manning, Justin Rink, W. Ross Silcock, and Michael Willison.

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## Black-throated Gray Warbler in Knox County, Nebraska

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The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (NOURC) considers Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Setophaga nigrescens*) to be Accidental in Nebraska (NOURC 2017). Silcock and Jorgensen (2020) list a total of seven accepted records with only two occurring in fall: an adult male at the Hyannis Cemetery, Grant Co., 01 Sep 2002 (Brogie 2003) and a female at Oliver Reservoir, Kimball Co., 07 Sep 2001 (Silcock 2001).

The following documents the third Nebraska fall record for Black-throated Gray Warbler, the third record east of the Nebraska Panhandle, the first for northeast Nebraska, and the only NOURC accepted record (#2338) in the last decade.

On the morning of 14 September 2021 while birding along 876 Road/Creek Road (0.9 mile west of its intersection with 521 Avenue) I encountered a small feeding group of Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*). It is well known that migrating small songbirds are often found associating with chickadee flocks. One of the first birds I noted was above me in a honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) that then flew directly across the road into a Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*). I instantly recognized the species as a Black-throated Gray Warbler. It had a very white breast with black side streaking, grayish back with white wing bars, dark cap, black and white face with distinct horizontal wide black stripe running through the eye. Knowing the rare status of this species in Nebraska, I attempted to photograph the bird. I could not focus on the bird before it flew into the deeper wooded area south of the road. I searched the area for over an hour when once again I heard chickadees vocalizing to the west and north of the road. I walked about 50 yards west and then played the Sibley Birds audio of Black-throated Gray Warbler calls. I noticed movement in a small Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) along the fence line and the warbler appeared near the top of the tree. I was able to get some distant but identifiable photos of the bird (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S94652182>). The bird then disappeared down into the cedar and was not seen again.

Looking at the photographs, the white throat and small black chest line indicates that the bird was either a female or first-year male. The characteristic yellow spot in front of the eye is barely discernable in one photograph.

Ed M. Brogie and I spent several hours the next morning searching for the bird without success.

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