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## Three New State Bird Species and Updates on Other Arkansas Avian Records

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This paper initially concerns 3 new bird species discovered in Arkansas that previously had not been found in the state. Secondly, the paper clarifies an ambiguity with regard to the published subspecies identification for the lone record of the Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) in Arkansas. A third objective is to address several published errors concerning birds in the state, and finally the paper concludes with a disclosure relating to nesting Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) in Arkansas. Adding these 3 new birds to the total of 402 species reported in James et al. (2007) now yields a grand total of 405 bird species that have been found in Arkansas.

The first of the 3 new species for the state was a Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) in adult breeding plumage found at the Craig State Fish Hatchery at Centerton in Benton County on 2 August 2008 by Mike Mlodinow and Jacque Brown, and later viewed by others. Many photographs were obtained. It stayed there for a week. (This record received AAS number 1004, which refers to the Documentation Form accepted by the Bird Records Committee of the Arkansas Audubon Society.) A few days before this sighting, in late July, Hurricane Dolly struck southern Texas and northern Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico. High winds from this storm blew through northwestern Arkansas the night of 30-31 July. The area where the hurricane made landfall from the Gulf is a prime region for nesting Least Grebes. Those winds could have blown this new bird to Arkansas.

The second new bird for Arkansas (AAS 1002) was a Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) found just north of Maysville, Benton County, on 25 December 2007 by Mike Mlodinow and Joe Neal. This bird was a juvenile individual in its very characteristic brownish plumage. This feature especially separates it from the other species of North American shrike. This shrike was seen a second time by others on 30 December and photographed.

A Gull-billed Tern (AAS 1011) in adult breeding plumage was the third new species. It was discovered on 26 April 2009 by Dick and Sarah Baxter on the

Baxter farm on Camp Nine Road, ~7.4 miles northeast of McGehee, Desha Co. The sighting was documented by Dan Scheiman. Images of the bird obtained by Charles Mills were submitted with Scheiman's documentation. Several competent observers saw the bird.

The only Fork-tailed Flycatcher ever reported in Arkansas, was found on 14 January 1995 ~3.5 km northwest of Pontoon, Yell County, and was originally described by Shepherd and Smith (1996). Photographs of the bird showed details consistent with the subspecies *T. s. savana* according to J. Van Remsen and his associates at the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University. This record was described again by James et al. (2007). This time Remsen and associates, when consulted, assigned the bird to the subspecies *T. s. monachus*. Using a different mix of photographs, those obtained by Charles Mills and La Donna Nichols, this contradiction was revisited by Remsen and associates. They found that the paleness of the back and whiteness of the collar definitely categorized the bird with the northern subspecies *T. s. monachus*. This diagnosis agrees with that stated in James et al. (2007). Therefore, the hypothesis in that paper (James et al. 2007) describing how the bird may have wandered into Arkansas is reasonable. In the photographs the dark blackness of the bird's crown shows it is an adult and the extreme length of the tail feathers indicates male. (James et al. [2007] stated the location of the bird was "5 miles west of Pontoon" along Highway 154. The Bird Records Database on the web site of the Arkansas Audubon Society gives its location as "approximately 1 mile northwest of Pontoon" along Highway 154. These distances vary from the ~3.5 km northwest of Pontoon stated in Shepherd and Smith [1996].)

Two errors exist in James et al (2007) that we correct below. In the next to last line of the first paragraph of the Discussion section, the Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) is erroneously named (page 76). (The Gray Jay was not mentioned in the body of the paper dealing with new birds found in Arkansas.

### Three New State Bird Species and Updates on Other Arkansas Avian Records

This is a species that has never been reported in the state.) The bird that should have been named was the Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*), which was described in the paper as a newly found bird species in Arkansas. The other error in James et al. (2007) is in the last line of the first paragraph, right column of page 75. The AAS No. 890 should correctly read AAS No. 980.

The final error to report occurred in James et al. (1994) pertains to the only record of a Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) in Arkansas. In that paper the loon was reported to have been discovered on 19 November 1991. That was incorrect. It was in fact discovered 2 days earlier on 17 November 1991 and photographed on 19 November 1991.

The circumstances concerning nesting Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) in Arkansas are more complicated than the above straightforward bird records additions, corrections, and updates. Howell (1911) suggested that Peregrine Falcons were locally common in the Mississippi Valley during the Nineteenth Century, reportedly nesting mostly on cliffs, but occasionally in cavities of tall trees in the bottomlands. Widmann (1907) discussed breeding peregrines in the early and middle part of that century in Missouri, but suggested that they were extirpated as a breeding species by 1900, although the last probable nesting activity in Missouri was 1912 (Robbins and Esterla 1992). Peregrines were also nesting in trees in the mid-1870s along the Neosho River in southeastern Kansas (Goss 1878). Citing observations in the spring of 1888 by B. T. Gault, Bendire (1892) stated that peregrines nested on the sandstone bluffs along the Little Red River in Cleburne County, Arkansas. Gault apparently queried Widmann about that observation and was told that peregrines nested quite abundantly on cliffs and ledges just south of St. Louis at that time (Bendire 1892). This remains the only sight report of nesting Peregrine Falcons in Arkansas.

Benjamin True Gault (1858-1942) lived most of his life in Glen Ellyn, a suburb of Chicago, and was considered an authority on the birds of Illinois (Clare 1948). In 1883, he traveled through southern California (Gault 1885, Bendire 1892), and he joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1885 (Clare 1948). It appears that he was traveling through eastern Arkansas and northeastern Texas in spring and summer of 1888. In addition to his peregrine sightings in spring of 1888, he reported that Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) were nesting in holes in the sandstone cliffs of the Little Red River (Bendire 1892). In May of 1888, he reported Ospreys nesting along the White

River in Arkansas, just south of the Missouri border (Widmann 1907). He also reported breeding Black-billed Cuckoos (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*), Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*), and Scarlet Tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*) in 1888 from what is Heber Springs today (Widmann 1907). By late June and early July, he was in northeastern Texas, west of Texarkana. (Bendire [1892] referred to information on Mississippi Kites [*Ictinia mississippiensis*] from "Mr. B. G. Gault," by which we assume he meant B.T. Gault.) By June of 1889, Gault was back in Illinois (Gault 1889). Gault and Widmann corresponded often (e.g., Gault 1896) and Gault made collecting trips to Missouri in 1892 and 1894 (Widmann 1907). Given his reputation among peers and his career as a field ornithologist, we find no reason to question his report of nesting Peregrine Falcons in the 1880s in Arkansas. Although much of the Little Red River was flooded by the construction of the Greer's Ferry Reservoir in 1962, large sandstone cliffs still exist there (e.g. on Sugarloaf Mountain), which are very typical of classic peregrine nesting sites.

The same cannot be said for heretofore unknown clutches of Peregrine Falcon eggs reportedly collected in Arkansas by E. F. Pope in the early 1920s. In his examination of all egg collections for Peregrine Falcon clutches, Lloyd Kiff (personal communication) discovered two clutches reportedly from Arkansas. The first is set no. 14,946 in the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago): A set of 4 fresh eggs collected by E. F. Pope at "Newton, Arkansas," on 8 May 1922 from a nest in Hemmed-In Hollow. Pope stated that the nest was on a ledge 12.1 m down from the top of an 85 m cliff and that the adults were "noisy and solicitous." He continued "Believe this to be a record for these eggs for Arkansas." The Field Museum acquired these eggs in 1941 as part of the Knickerbocker egg collection (David Willard, personal communication). The second is set no. 20,001 in the San Bernardino County Museum (California), which is another set of 4 fresh eggs collected by E. F. Pope from Newton County, Arkansas, this time on 2 May 1923, again from a nest described as from "Hemmed-In Hollow." The description of the nest site is the same as in 1922.

E. F. Pope (1870-1952) collected eggs from the mid-1880s through the late 1920s and specialized on raptors, as their nests were difficult to find and access and thus their eggs fetched more money (Casto 2008). Starting in 1922, he was employed by the United States Biological Survey in the Predatory Animal Control Division in Albuquerque, New Mexico (Hawthorne et

**D.A. James, K.G. Smith, J.C. Neal, W.M. Shepherd and C. Mills**

al. 1999). His territory included Arkansas and Oklahoma, but he apparently did not have much time for collecting eggs. Casto (2008) reported that the peregrine clutch from Arkansas in 1922 was the only clutch that Pope collected that year, that he did not collect any clutches in 1923, and all future clutches collected by Pope were from New Mexico. Pope stopped collecting in 1929. The 2 peregrine clutches apparently were the only eggs ever reported by Pope from Arkansas.

Hemmed-In Hollow is one of the highest waterfalls between the Rockies and the Appalachians, with cliffs over 60 m tall. It probably would have been suitable nesting habitat for peregrines. However, it was quite remote in the early 1920s, in an area inhabited by only a small isolated community that had little contact with the outside world (Blevins 2002:119-121). How Pope would have discovered peregrines nesting in Hemmed-In Hollow remains a mystery, but the existence of Hemmed-In Hollow (or Hemmed-In Holler) was made popular by writers who “discovered” the Ozarks after World War I (Blevins 2002:119).

We suggest that it is inconceivable that Wheeler (1924) and Baerg (1931) were unaware of Pope’s records or his collecting activities in the state. Wheeler was a premier egg collector and was actively trying to collect new nesting species for the state in the early 1920s (e.g., Wheeler 1922). There are also 4 clutches of hawk eggs collected by Pope in Texas between 1912 and 1918 in Wheeler’s egg collection at the University of Arkansas Museum. They both served on A Committee of Twenty-five Prominent American Oologists (1922), which set standard prices for bird eggs in 1922, from 1919 to 1921. Wheeler was secretary of the Committee, so the two were acquainted and in contact with each other prior to 1922. Wheeler (1924) mentioned the Peregrine Falcon in his book to “provoke inquiry as to its occurrence in recent years,” but he believed the species to be “extinct” (=extirpated) in the state.

Equally suspicious is Pope’s remarks on the egg record card from 1923: “Remains of Least Bitterns, robins, jays and other birds about the nest.” Least Bitterns (*Ixobrychus exilis*) nest locally in the Arkansas River Valley in Arkansas and have never been recorded from Newton County (James and Neal 1986). Several of Pope’s other localities and species identifications have been questioned (reviewed in Casto 2008), leading Kiff (personal communication) to believe that Pope occasionally was an “egg faker” misrepresenting the actual locality of a clutch. The facts suggest that Pope was collecting eggs in New

Mexico in the 1920s and that Wheeler and Baerg knew nothing of his work in Arkansas. We believe that it was unlikely that Pope actually collected 2 clutches of Peregrine Falcon eggs in Arkansas respectively in 1922 and 1923.

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**Three New State Bird Species and Updates on Other Arkansas Avian Records**

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