

southern great plains region



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This was another normal year, normal for the Plains being full of unpredictability. Most areas received reasonable moisture, so good news generally continued. However, the exception—southwestern Oklahoma—was at the extreme with only about 1.5 inches of rain since the end of March, the driest in over 60 years. The rest of Oklahoma, except the normally dry Panhandle, became quite dry as the season progressed, and the heat was generally widespread, with 100+ degree F. temperatures the norm. This made for some uncomfortable birding and hiking weather. The summer had an unusual number of late migrant warblers found in the beginning of June, a continuation of the protracted migration noted in late May. Some lingering waterfowl and shorebirds may simply have become vagrant, but with a much larger number of difficult-to-interpret mid-summer records for shorebirds than normal. For example, who would expect to see a flock of Snow Geese or Black-bellied Plovers and Whimbrel in the Region during mid-June? Among possible patterns in early autumn shorebirds, Lesser Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwits, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers seemed more visible at the front end of their migration window (when adults pass through); Western Sandpipers

and Long-billed Dowitchers were much less in evidence than might be expected.

This was also a good year for White Ibises in Oklahoma, but not elsewhere. Herons made only a modest showing in Nebraska, as did landbirds in general. Perhaps the heat was a factor in detecting them, but among the “normalcy” were a Green Violet-ear, Cave Swallow, and Pyrrhuloxia, not to mention the seasonally geographic rarities I won’t mention until their place in the following account. We should be so lucky every summer.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (*Cheyenne Bottoms, Barton Co., KS*); Fontenelle Forest (*Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co., NE*); Funk Lagoon (*Funk Lagoon, Phelps Co., NE*); McConaughy (*L. McConaughy, Keith Co., NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R. Stafford Co., KS*); Sooner Lake (*Sooner Lake, Noble/Pawnee Cos., OK*).

LOONS TO WATERFOWL

A **Pacific Loon** in alternate plumage June 28–July 6 at *Geary, KS* (CO, m.ob.) provided about the 3rd summer record for the Region. Up to three Com. Loons were at *L. Ogallala/Keystone L., Keith, NE*, June 10 & 12 (BP, LP, JS). Other Commons were at *Geary, KS*, June 30–July 5 (GS, m.ob.); *Buffalo, NE*, July 7–12 (LR, RH, m.ob.); and at *Sooner Lake* for the season (JDo, JWA, m.ob.). Eight Eared Grebes in courtship displays in *Seward, KS*, June 4 (MR) may represent a breeding outpost for this species. Single W. Grebes were observed at *Cheyenne Bottoms* June 4–21 (MR, BP), and *Douglas, KS*, June 29–July 2 (AS). A single Clark’s Grebe was at *Funk Lagoon* June 14–21 (LR, RH); three adults, one with two young on its back, were found in *Sheridan, NE*, June 12 (WRS, JS), only the 3rd report of breeding in Nebraska away from *McConaughy*. One Clark’s in *Cimarron, OK*, June 13 was exceptional (JSt). Least Bitterns were in *Sarpy, NE*, June 17–28 (JS, BP, LP) and at *Funk Lagoon* June 12–24 (LR, RH et al.); they appear to be absent from breeding locations in c. Oklahoma (JGN, JAG). Vagrant Great Egrets began appearing in Nebraska by the end of June; the Nebraska high count was 16 in *Otoe*

June 29 (BP, LP). At least eight Little Blue Herons were found in *Lancaster, NE*, June 11–July 18 (JS et al.). Black-crowned Night-Heron numbers at *Funk Lagoon* grew to 100 by July 12 (MU, JK, ZU). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons made a better-than-normal showing in Nebraska. White Ibises made an impressive showing in Oklahoma. In *McCurtain*, 70 (two adults and 68 immatures) were in a heron rookery June 27 (BH, PH), with three immatures and an adult at 2 other locations in *McCurtain* July 8 & 9 (BH). Building since May, up to six were counted in *Oklahoma* and *Canadian, OK*, through July (VA, m.ob.)

The 23 Snow Geese at *Funk Lagoon* June 7 (LR, RH) and two July 13 (LR, RH) seemed exceptional; other stragglers were also noted at *Dakota, NE*, June 9 (BFH), and *Sooner Lake* June 12 (JWA). Two ad Trumpeter Swans with four cygnets were in *Grant, NE*, June 12 (JS, WRS). A Mottled Duck at *Quivira* June 25 (BP) was the token observation for this season. Cinnamon Teal pairs were seen in *Buffalo, NE*, June 1 (LR, RH) and at *Quivira* June 20 (BP, SC). Singles were in *Dawes, NE*, June 13 (WRS, JS), and at *Funk Lagoon* July 4 (LR, RH). Two Gadwall and an Am. Wigeon summered at *Sooner Lake* (JWA). Seven Gadwall and two Am. Wigeon were noted June 11 in *Blaine, OK* (JSt). Also s. of normal were an injured male Canvasback, and a basic-plumage Lesser Scaup in *Comanche, OK*, through the period (JAG). There were 2 other June Lesser Scaup in Oklahoma. A Ring-necked Duck was in *Blaine, OK*, June 11 (JSt). More unusual was a male Bufflehead summering at *Sooner Lake* (JWA, JDo). Two male Com. Mergansers were at *Harlan, NE*, July 25 (GH, WH). A first summering record of Red-breasted Merganser for Oklahoma was a male documented at *Sooner Lake* June 12–July 4 (JWA). Also noteworthy there was a Hooded Merganser June 19 (JWA).

RAPTORS TO RAILS

Mississippi Kites continue at *Ogallala, Keith, NE*, (BP, LP, JS). Quite far afield was one in *Scotts Bluff, NE*, May 30–June 3 (SK, *vide* AK). A pair of Mississippi Kites nested

in *Saline*, KS (DW). A rare summering Sharp-shinned Hawk was observed in *Franklin*, NE, July 3 (LR, RH). Peregrine Falcons provided encouraging news. The pair at the Woodmen Tower in Omaha, NE, raised five (KP). One was observed June 4 in *Douglas*, KS (DK), and a dark immature was noted in *Washita*, OK, July 2 (JAG). The origin of two juveniles at Ft. Sill, *Comanche*, OK, July 9–10 (JAG) might have indicated nesting in Oklahoma, although their dispersal potential led expert Steve Sherrod to point to the healthy New Mexico populations as the source.

A Black Rail in *Jefferson*, KS (GK, DL), was away from known sites. Two ad. Virginia Rails with four chicks at Funk Lagoon July 4 (LR, RH) provided one of few breeding records for the Region. Common Moorhens are widely dispersed. Breeding was recorded in *Stafford*, KS (BP, SC), and at *Sarpy*, NE (JS). The latter is only the 6th breeding record for Nebraska since 1957 (*vide* WRS, JGJ).

SHOREBIRDS TO TERNS

Among shorebirds, there was an interesting array of late spring migrants, early fall migrants, and uncertainties. Slow-movers were a Black-bellied Plover in *Otoe*, NE, June 5 (LF,CF); 13 in *Stafford*, KS, June 6 (MR); and one June 12 at Sooner Lake (JWA). Probably ahead of schedule was a Semipalmated Plover July 5 in *Tulsa* (JL). At least 11 nests of Piping Plovers were protected by enclosures at McConaughy (RK, *vide* SJD). An ad. Piping attended three nearly fledged young in *Saunders*, NE, July 30 (KP). At least six large Piping Plover chicks with adults were noted at several locations along the Kansas R. in *Wabauusee* and *Pottowatomie*, KS (*vide* LM). Migrant Pippings included one early in *Tulsa* July 4, and singles by July 25 at Quivira (MM, MC) and July 27 in *Oklahoma* (JGN, DN). Mountain Plovers continue in *Kimball*, NE (BP, LP). An ad. Mt. Plover with chicks was seen in *Morton*, KS, June 5 (MR). Breeding Black-necked Stilts and chicks continue at more locations in *Sheridan*, NE (BP, LP), with others in *Hall*, NE, during late June (GL, *vide* TL). Isolated vagrants were noted June 6 in *Kingfisher*, OK, and June 13 in *Blaine*, OK (JSt), with several June 13 in *Tillman*, OK (*vide* NK). Were two Greater Yellowlegs in *Blaine*, OK, June 12 (JAG), and two in *Dawes*, NE, June 13 (JS, WRS) fall migrants or summer vagrants? Apparently, but not certainly, part of an early fall migration were five Lesser Yellowlegs in mid-June in Oklahoma, and two at Funk

Lagoon June 22 (LR, RH), with 30 there by June 29 (LR, RH). Solitary Sandpipers appeared by July 5 in *Tulsa* (JL). Difficult to assess were the status of seven Willets at 3 locations in Kansas June 1–16 (*vide* LM). Two Marbled Godwits at Funk Lagoon June 21 (LR, RH) were the first of more-than-normal numbers. Upland Sandpipers, already in the night air over *Cleveland*, OK, June 28 (JAG), had a major movement July 22–23 over *Pawnee* (SS) and *Russell*, KS (MR), with hundreds appearing in local fields the following mornings. Perhaps illustrating the shorebird idiosyncrasies of the season was the collection at Quivira during mid-June. These included two **Whimbrel** June 14 (SP), two–five Ruddy Turnstones June 16 & 21 (DG, MR, CS, BP), 2500 White-rumped Sandpipers June 16 (MR), six Stilt Sandpipers June 16 (MR), and three Long-billed Dowitchers June 20 (BP). Also among the tardy were eight total Semipalmated Sandpipers at 2 locations in *Lancaster*, NE, June 7 (LE). The five Whimbrel July 16 in *Osage*, OK (MK, JL), were among very few fall migration records for the Region. Buff-breasted Sandpipers, with a narrow window of adult migration in late July and early August, numbered seven in *Sedgwick*, KS, July 19 (JB, DK), and two in *Sarpy* July 22 (BP, LP), the latter the 2nd earliest fall migrants in Nebraska (*vide* WRS, JGJ). Seventeen Buff-breasteds were in *Cass*, NE, July 29 (KP, JD). Ahead of schedule was a Red-necked Phalarope in *Cass* July 30–31 (GW, BP, LP). Less certain was the status of two Wilson's Phalaropes in *Cimarron* and *Texas*, OK, June 12 & 14 (JSt).

With less than a decent showing of Laughing Gulls in recent years, this season was better, including a 2nd-summer individual at Keystone L., *Keith*, NE, June 14 (JS, WRS), five in Kansas June 4–July 25; and July 25–26 in *Tulsa* (BC et al.). The 95 Franklin's Gulls June 16 in *Douglas*, KS (LM), were an exceptional count. Caspian Terns lingered to June 4 at *Lancaster*, NE (LE); at least June 16 in *Douglas*, KS (LM); with others in *Dawes*, NE, June 13 (JS, WRS); and *Harlan*, NE, June 27 and July 3 (GH, WH). Always a surprise in June were two Com. Terns in *Keith*, NE, June 14 (WRS, JS).

DOVES TO THRUSHES

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to spread and establish themselves as local breeders. As many as seven birds were present in Kearney, NE, including four adults and two young; two of the adults were

probably birds fledged there May 19 (RN, *vide* LR, RH, m.ob.). A single bird was seen in *Nuckolls*, NE, July 11 (DCE), now the 3rd location for Nebraska (*vide* WRS, JGJ). Others were in *Cimarron*, OK, June 12 (JSt), and *Edwards*, KS, July 20 (GP). **White-winged Doves** continue their recent dispersal with a single in Kearney, NE (RN, *vide* LR, RH, GL, *vide* CNC, m.ob.), the 3rd documented for Nebraska. Others appeared June 7–9 in *Clark*, KS (GP), and June 1–21 in *Sedgwick*, KS (G&PT). Short-eared Owls were detected in *Texas*, OK, July 16 (JB). Among the easternmost Burrowing Owls was one in *Phelps*, NE, June 21 (LR, RH). A Com. Poorwill nest was located in *Comanche*, OK, containing 2 eggs June 25, and one egg and one young July 10 (JAG); another in *Dawes*, NE, had 2 eggs June 13 (WM). At the w. extent of its Nebraska range was a Whip-poor-will in *Saunders*, NE, June 30 (DP, JP). Only the 2nd for the Region in almost as many years was the **Green Violet-ear** in *Comanche*, OK, through July 13 (K&SM, m.ob.). A Broad-tailed Hummingbird graced a feeder June 3–5 in *Finney*, KS (TS). Adult male and female Rufous Hummingbirds were in *Delaware*, OK, July 12 (EW, BG).

The last reported Olive-sided Flycatcher was in *Douglas*, NE, June 12 (BP, LP). A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was noted June 6 in *Douglas*, KS (PW). Acadian Flycatchers were reported as far north as *Thurston*, NE, June 13 (BFH). A probable migrant Alder Flycatcher was recorded June 10 in *Dickinson*, KS (JH, DM). Fall migrant Least Flycatchers appeared as early as July 14 in *Douglas*, KS (MRo). Cordilleran Flycatchers have been seen in a larger area in *Sioux*, NE, since about 1996, with 5 pairs this season June 7 & 8 (RB). Ash-throated Flycatchers were observed nesting in *Morton*, KS, June 5 (MR), with a single in *Texas*, OK, July 4 (DR). The Black-capped Vireos in the Wichita Mts., OK, must have done well in 1997, as 325 territories were mapped in 1998 (JAG, RW), about 280 in the same areas where 195 were plotted in 1997. Plumbeous Vireos bred in the Pine Ridge of Nebraska, with reports from Sowbelly and Monroe canyons, *Sioux*, June 13–July 10 (JS). Tree Swallows produced 2 nestlings in *McCurtain*, OK, by early June (BH, PH, FH), with nesting also in *Osage*, OK (JC, PS), and *Delaware*, OK (VS). Charles Brown et al. continue to net the occasional juv. **Cave Swallow** at Keystone L.; the 3rd Nebraska, as well as Regional, record was banded July 1. Brown has suggested (*Nebraska Bird Review* 60:36) that these



Scattered breeding pairs of Tree Swallows are appearing south of traditional range limits in the Great Plains in recent years. This adult and advanced juvenile provide proof of successful nesting in northeastern Oklahoma at Skiatook Lake, Osage County, on June 13, 1998.

Photograph/Patricia L. Seibert

juveniles are hatched in Texas during March and fly N with migrant Cliff Swallows.

A Red-breasted Nuthatch (female or immature) noted July 5 & 17 in *Cleveland*, OK (JAG), was a surprise. The most westerly Sedge Wrens were six in *Buffalo*, NE, through the period (LR, RH). Blue-gray Gnatcatchers appear to be expanding in the Nebraska Panhandle with several birds in *Scotts Bluff*, NE, during June (JS, WRS). A Swainson's Thrush lingered until June 12 in *Douglas*, KS (RA).

WARBLERS TO FINCHES

Spring warbler migration extended into June. An Orange-crowned Warbler was noted June 7 at Funk Lagoon (LR, RH). Among other late migrants were a Nashville Warbler at *Sarpy*, NE, June 6 (JWH); Chestnut-sided to June 9 in *Douglas*, KS (RA); Magnolia in *Sedgwick*, KS, June 4 (JN); Black-throated Green June 4 in *Sedgwick* (JN); Blackpoll Warbler in *Sarpy*, NE June 21 (JWH); Blackburnian in *Harvey*, KS, June 6 (PJ); Mourning at Fontenelle Forest (BP, LP) and *Harvey*, KS (PJ), June 6; Wilson's at Fontenelle Forest June 7 (LR, RH); and Canada Warbler June 4 in *Stevens*, KS (MR). The Williams Center Green in downtown Tulsa attracted 6 species of warblers June 2-7, including a

Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Mourning, and Canada warblers, Am. Redstart, Ovenbird, along with a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (JWA). The northernmost N. Parula was in *Thurston*, NE, June 13 (BFH), while another was singing rather far west in *Cherry*, NE, July 4 (NR).

Atlasers Rintoul, and Tom and Sara Shane happened upon a **Pyrrhuloxia** in *Texas*, OK, July 4. Cassin's Sparrows were much in evidence in *Dundy*, NE, where 12 were noted on a BBS route June 12 (JS, WRS). Other Cassin's were e. to *Arthur*, NE, June 11 (BP, LP); *Barber*, KS (PJ, JNi); and in *Comanche*, OK, during June (JAG). Nesting Bachman's Sparrows were found June 25 in *Osage*, OK (JC), a n.w. range extension. Three Rufous-crowned Sparrows were in *Comanche*, KS, July 26 (PJ, JNi). Among better news has been Henslow's Sparrows. Almost unheard of before 1980, the Flint and Osage Hills populations in Kansas and Oklahoma appear to be doing well, with small groups appearing in *Seward*, NE (BP, LP), and Sooner Lake (JDo). An outlier breeding group of Song Sparrows was noted July 11-12 in *Reno*, KS (PJ, JB). Swamp Sparrows continue an outlier cluster in *Phelps*, NE (JS, WRS, MU).

A Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a feeder in *Dawes*, NE, June 20 provided a rare find (RL). The westerly summering Rose-breasted continued in *Buffalo*, NE, with up to four, including a juvenile, July 14 (LR, RH), along with a yearling Black-headed Grosbeak (LR, RH). Great-tailed Grackles have established a stronghold at Funk Lagoon with at least 80 there June 23 (GH, WH). Most wetlands in s.e. Nebraska now attract summering birds (*vide* WRS, JGJ). At the w. edge of the summer range for Baltimore Orioles were two at a nest in *Garden*, NE, June 6 (AK).

A Pine Siskin in *Tulsa* July 31 (BC) was a surprise. Also unexpected was a subadult male Red Crossbill in *Harlan*, NE, July 1 (GH, WH). A large mixed-age flock of Red Crossbills noted at feeders in *Scotts Bluff*, NE, during spring persisted to at least June 13, when as many as 50 were present (JS, WRS).

Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):

KANSAS: Robert Antonio, James Barnes, Sherry Chapman, Mark Corder, Dan Gish, Jerry Horak, Pete Janzen, Dan Kilby (DKi), Dan Kluza, Glen Koontz, Dan LaShelle, Mick McHugh, **Lloyd Moore**, Dan Mulhern, Jim Nickel (JNi), John Northrup, Chuck Otte, Jaye Otte, Brandon Percival (BPc), Sebastian Patti, Galen Pittman, Mike

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 428.