

RECENT BIRD RECORDS FROM WESTERN MONTANA

By ROBERT S. HOFFMANN, RALPH L. HAND and PHILIP L. WRIGHT

Since the publication of Saunders' "A Distributional List of the Birds of Montana" (Pac. Coast Avif. No. 14, 1921), contributions to distributional knowledge of Montana birds have appeared only in the form of notes or regional lists and new information is still being gathered. It therefore seems desirable to publish the following records from western Montana. Unless otherwise noted, all specimens collected are in the Montana State University Zoological Museum. All sight records reported were made by one or more of the authors.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos. White Pelican. The occurrence of this species west of the Continental Divide does not appear to be on record. On May 18, 1957, Hoffmann saw 10 pelicans flying high above Brown's Lake, Powell County, and the next day they were observed on the lake throughout the morning. Several bore prominent bill crests.

Phalacrocorax auritus. Double-crested Cormorant. An immature specimen was obtained near Kalispell, Flathead County, by Louis Palmer on January 1, 1952, and was presented to the Zoological Museum. Presumably the bird had been injured, but it was in good flesh when received. This is the first record of the species west of the Continental Divide, although it is a summer resident in the eastern part of the state.

Olor buccinator. Trumpeter Swan. Mackay (Condor, 59, 1957:339) has recently established that movement of Trumpeter Swans occurs between the Red Rock Lakes area in Montana and the Peace River District of Alberta. In the light of this migration, the following records are of interest. On October 31, 1953, Hand saw a flock of approximately 30 swans flying in a southeastern direction over Missoula, Missoula County. The call notes were much louder and entirely different from those of the Whistling Swan, with which he is very familiar. Then, in 1957, a flock of three to four swans was present from the end of March until about April 14 on a pond near Florence, Ravalli County (Hoffmann and Wright). None possessed a yellow bill spot, but neither were they heard to call, and their identity as Trumpeters is not certain. The landowners reported that "trumpeter type" swans had visited the pond every spring for at least the last ten years.

Anser albifrons. White-fronted Goose. There appear to be no records of this species from Montana west of the Continental Divide. The head, feet and wings of an immature specimen that had been shot by Clarence Brown near Frenchtown, Missoula County, on October 10, 1954, were brought to Hand. It was identified as this species by Lowell Adams of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Bucephala islandica. Barrow Golden-eye. This species, although formerly considered rare in Montana (Saunders, Pac. Coast Avif. No. 14, 1921:38), is a fairly common migrant at Brown's Lake, Powell County. On May 13, 1956, the male of a pair, and on May 18, 1957, the female of a pair, were collected; both are adult specimens. On this latter date the species was quite common on the open water on the lake, mostly in pairs, but no Common Golden-eyes (*B. clangula*) were seen. Wright's records for the species include a female with a widely scattered brood at Howe Lake, Glacier National Park, Flathead County, on June 29, 1949, and four in female plumage seen at Red Meadow Lake, Flathead County, on July 5, 1949. The latter appeared not to be breeding. Silloway (Univ. Mont. Bull., Biol. Ser., no. 1, 1901:39) lists as Common Golden-eyes several specimens taken on Sin-yale-amin Lake (now St. Mary's Lake), Flathead Indian Reservation (now Lake County) and at the north end of Flathead Lake. Silloway's remaining specimens, from St. Mary's and Swan lakes, have been re-examined and are definitely Barrow Golden-eyes. Since he referred all golden-eyes to *B. clangula* with the remark "This species appeared to be by far the most abundant of the summer ducks in the Flathead Region," the status of the two species at that time must remain in doubt. However, at present *B. clangula* does breed in the Flathead Valley at lower elevations, while *B. islandica* is frequently encountered on lakes at higher altitudes in the surrounding mountains. Each species is not uncommon in its appropriate habitat.

Clangula hyemalis. Oldsquaw. Harold Knapp and John Craighead collected an adult male in full winter plumage on a pothole near Ninepipe Reservoir, Lake County, on October 20, 1953. Another

individual was present, but was not obtained. The only other specimen from western Montana was taken near Kalispell, Flathead County (Saunders, *op. cit.*:38).

Falco rusticolus. Gyrfalcon. Only a few sight records and one specimen (Bowles, Condor, 24, 1922: 28) of this species are available from Montana. An adult female in the gray plumage phase was obtained by Robert Cooney at Lake Sewell, Lewis and Clark County, on November 10, 1946.

Charadrius semipalmatus. Semipalmated Plover. The only records of this species for Montana are two sight records from widely separated localities (Weydemeyer, Auk, 47, 1930:98; Hotchkiss, Condor, 50, 1948:275). On August 24, 1952, Hand saw one among a small group of Killdeer, about 2½ miles west of Missoula, along the Clark Fork River. On August 11 and 26, 1955, he saw one each day at Kicking Horse Reservoir, Lake County.

Squatarola squatarola. Black-bellied Plover. Saunders' (*op. cit.*:53) only references to this species are: "Several birds . . . seen at Priest Butte Lakes, September 4, 1911," and "taken every fall by hunters at Flathead Lake." A specimen in the Zoological Museum labeled Missoula, September 16, 1897, taken by M. J. Elrod, has not been reported in the literature. Hoffmann collected a male and female, and saw others, on October 5, 1957, at Kicking Horse Reservoir, Lake County, and Hand saw two in breeding plumage, with a small group of dowitchers, at the same place on May 24, 1957.

Limnodromus scolopaceus. Long-billed Dowitcher. Only a few sight records of dowitchers west of the Continental Divide have been published (Hand, Condor, 55, 1953:45; Weydemeyer, Condor, 33, 1931:128). A male in breeding plumage, taken by D. E. Davis on August 14, 1952, near Somers, Flathead County, and another in winter plumage obtained on October 5, 1957, near Ninepipe Reservoir, Lake County, are definitely of this species.

Micropalama himantopus. Stilt Sandpiper. Two birds, a male and one of undetermined sex, were collected by D. E. Davis on a slough east of Somers, Flathead County, on August 14, 1952. The only other record for the state is a series of seven obtained by Coues, probably in northern Teton County, east of the Continental Divide (Saunders, *op. cit.*:48).

Lobipes lobatus. Northern Phalarope. Saunders (*op. cit.*:45) indicates that this species is primarily a spring migrant in eastern Montana, and a fall migrant in the western half of the state. Wright observed two flocks at Medicine Lake, Sheridan County, on June 13, 1942. These birds were probably migrants because they were still flocked, but the date is late. A group of two females and three males was seen with a flock of Wilson Phalaropes at a small pond two miles southwest of Missoula on May 17, 1955. One of them was collected and the identification confirmed, but the specimen was not preserved. This constitutes the only spring record for western Montana.

Stercorarius longicaudus. Long-tailed Jaeger. Wright (Auk, 67, 1950:514) first reported this species in Montana, on the basis of a mummified, partial carcass picked up at Ninepipe Reservoir, Lake County, in May, 1947. On about October 1, 1957, an adult male of this species flew into the house of Mr. Vern Staples, 6 miles south of Hall, Granite County. The bird was kept alive on a fish diet for over a month by Mr. Staples. After its death, he presented the specimen to the M.S.U. Zoological Museum. Autopsy revealed it to be very emaciated.

Larus philadelphia. Bonaparte Gull. This species is recorded by Saunders (*op. cit.*: 30) as an uncommon migrant in western Montana, but no records have been published since that time. Hand's sight records include: May 11, 1952, one adult, Ninepipe Reservoir, Lake County; October 26, 1956, an adult in fall plumage, pothole at south edge of Missoula; November 1, 1956, one immature, two miles west of Missoula along the Clark Fork River; May 14, 1957, a flock of 5 adults and 6 immatures, pothole south of Missoula. An adult male was collected at the last locality two days later, at which time the only other gull remaining was an immature bird. Two immature specimens were taken near Somers, Flathead County, by D. E. Davis on August 13, 1952. Finally, three immature birds were seen by Hoffmann in a flock of about 50 Ring-billed Gulls resting on the shore of Brown's Lake, Powell County, on May 18, 1957.

Xema sabini. Sabine Gull. An adult specimen of this gull, in winter plumage, was collected near Kalispell, Flathead County, by Mr. Harry Wilson, a local taxidermist. After Mr. Wilson's death in 1946, his specimens were deposited in the Zoological Museum, but collection dates and exact localities had been lost, although all specimens were known to have come from the vicinity of Kalispell. The only previous record of this species is from Custer County, in the extreme eastern part of the state (Cameron, Auk, 22, 1905:76).

Hydroprogne caspia. Caspian Tern. Apparently the only previous Montana record is from Big Lake, Stillwater County, where Saunders reports an adult male taken and three others seen, May 1, 1917, and several seen in the spring of 1918 (*op. cit.*:30). Hand saw four together at Kicking Horse Reservoir, Lake County, on May 15, 1956. They flew directly overhead and rather low, providing an excellent view of this large and conspicuous species.

Strix occidentalis. Spotted Owl. Aside from one sight record (Weydemeyer, Condor, 29, 1927:159), this owl has not been recorded in the northern Rocky Mountain region of Montana. In the summer of 1953, Vernon Hawley saw two at Anaconda Creek, Glacier National Park. The birds were observed once in July and twice in August at distances as close as 75 feet. Hawley photographed the birds on August 21 and the prints, while not of top quality, appear adequate to verify the identification.

Surnia ulula. Hawk-Owl. Although Saunders (*op. cit.*:71) suggests that this owl is not uncommon in winter in northwestern Montana, few specimens have been recorded. Mr. Harry Wilson collected one near Kalispell, Flathead County, and the specimen came to the Zoological Museum in 1946 after his death.

Phalaenoptilus nuttallii. Poorwill. The Poorwill, although a common summer resident east of the Continental Divide, has appeared in the past as a rare vagrant to the west. A juvenal female, collected by D. S. Farner at Yellow Bay, Flathead Lake, Lake County, on August 18, 1949, is the first specimen obtained on the west side. More recently, a single Poorwill was heard calling nightly (Wright and Hoffmann) from July 10 to 20, 1956, on the mountainside above the Montana State University campus. It was known not to have begun calling before June 11, nor was it heard after July 20. The next year a Poorwill began to call in the same area on May 9 and was soon joined by another bird located about ¼ mile to the south. Both continued to vocalize until at least early July. In 1958 none was heard. Saunders (*op. cit.*:79) reports hearing a Poorwill near Polson, Lake County, on July 26, 1915, but this is the only other record.

Aëronautes saxatalis. White-throated Swift. On May 19, 1956, a large group of these swifts was found at Bearmouth, Granite County, frequenting the vicinity of large cliffs along the north bank of the Clark's Fork River. One male taken on June 1, 1956, and a male and female taken on May 11, 1957, are the first specimens obtained west of the Continental Divide, although other observers have reported seeing the species. Whether the swifts are breeding on the cliffs at Bearmouth is uncertain. Their regular occurrence here during the spring and summer suggests this, but no nests have been observed, and none of the specimens showed internal evidence of breeding activity.

Colaptes auratus x cafer. Flicker. While hybrids between the Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted flickers are common in the eastern part of the state, none has been recorded west of the Continental Divide. Hand saw three, on October 23, 1949, October 6, 1952, and February 20, 1956, all within a few miles of Missoula, and all exhibited predominantly Yellow-shafted characteristics. In the latest instance the bird was watched for some time as it fed on the ground within 15 feet. It was evidently a male having both the red nuchal crescent and the black malar stripe. When it finally flew, the wing linings appeared to be clear yellow.

Asyndesmus lewis. Lewis Woodpecker. Supplementing a previously published record (Condor, 53, 1955:45) Hand saw another individual wintering in the Orchard Homes section of Missoula between January 25 and late February, 1956. On March 17 of the same year another, perhaps the same individual, was seen within the city proper.

Cyanocitta cristata. Blue Jay. A female, collected by Mr. E. L. Mitchell on January 28, 1958, near Polson, Lake County, represents a new specimen record for Montana. Mr. Mitchell reported that it was one of three Blue Jays frequenting his feeding station throughout the winter, in the company of Steller Jays, Canada Jays, and Clark Nutcrackers. In previous winters he had observed none. Other sight records for the species in Montana include Carter County, in the extreme east (Youngworth, Nebr. Bird Rev., 23, 1955:32) and one seen on the Montana State University campus on October 8, 1950, by Wright.

Ixoreus naevius. Varied Thrush. A single bird was seen by Hoffmann in Missoula on December 20, 1956. Its actions suggested it suffered from a leg injury. There are no other winter records for this area.

Vermivora ruficapilla. Nashville Warbler. Two specimens have previously been taken in the state, one at Yellow Bay, Lake County on August 6, 1912, which was subsequently lost, and one at Bozeman, Gallatin County, on September 22, 1941 (Saunders, *op. cit.*:45; Hiatt, Condor, 44, 1942:38). Both of

these appear to have been migrants. Two more specimens are now available. One is a migrant, an immature female found dead in Missoula on September 15, 1958. The second is an adult male obtained by Wright near Lolo, Missoula County, on May 4, 1950; the bird was alone and not singing. Weydemeyer (Auk, 51, 1934:89), on the basis of sight records, believed that this species was a very rare summer resident in Lincoln County, in the northwestern corner of the state. Hand's observations support this in that he has seen it regularly near Missoula every spring since 1950. The birds usually arrive in early May, the earliest record being April 26, 1953, and are not seen after the end of May. However, in 1954 a pair remained until at least June 20, and may have nested.

Dendroica coronata. Myrtle Warbler. Saunders considered this species a migrant in eastern Montana, not found west of the prairie region, and gives several records the westernmost of which is Great Falls (*op. cit.*:147). Hand saw one, a male in full spring plumage, at Missoula, May 1, 1954.

Dendroica palmarum. Palm Warbler. There is only one previous record for Montana, a migrant at Great Falls, Cascade County, in September, 1889 (Chapman, *The Warblers of North America*, 1907:214). Wright saw a flock of about twenty on the shore of one of the Necklace Lakes in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, South Fork of the Flathead River drainage, Missoula County. The elevation here is about 7000 feet above sea level, and a snow storm was in progress during the observation on September 15, 1950. The birds were seen again the next day, but were gone on September 17. They were first observed wading in the shallow water of the lake and the tail bobbing habit was clearly seen. The white in the tail feathers was readily visible in flight. No suitable collecting weapon was available, but Wright was very familiar with this bird from several years of experience in Wisconsin and New Hampshire.

Loxia leucoptera. White-winged Crossbill. Saunders records this species as a rare summer resident in the mountains of northwestern Montana, of very rare occurrence elsewhere. The only subsequent records are: in winter, Lincoln County (Weydemeyer, *Condor*, 30, 1928:247) and Missoula County (Mewaldt, *Condor*, 52, 1950:239; spring, Wright saw three with flock of Red Crossbills on Montana State University campus, May 2, 1951; summer, breeding "near Red Lodge, Carbon County" (A.O.U. Check-list, 5th ed., 1957:577). White-winged Crossbills were common in the sub-alpine forest around Thompson Lake in the Flint Creek Mountains, Deer Lodge County, from August 19 to 22, 1958. Six adult males were collected; no females or juveniles were observed. The birds were all either alone or in very loose flocks, and they frequently sang from the tops of trees or standing snags. On only one occasion were Red Crossbills seen here, when a small flock came by camp, from which an adult male and female were secured. White-winged Crossbills appeared to be equally common in the sub-alpine forest around Sailor Lake, Tobacco Root Mountains, Madison County, on August 28, 1958. Six were collected. Here, however, they were in flocks of up to 20 birds, and no singing was heard. Finally, a lone singing male was seen by Hoffmann at a camp on Beartooth Lake, Absaroka Mountains, Shoshone County, Wyoming, on September 2, 1958. No other crossbills were seen here although we occupied the area from August 30 to September 2. These summer records are from far south of the supposed normal range of the White-winged Crossbill. They may represent a temporary response to the very large white-barked pine cone crop observed in the Flint Creek and Tobacco Root mountains. On the other hand, the areas are so poorly known that the species may be one that has occurred often but has been overlooked.

Ammodramus bairdii. Baird Sparrow. This species has heretofore been recorded only east of the Continental Divide. On April 20, 1957, Hand flushed a sparrow near a pothole south of Missoula. While rather shy, it appeared reluctant to leave the vicinity and a good view of it at rest was finally obtained with 8 x 40 binoculars in good light at a distance of less than thirty feet. The most striking characteristics were the bright ochre color of the median crown stripe and facial area, the clear-cut string markings of the upper parts, and the finely streaked breast with the markings cut sharply across and rather high up, somewhat like the streaks on the Pectoral and Least sandpipers. The bird was obviously in adult spring plumage, without any of the dubious characteristics of immature sparrows that one sees in the fall. Savannah Sparrows, the only species with which this might be confused, had not yet arrived.

Spizella breweri. Brewer Sparrow. Baldwin (*Wilson Bull.*, 68, 1956:251) published the first report of this sparrow breeding west of the Continental Divide in Sanders County. Since then it has proved to be a common breeding bird in the extensive areas of sagebrush around Brown's Lake,

Powell County. Brewer and Vesper sparrows appear to be equally abundant in this habitat. Two singing males with enlarged testes and a female were collected on May 13, 1956. The species was also seen on the sagebrush-covered east bench of the Bitterroot Valley east of Stevensville, Ravalli County, on May 24, 1957.

Zonotrichia querula. Harris Sparrow. Previous sight records from Missoula have been published (Condor, 55, 1953:46), and subsequently Hand saw another one 2½ miles west of Missoula on November 1, 1956. Tom Rogers of Libby, Lincoln County, also wrote Hand of one that occurred there in the spring of 1957. He stated that it appeared February 16, was trapped and banded the next day, and remained in the neighborhood until April 29, by which time it had acquired adult plumage. It sang a good deal during the latter part of its stay.

Zonotrichia leucophrys. White-crowned Sparrow. Farner (Condor, 60, 1958:196) recently published a record of the race *gambeli* breeding at Hart's Pass, Cascade Mountains, Okanogan County, Washington, reported to be the southernmost breeding station for the race. In this connection it is interesting to note that Saunders (*op. cit.*:120) "found both *leucophrys* (now *oriantha*) and *gambeli* in Glacier National Park, where frequent observations showed that the two forms were about equally common" in the summers of 1914 and 1915. He also secured specimens of *gambeli* in June, 1912, on Birch Creek, Pondera (formerly Teton) County (Condor, 16, 1914:138). Burleigh (Auk, 38, 1921:559) found a pair he identified as *gambeli* breeding along the Kootenai River at Warland, Lincoln County in 1920. More recently, Weydemeyer (Bird-Lore, 33, 1931:171) observed singing White-crowned Sparrows at Logan Pass, Glacier National Park, on June 29, 1930, and remarks: "I took special care, several times during the day, to observe closely as many as possible. Every individual identified was a white-lored *gambeli*." Rand (Nat. Mus. Canad. Bull. no. 111, 1948:95) adds that "in south British Columbia and southwest Alberta both types [that is, the black-lored *oriantha* and the white-lored *gambeli*] occur, apparently with few intergrades," but no years are indicated.

At present, white-lored *gambeli* individuals appear to be very scarce in the Glacier Park area. Casual observation by Hoffmann in 1955-56, and a close check, coupled with some collecting, in 1957-58 has failed to reveal any breeding White-crowned Sparrows of this race. In particular, all breeding sparrows at Logan Pass now appear to be black-lored. These observations suggest that the composition of White-crowned Sparrow populations breeding in Glacier National Park may have changed rather rapidly.

Calcarius lapponicus. Lapland Longspur. While Montana is included in the range of this species, there appear to be very few records from west of the Continental Divide. Judging from observations in the past two years, Hand believes it to be far more common than the published records would indicate. This may be because the species has been overlooked, or perhaps more likely, it is one of those that are gradually spreading westward. In the fall of 1956, his first positive identification was on October 7, but he is quite certain that the characteristic flight note was heard as early as September 13. The species was not seen in large numbers, but remained in small, scattered groups in company with Water Pipits and Horned Larks until October 28. The following spring Hand again heard them between March 7 and 12, and got at least one satisfactory sight of one on the ground. In the fall of 1957 the species appeared simultaneously with the migrating Water Pipits and again departed on October 28, which was just three days ahead of the last pipit. On October 23, following an early snowstorm, a flock of between 30 and 40 individuals was seen, but otherwise they were noted only as scattered singles and small groups not exceeding six or eight birds, sometimes by themselves but more often with Horned Larks or Water Pipits or both. All observations were at the old County Airport (Hale Field) and the adjacent area including the Missoula County Fairgrounds. Birds collected on October 6, 1957, and September 28, 1958, confirm the sight identification.

Department of Zoology, Montana State University, Missoula, and 415 W. Central Ave., Missoula, Montana, November 1, 1958.