

Southern Great Plains Region

JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

This season maintained a disruptive pattern of befuddled anachronisms. Although there was a sprinkling of early and very early arrivals, it seemed as if many summer residents took time getting here, particularly in western portions of the Region. This was especially evident for Mississippi Kites, Upland Sandpipers, Common Nighthawks, Western Kingbirds, Cliff Swallows, Blue Grosbeaks, and Grasshopper Sparrows. Others arrived or wandered in roughly on schedule, but in less than sparkling numbers. Few fall-outs occurred.

Among the more newsy items were the gulls of Lake McConaughy, Nebraska. As more attention is drawn to this location, it can be expected to improve, though this seasons rarities will be hard to best. The previous accumulations of generally wetter years is seen in better numbers of marsh birds, including Pied-billed Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, several species of ardeids and rails, perhaps Black-necked Stilts, and possibly some land birds as well.

We will not likely top last year's warbler performance for some time, but conspicuously absent in this season's reporting were those of western affinity. Some species either underreported or showing more serious declines included Buff-breasted Sandpipers and longspurs. Dips in Lark Bunting numbers were clearly evident in the western areas, and may be naturally cyclic. The low numbers of Pine Siskins generally reported Region-wide for some years may have a disease origin, as observed by Rosche in western Nebraska. American Goldfinch numbers also seemed low.

Observers should also look over unusual ducks closely, as hybrids are appearing among the more sought-after species. Noted hybrids this season were Mallard and American Black Duck, American and Eurasian wigeon, and Blue-winged and Cinnamon teal. One must ask: "Where are the Eurasians coming from?"

Abbreviations: Fontenelle Forest (*Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy County, NE*); McConaughy (*Lake McConaughy, Keith County, NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford County, KS*).

Loons to Waterfowl

Common Loons lingered to at least May 28 in *Scotts Bluff, NE* (SS). An Eared Grebe Mar. 6 in *Tulsa* (PS *et al.*) was early. A high count of 56 W. Grebes was reported from *Scotts Bluff, NE* May 3 (LM).

Two Neotropic Cormorants were observed in *Oklahoma* Apr. 9–14 (JGN, m.ob.), and two–six were noted in *Tulsa* May 20–22 (JCH, JL *et al.*). Eight Anhingas arrived in *McCurtain, OK* by Apr. 10 (BH).

Am. Bitterns showed marked improvements in numbers in w. Nebraska, with up to six counted from some localities (RCR, LM). Other records were submitted from across the Region. One Snowy Egret Apr. 20 (BJR) and three Apr. 23 (LR, RH) in *Phelps, NE*, and a Little Blue Heron Apr. 25 in *Fontenelle Forest* (JAI), were all early for these more northerly locations. Black-crowned Night-Herons were generally more abundant, with a high count of 19 in *Sheridan, NE* May 7 (RCR, DJR).

Documenting changing distribution and occurrence patterns is clearly what this column is about. For the growing population of Trumpeter Swan now migrating and breeding in the Region, the Rosches noted first arrivals in w. Nebraska Mar. 4, with 13 birds observed in the Sandhills. Two were at a nesting site in *Cherry, NE* Apr. 12 (RCR, DJR).

Greater White-fronted Geese appeared more commonly in w. Nebraska, with a high 2142 birds Mar. 12 in *Perkins* (RCR, DJR). Two stragglers were present in *Hamilton, NE* May 18 (RCR). Peak counts of Snow Geese reached 300,000–400,000 in *Phelps, NE* Mar. 12 (LR, RH); one was still present in *Scotts Bluff, NE* May 29 (LM). Ross' Geese continue in numbers much higher than those of even a decade ago. A minimum of >30 Mar. 14 in *Phelps, NE* were noted on the edge of a large flock of Snow Geese which undoubtedly contained many more Ross' (JJ).

An Am. Black Duck was found Mar. 12 in *Dakota, NE* (BHu) for the only report. A likely hybrid Am. Black Duck x Mallard was observed Mar. 19–26 in *Tulsa* (JA), and a peculiar Black-type traveling with what appeared to be a domestic version of a Mallard was present at L. Hefner during much of April (JGN, m.ob.). Two Cinnamon Teal Apr. 2 in *Wagoner, OK* (JH) were the easternmost reported. One hybrid Cinnamon x Blue-winged Teal Mar. 3–Apr. 16 photographed in *Tulsa* (JA) demonstrated the close scrutiny that these bird should receive before determining identification. One Eurasian Wigeon would have been great, but one each were reported from *Phelps, NE* Mar. 10 (JJ), *Washington, OK* Apr. 1–12 (MD *et al.*), and *Scotts Bluff, NE* Apr. 5 (AK). A hybrid was also photographed in *Phelps, NE* Apr. 6–7 (JJ). After a surge over the past decade in w. portions of the Region, Wood Duck numbers seem to have dropped in w. Nebraska (RCR) and w. Oklahoma (JAG).

Having only one report of two Greater Scaup Mar. 8 in *Phelps, NE* (JJ) was as unusual for recent years as the record itself. The only Oldsquaw reported was a female Mar.



This duck, observed in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for much of March and early April 1994, was identified as a Cinnamon Teal X Blue-winged Teal hybrid. Photograph/James W. Arterburn.



Male Eurasian Wigeon at Bartlesville, Washington County, Oklahoma, April 2, 1994. Photograph/Jeri McMahon.

5 at McConaughy (RCR, m.ob.). A White-winged Scoter Mar. 6 in *Tulsa* (AT, PS *et al.*) was the only scoter reported. A Red-breasted Merganser lingered until May 25 in *Garden*, NE (LM).

Raptors to Rails

Repeating only a few recent occurrences, a White-tailed Kite photographed in *Atoka*, OK Mar. 13 & 15 (J&KM, WAC), was last observed Mar. 24 (JM). In line with national trends, reported numbers of Bald Eagles seem to be increasing, with 225 Mar. 5 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, MB) being the high count. A nest of Bald Eagles in *Scotts Bluff*, NE contained two young by the end of the period (*fide* AK).

Two Sharp-shinned Hawks present through the end of the period in *Saunders*, NE (TH) were suspected of breeding. Ferruginous Hawks May 25 in *Barber*, KS suggest breeding e. of normal range (PJ). Ten reports of Merlin were received. Peregrines were seen during the period from Apr. 14–May 17.

There were mixed views on Greater Prairie-Chickens: observations in *Noble*, OK indicate that they are declining locally, while, in *Mayer*, OK to the southeast, 14 were observed Mar. 26 (JN, MN).

How unlucky and lucky can you get? To have to go to your downtown office on a pleasant Saturday when you could be birding—only to find and catch a Yellow Rail in



The White-tailed Kite is still a rare bird on the southern plains. This one was in Atoka County, Oklahoma, March 13, 1994. Photograph/Jerry Morgan.

a small alcove right off the street? Arterburn did this Apr. 9 in *Tulsa*. King Rails were observed at Quivira beginning Mar. 25 (RB, PB). Virginia Rails were reported from a few w. locales including *Cimarron*, OK Mar. 15 (S&KM), *Sheridan*, NE May 6 and Dawes, NE May 14 (RCR, DJR). Two Com. Moorhens were at Quivira May 6 (PJ, JNo, DG).

Plovers to Terns

A Snowy Plover May 2 in *Phelps*, NE (JJ) was n. of most occurrences. Scattered reports of migrant Piping Plovers were noted Apr. 21–May 15.

Black-necked Stilts continue their irruptive surge in the Region. Upwards of 27 were present in 3 loose groups in the *Sheridan*, NE May 7, with at least 3 pairs remaining to nest; another pair was found with an active nest May 28 in *Dawes*, NE (RCR, DJR). Still others were observed in *Oklahoma* Apr. 11 (EW) and *Texas*, OK May 12 (JW *et al.*). An Am. Avocet



Yellow Rail captured in downtown Tulsa April 9, 1994, and later released. Photograph/James W. Arterburn.

Mar. 22 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (LM) was early.

Only a few Whimbrels were reported: May 14 (GO, NK) & 24 (NK) in *Cleveland*, OK, and May 12 at Quivira (JNo, CG). Baird's Sandpipers reached Nebraska by Mar. 18 with 35 at *Clay* (JJ), and 4 at *Phelps* (BP, LP); a Pectoral Sandpiper Mar. 18 at *Clay* (JJ) was also early. A Dunlin at *Clay* Apr. 8 (JJ) was as likely a wintering bird as an early migrant. Perhaps the find of the season was a red-maned ♂ Ruff photographed during its brief appearance Apr. 19 in *Phelps*, NE (JJ). This was the first report for Nebraska, and only the 2nd documented for the Region.

Short-billed Dowitchers occurred in Missouri Valley locations Apr. 30–May 15. Early for this species, and notably west, were documented observations in *Phelps* Apr. 19 (BJR, RS) & Apr. 28 (JoJ). Buff-breasted Sandpipers continue a pattern of either sporadic observations, sporadic reporting, or reduced numbers, as very few were reported this season. Am. Woodcocks were noted west to *Buffalo*, NE Apr. 2 (B&GC).

SA The spillway at Lake McConaughy, Keith, NE is receiving national attention (see Rosche's article in *Birding* 26:178–189, and publication *Birds of the Lake McConaughy Area and the North Platte River Valley, Nebraska* [Grzybowski 1994]), and well deserved it is. One of two ad. Lesser-Black-backed Gulls present in late February remained until Mar. 14 (PL *et al.*), for only the 3rd Nebraska record. At least one, possibly two Iceland Gulls were identified Mar. 5 (MB, RCR), and one Mar. 12 (RCR, DJR) for only the fifth or sixth to be reported in the Nebraska or the Region. Nebraska's (and likely the Region's) 3rd record (probably second individual) of Great Black-backed Gull, this one in first-winter plumage, was accompanied by another in 2nd-winter plumage Mar. 14 (PL *et al.*); in addition, three Thayer's gulls, one an adult, a rare find for the region, were also observed (PL *et al.*). One imm. Thayer's remained through Apr. 4 (RCR, DJR). On top of all this, an unprecedented seven–eleven Glaucous Gulls were present Mar. 5–14 (MB, RCR), and one was still present Apr. 4 (RCR, DJR). The collection of 20,000 gulls, mostly Ring-billed, included 600 Herring Gulls [a good count for the Region] Mar. 14. Twelve California Gulls were present on the lake Apr. 29 (RCR).

Com. Terns were reported from *Garden*, NE May 4 (LM), *Harvey*, KS May 6 (PJ, JNo, DG), and *Quivira* May 12 (JN, CG). Forster's Terns arrived by Mar. 28 in *Oklahoma* (JGN). A Black Tern in *Phelps*, NE Apr. 23 (LR, RH) was early.

Doves to Shrikes

An Inca Dove Mar. 10–28 in *Cleveland*, OK (VB) and a White-winged Dove May 4 in *Kay*, OK (A&KS, BW) continued the recent but fading incursion of doves in the Region. Probably underreported, and of questionable origin, three Ringed Turtle-Doves were photographed Apr. 2, May 1, and May 23 in *Tulsa* and *Creek*, OK (JA, PS, CR, respectively). A Black-billed Cuckoo Apr. 19 in *McCurtain*, OK (BH) was well ahead of its crowd.

An injured Com. Poorwill was retrieved in *Oklahoma* Apr. 30 (JR). A Black-chinned Hummingbird was noted e. to *Cleveland*, OK Apr. 13 (RBo). A Rufous Hummingbird seen November–Apr. 10 in *Muskogee*, OK (JB) may be the first observed surviving the winter in Oklahoma.

A few Snowy Owls lingered into March in Nebraska: at *Cass* Mar. 4 (GW) and *Stanton*, Mar. 5; (JJo). A Chuck-wills-widow May 14 in *Dakota*, NE (BH_u) was considered extralimital.

Early Scissor-tailed Flycatchers arrived Mar. 21 in *McCurtain*, OK (BH). One appearing in *Sarpy*, NE May 22 (JMo) advanced beyond its normal range limit. Five Tree Swallows arrived at a breeding location in *Sequoyah*, OK in record time Mar. 3 (JN, MN, JM). A Cliff Swallow Mar. 26 in *Buffalo*, NE (LR, RH) was exceptionally early. Acadian Flycatchers made it to *Lancaster*, NE and *Nemaha-Richardson*, NE May 31 (JG).

Five Black-billed Magpies were noted e. to *Dixon*, NE Apr. 4 (JJo). Red-breasted Nuthatches lingered in the region until late April and early May, the last being noted May 16 in *Tulsa* (PS, JL). Two Brown-headed Nuthatches located in *Atoka*, OK Mar. 13 & 15 (J&KM, WAC) were w. of most occurrences. A Brown Creeper investigating loose bark May 25 in Fontenelle Forest (BP, LP) may have been the only wishful breeder of its kind in the Region. Carolina Wrens were seen w. to *Buffalo*, NE May 15 (LH, RH).

A Gray Catbird May 31 in *Comanche*, OK (JDT) was tardy or s. of most breeding locales. Very early was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher Mar. 7 in *Oklahoma* (JGN). A Golden-crowned Kinglet May 25 in Fontenelle Forest (JJ) may be the latest on record for the Region. A Veery was reported singing in Fontenelle Forest on the exceptionally early date of Apr. 22 (BP, LP). Others were noted in e. Nebraska and e. Oklahoma, with the latest May 30 in *Washington*, NE (BP, LP). A Veery of w. persuasion was observed in *Cimarron*, OK May 14 (JC, m.ob.)

Vireos to Warblers

A recently discovered group of Black-capped Vireos in *Cleveland*, OK contained five males and at least two females (KR, VB). We hope this outpost will persist. Two Solitary Vireos Mar. 10 & 11 in *McCurtain*, OK (BH), contributed to a pattern of other records over the past several years indicating that this species may regularly winter in s.e. Oklahoma. A Yellow-throated Vireo was on the edge of its range in Wichita May 11 (JNo, DV). Fewer than normal Philadelphia Vireos were reported this season—only two from Nebraska. A Red-eyed Vireo made it west to *Dawes*, NE May 14 (RCR, DJR).

Warblers? After last year's exceptional showing, fewer have to be disappointing. A Blue-winged Warbler May 9 near *Sarpy*, NE (JMo) was a rare spring overshoot, while one May 4 in *Tulsa* (PS, JL) was notably west. Too numerous to list last year, reports of Golden-winged Warblers this season included singles at *Richardson*, NE May 8 (*fide* BP, LP), Fontenelle Forest May 9 (JAL) & 11 (BP, LP), and *Sarpy*, NE May 9 (JMo).

A Tennessee Warbler in *Cherry*, NE, May 13 and a Blackpoll in *Sheridan*, NE May 7 were species not annually observed in w. Ne-

braska (RCR). Always a rarity in w. Nebraska, a N. Parula was discovered May 7 in *Sheridan*, NE (RCR), and a second was seen *Garden*, NE May 25 (LM).

A silent ♂ Cape May Warbler observed in *Cleveland*, OK Apr. 3–9 (EW) molting into breeding plumage was singing Apr. 18–21 (JAG); it likely wintered. Another Cape May Warbler appeared May 11 in *Douglas*, NE (JBr). Pine Warblers in *Tulsa* Mar. 5–Apr. 13 (JCH, JL, m.ob.), *Cleveland*, OK through Mar. 12 (JAG), and Wichita May 10 (PB, DV *et al.*) were clearly extralimital.

A Prairie Warbler May 3 in *Tulsa* (PS *et al.*) was the first there in many years. A Palm Warbler May 5 in *Dawes*, NE (RCR) was a clear rarity, while one in Wichita Apr. 21 (PJ) & 22 (DV) was just west of most occurrences. Bay-breasted Warblers appeared at 2 locations in *Lancaster*, NE May 11 and May 14 (LE), in *Tulsa* May 6 (WC), and Wichita May 11 (PJ). Two Cerulean Warblers made it n. to *Dixon*, NE May 20 (BP, LP). Others were observed w. to *Tulsa* May 1–3 (WC).

Worm-eating Warblers outside their normal haunts appeared in *Sarpy*, NE May 2–31 (JMo, BP, LP), *Douglas*, NE May 9 (JAL, JBr), and Wichita May 6 (PJ, JN, DG). Five Ovenbirds were noted in *Dawes*, NE May 14 (RCR, DJR). Early was a Louisiana Waterthrush Mar. 22 in *Tulsa* (SD), as was a Com. Yellowthroat Apr. 3 (PS, JL). At the edge of its range, Kentucky Warblers were reported from 4 localities in *Douglas* and *Sarpy*, NE (BP, LP). A "scoop" was a Connecticut Warbler banded May 27 in *Cuming*, NE (MO). A MacGillivray's Warblers documented itself in a window in *Douglas*, NE May 10 (TL). A small group of Hooded Warblers in *Tulsa* were first observed Apr. 12 (m.ob.). However, unexpected was a Hooded Warbler in *Scotts Bluff*, NE May 28 (SS). Yellow-breasted Chats appeared to be declining in e. Nebraska (*fide* RS).

Tanagers to Finches

A Rose-breasted Grosbeak Apr. 24 in *Sarpy*, NE was the second earliest reported in Nebraska (BP, LP). Black-headed Grosbeaks were observed w. to *Cleveland*, OK May 4 (VB). A Blue Grosbeak Apr. 12–20 in *McCurtain*, OK (PH, BH) was early, as was a Green-tailed Towhee in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Apr. 25–29 (ET). A ♂ Lazuli Bunting struck a window in *Muskogee*, OK Apr. 27 (GS), and a second May 7 in *Tulsa* (WD) was west of most.

Two Bachman's Sparrows in *Pushmataha*, OK (JM, JS, JN) Mar. 24 were hoped to be part of a localized but widespread population. A Field Sparrow Mar. 22 in Lincoln, NE was early (TL).

A fallout of thousands of Vesper Sparrows was noted after an Apr. 26 snowstorm in w. Nebraska (RCR). A rare find was a Henslow's Sparrow in *Lancaster*, NE on Conservation Reserve Program lands (JG). Perhaps as rare, though possibly less detectable, were Sharp-

tailed Sparrows: one in *Tulsa* Apr. 7 (M&GK), and the second in *Tulsa* May 22 (RG, J&PM). Swamp Sparrows observed May 22 in *Knox*, NE may be breeders (BP, LP). A White-throated Sparrow at McConaughy Apr. 29 (RCR) was only the second reported there. Late was one May 30 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (LM). Unusual was a "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco noted Apr. 27 in *Kimball*, NE (RCR).

Great-tailed Grackles are now established in s.e. Nebraska, with birds occurring regularly in w. and n.c. Nebraska. Earliest migrants this season were in Cass, NE Mar. 7 (GW). A Brown-headed Cowbird in Cass, NE Mar. 1 (GW) must have been eager. A N. Oriole Apr. 8 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE could likely have been an overwintering bird (LM).

A ♂ Cassin's Finch May 11 in *Cimarron*, OK was exceptionally late (WC). Nine Red Crossbills found Mar. 21–Apr. 17 in *Cleveland*, OK (JAG) were the only ones reported in the Region outside of the Sandhills. While Pine Siskins, rare for many years, appear to making an upsurge, Rosche found many dead or dying from an unknown disease in w. Nebraska. Evening Grosbeaks haven't had a good year since I have been writing this column. Only one–three were noted in *Dawes*, NE Mar. 25–May 2 (RCR).

Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):

KANSAS—Pat Bekemeyer, Roy Bekemeyer, Dick Galbraith, Chet Gresham, **Pete Janzen**, John Northrup (JNo), Don Vannoy. NEBRASKA—Jim Alt (JAL), John Brenneman (JBr), Mark Brogie, Beverly & George Canterbury, Larry Einemann, Joe Gubanyi, Robin Harding, Thomas Hoffman, Bill Huser (BH), Jan Johnson (JJo), Joel Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Thomas Labeledz, Paul Lehman, Larry Malone, Jim Mountjoy (JMo), Mabel Ott, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Lanny Randolph, Dorothy J. Rosche, **Richard C. Rosche**, B.J. Rose, Sam Schlothauer, Ross Silcock, Edna Thomas, Gertrude Wood. OKLAHOMA—Jim Arterburn, Jan Beasley, Ruth Boyd (RBo), Vicki Bye, William Carroll, William A. Carter, Jeff Cox, Walt Davis, Scott Dingman, Melinda Droeger, R. Gard, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Jim Harman, Berlin Heck, Pat Heck, James C. Hoffman, Martha & George Kamp, Nathan Kuhnert, **Jo Loyd**, **Louis McGee**, **Jeri McMahan**, S. & K. Meizenzahl, Jerry & Keta Morgan, Jim & Paula Munn, **John G. Newell**, James Norman, Marion Norman, Greg Overall, Jack Roberts, Kathy Reeves, Chuck Rush, Gloria Schumann, Pat Seibert, Albert and Kathie Shultz, John Sterling, Arnella Trent, Jack D. Tyler, Bob Wilson, Ernie Wilson, Jim Woodard. —*Joseph A. Grzybowski, 715 Elmwood Drive, Norman, OK 73072.*