

# Southern Great Plains Region

JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

While broad-scale patterns can emerge in some seasons, this was the season of local or indeterminable patterns. The spring drought in much of Oklahoma turned into a patchwork of extended or worsening conditions and exceptional rains. Many wetlands were flooded in western Nebraska, curtailing the nesting of species such as avocets, stilts, and phalaropes. Perhaps some of the effects of the retarded spring extended into larger numbers of summer vagrants for some species, such as Franklin's Gulls. But for most, there were not many direct links between abiotic and population phenomena.

The extension of some southern and eastern species appears to continue. Northern Cardinals and Blue Jays keep inching westward. Great-tailed Grackles are maintaining their foothold in Nebraska. Others observations are likely part of the ebb and flow—or perhaps cyclic patterns, most probably of occasional blips that all populations incur for any variety of reasons. Dickcissels made a strong

appearance in western Nebraska; two years ago it was western Oklahoma. Cassin's Sparrows blipped east this year, pushing into the middle of Kansas. Trumpeter Swans and Black-necked Stilts seem to hold their own in Nebraska. Some marsh birds appear to operate under metapopulation models of their dynamics, where "lights" indicating their presence are constantly blinking on and off, perhaps mostly on or mostly off some years, but never all on or all off (*i.e.*, Least Bitterns, Common Moorhens, and Virginia Rails).

And then there were those crossbills, which made an unusual summer appearance; with many being juveniles, it likely signaled a good reproductive season, which may have meant good cone crops, which may have gotten depleted and created a need for these birds to wander to seek out alternative food sources while the cone crops develop either this winter, or the next, somewhere. Or, it may just be that when there are many, some wander.

Abbreviations: Crescent Lake (*Crescent Lake N.W.R., Garden Co., NE*); Cheyenne Bottoms (*Cheyenne Bottoms WMA, Barton Co., KS*); Fontenelle Forest (*Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co., NE*); McConaughy (*Lake McConaughy, Keith Co., NE*); N.O.U.R.C. (*Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee*); North Platte (*North Platte N.W.R., Scottsbluff County, NE*); K.B.R.C. (*Kansas Bird Records Committee*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford Co., KS*).

## Loons to Waterfowl

Perhaps a strange way to start out a report, but several loons were documented in *Keith*, NE June 22, variously identified as Red-throated, Pacific, and Common (*vide* WRS). The N.O.U.R.C. will decide this one. Two Com. Loons were noted in *Dawes*, NE June 7 (RCR, DJR), and one was present July 11 in *Tulsa* (JL, PS). An Eared Grebe June 14 in *Kingfisher*, OK (JL, PS), was s. of most during summer months. Western Grebes were present at Cheyenne Bottoms during July (SA, EP, BF) and may have again nested; others were noted e. to *Phelps*, NE June 2 (LR, RH) and *Antelope*, NE July 12–13 (LR, RH). Clark's Grebes were documented in *Keith*, NE June

9 (BP, LP), North Platte June 16–July 12 (LKM, LK), and *Dawes*, NE Aug. 3 (RCR, DJR).

Neotropical Cormorants were noted at Cheyenne Bottoms June 9 (GP), and *Douglas*, KS July 29 (LM, GP). Fourteen Anhingas were counted in *McCurtain*, OK June 6 (BH) at the only known nesting area in the Region.

Least Bitterns were located at 3 locales in s.e. Nebraska (*vide* WRS), and in *McClain*, OK (NK). Among herons wandering N were two Great Egrets at Crescent Lake June 5 (LKM) and one June 3 in *Dawes*, NE (TM). Fourteen Little Blue Herons June 4 & 13 and July 24 in *Otoe*, NE (L&CF) represented a high count; five additional Little Blues were noted in Nebraska (*vide* WRS). Three Tricolored Herons wandered N to Quivira June 9 (m.ob.).

A real surprise and cause for careful observation was a Glossy Ibis documented at Quivira June 9 (GP), accepted by the K.B.R.C. East of most observations were four White-faced Ibises at *Seward*, NE June 10 (LP, BP). Possibly different White Ibises were noted in *McCurtain*, OK June 9 and July 11 (BH).

Vagrant waterfowl included a Snow Goose at *Lancaster/Saunders*, NE June 25 (LP, BP), a N. Shoveler July 14 in *Comanche*, OK (JDT), and four Gadwall June 3–4 in *Comanche*, OK (JAG). Cinnamon Teal were observed at scattered localities in Nebraska e. to *York* July 14 (JGJ). Counts of 13 and 15 Canvasbacks occurred at Crescent Lake July 13 & 29, respectively (MF).

Among vagrant ducks were a Ring-necked Duck June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR), one June 5 (JAG)—8 (NK, KL, SL) in *Comanche*, OK, two June 14–15 and July 13 in *Kingfisher*, OK (JL, PS), and one–six July 16–31 at Crescent Lake (MF, LKM); this continues a recent pattern of substantially more reports for the summer period. Other vagrants included Lesser Scaup in *Kingfisher*, OK June 14 (JL, PS), *Comanche*, OK July 4 (JAG)—July 14 (JDT), and *Tulsa* July 2 (AR *et al.*). Three Bufflehead were noted June 5 at Crescent Lake (LKM); and a Com. Merganser was seen June 15 at *Jefferson*, KS (LM, GP).

## Raptors to Rails

Only three Ospreys were reported: June 4 in *Otoe*, NE (L&CF), June 22 at McConaughy (WRS, JGJ, LKM), and July 20 in *Lancaster*, NE (JM). The Mississippi Kite colony established at *Keith*, NE contained four adults June 4 (LP, BP). The appearance of Broad-winged Hawks in the Wichita Mts., OK during June and July in recent years may indicate local breeding or wandering, or early migration



patterns; one adult July 1 (CG) opens speculation for both.

Among scattered reports of King Rail were one at *Seward*, NE June 1–2 (LP, BP et al.). Up to six Com. Moorhens June 14–July 28 in *Kingfisher*, OK (JL, PS) were unexpected. Two Purple Gallinules were noted in *Choctaw*, OK (JW), an area where the species occurs sporadically. A single Sandhill Crane June 27 in *Buffalo*, NE (LR, RH), and a pair in *Clay*, NE July 14, 21 & 28 (JGJ) were suggestive of potential breeding in Nebraska (*fide* WRS).

### Plovers to Terns

The first confirmed breeding of Piping Plovers for Kansas was in *Pottawatomie*, where a nest hatched at least one chick by July 17 (BB, DR, DM). Part of an upsurge since their disappearance as breeders in c. Oklahoma were 7 pairs of Snowy Plovers located in *Cleveland/McClain* (NK). Mountain Plovers were confirmed nesting in *Greeley*, KS (RB), adding one more to a short list of counties in w. Kansas.

Among late shorebirds heading N were a Black-bellied Plover June 10 at N. Platte (LK), a Hudsonian Godwit June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR), a Sanderling June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR), 49 Baird's Sandpipers June 5 at Crescent Lake (LKM), and a Red-necked Phalarope June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR). Among early returning birds were three Greater Yellowlegs June 24 at Crescent Lake (MF, LKM); four Lesser Yellowlegs each at *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH) and *Keith/Garden*, NE (JGJ) June 22; eight Marbled Godwits June 22 at *Keith/Garden*, NE (WRS, JGJ) and two the same day at *Quivira* (MM, GP); five Baird's Sandpipers July 4 in *Dawes*, NE (RCR, DJR); a Long-billed Dowitcher July 5 in *Sheridan*, NE (RCR, DJR); and three Stilt Sandpipers in *Phelps*, NE July 6 (LR, RH). Exceptionally early were two Sanderling July 4 at *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH). Among limited observations for Short-billed Dowitchers were two in *Oklahoma* July 12 (MO) and three at Crescent Lake July 31 (LKM).

Black-necked Stilts appear to be increasing in the Region: one and four were noted at the *Sheridan*, NE locale June 4–5 (LKM); four were at Crescent Lake June 5 (LKM); one in *Phelps*, NE June 11 (*fide* LR, RH); and two June 2 (WRS, JGJ) and one June 10 (BP, LP) at *Seward*, NE. A count of 270 Am. Avocets at Crescent Lake July 16 (MF, LKM) was impressive. Common Snipe, not known to breed in the Region, were noted June 13 in *Morrill*, NE (AK), with five in *Holt* NE June 14 (JGJ), and one–two during July at Crescent Lake (LKM). Four excited ♂ Wil-

son's Phalaropes July 7 & 14 at *Clay*, NE, with a juvenile July 21 (JGJ), likely bred; the 1338 counted July 31 at Crescent Lake were migrants (LKM).

A yearling Laughing Gull was noted in *Bryan*, OK June 3 (JW). Several summer vagrant Franklin's Gulls occurred in Nebraska; 600 at *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH) was high for that late in the migration period. Also tardy were three Bonaparte's Gulls at McConaughy June 1 (RCR, DJR). Six Caspian Terns at McConaughy June 22 (WRS, JGJ) and two at *Harlan*, NE June 23 (WRS, JGJ) were unusual that far west in the Region. Two Forster's Terns in *Cleveland*, OK June 26 (NK) were summer vagrants. Common Terns were reported for Nebraska, but few are ever documented (*fide* WRS). A new breeding site for Least Terns, with 14 adults, was located in *Pottawatomie*, KS (DR, DM).

### Doves to Shrikes

Details were provided for a Common Ground-Dove June 21 in *Sioux*, NE (RCR, DJR), an occurrence which may be the northernmost recorded for the Plains. A Eur. Collared Dove with young of uncertain parentage was present in *Tulsa* June 10–July 10 (SM, m.ob.). Black-billed Cuckoos are very low density breeders in the Region. This season one was reported in *Otoe*, NE June 11–July 1 (L&CF), with another June 12–July 10 at Crescent Lake (MF). A good count of 14 Whip-poor-wills was made in *Sarpy*, NE June 23 (WRS). A juv. Com. Poor-will was captured July 19 in

*Comanche*, OK (JAG), one of few fledged young observed in Oklahoma.

Chimney Swifts were noted in the far n.w. reaches of the Region, with one at *Scottsbluff*, NE July 9 (LKM) and two at *Dawes/Sioux*, NE July 13 (LKM). A record of a ♂ Calliope Hummingbird in *Morton*, KS July 24 (L&RS) is under review by the K.B.R.C. Several other Calliopes were noted in w. Kansas, but no documentation has been forthcoming. The only Rufous Hummingbird report was July 26–28 in *Tulsa* (LS, PS, JL).

An E. Wood-Pewee in *Dawes*, NE June 7 (RCR, DJR) was both a westerly and likely late migrant. Both E. and W. wood-pewees were noted in *Morton*, KS June 22 (M&EC). A Least Flycatcher pair was possibly breeding June 4 in *Brown*, KS (SP), though the date still leaves the possibility of migration. Say's Phoebe were noted e. to *Phelps*, NE July 6 (LR, RH). It's always nice to note 30,000 Purple Martins, like those estimated in *Tulsa* July 15 (DS).

Blue Jays now apparently occur across the Region to *Scottsbluff*, NE, with one noted July 12 (LKM). A Brown Creeper was found again in Fontenelle Forest this season (BP, LP), the only known breeding location in the Region. In this period of splitting, another possible split could come from the eastern and western songtypes of the Marsh Wren. Several in *Holt*, NE, were near the dividing line for these song types (*fide* JGJ).

A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at *Box Butte*, NE June 2 provided the 3rd record for panhandle Nebraska (LKM). Four Sage



This Eurasian Collared-Dove—quite likely an outsider from the rapidly expanding population in the southeastern states—provided some excitement in *Tulsa*, Oklahoma, June 23, 1996. Photograph/Patricia Seibert.

Thrashers documented in *Kimball*, NE July 18 (BP, LP) raised possibilities of breeding. The possible 4th Curve-billed Thrasher record for Nebraska July 2 at *Scottsbluff*, NE (LK) is pending review by the N.O.U.R.C.

### Vireos to Warblers

Between 110–112 ♂ Black-capped Vireo territories were mapped in a partial survey of the Wichita Mts., *Comanche*, OK (JAG). Only 24 adults (ten females) were noted or presumed in *Blaine*, OK (JAG), and only seven adults (two females) were found in *Cleveland*, OK (VB). Late migrant warblers included Tennessee and "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped warblers June 2 in *Box Butte*, NE (LKM), a 2nd Tennessee June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR), and a Nashville June 17 in *Leavenworth*, KS (JS). Unusual n. and w. of many occurrences were a N. Parula June 1 in *Keith*, NE (RCR, DJR), and a Hooded Warbler June 23 in *Scott*, KS (M&EC).

### Tanagers to Finches

Only three ♂ Lazuli Buntings were present in an area of the Wichita Mts., OK where 25 were present during 1995 (JAG), raising some interesting questions of population vagility. A Painted Bunting June 9 in *Edwards*, KS (SS) was n. of most. Dickcissels generated a population burst in w. Nebraska (*vide* WRS; RCR, DJR). Two late-straggler Green-tailed Towhees were noted June 2 in *Sioux*, NE (TM).

Towhee updates may prove useful as we sort the occurrences of the recently resplit Eastern and Spotted species. One Eastern was noted at *Buffalo*, NE June 1 (LR, RH), where Spottedts are the norm. Other pure Easterns were noted w. to *Harlan*, NE June 23 (WRS, JGJ). Pure Spottedts were noted e. to *Harlan*, NE June 23 (WRS, JGJ). It is resident in *Buffalo* and *Kearney*, NE (*vide* JGJ). Five pairs of Spottedts were noted in *Cheyenne* and *Rawlins*, KS June 10 & 11 (SP).

The eastern line for Cassin's Sparrows probably edged farther eastward this year,



Many Red Crossbills appeared on the southern plains this season. This bird, retaining some juvenile plumage, was in Osage County, Oklahoma, July 30, 1996. Photograph/Martha B. Kamp.



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to match that earlier reported for Oklahoma, with birds reported to *Barton* and *Stafford*, KS (*vide* LM). A Rufous-crowned Sparrow June 7 in *Comanche*, KS (SP, MR) was away from the species' home bases. A Field Sparrows wandered W to *Box Butte*, NE June 2 (LKM).

The Rosches may have run down the only known location for breeding Baird's Sparrows in the Region, with three territorial males in *Sioux*, NE June 27. The isolated Song and Swamp sparrow populations established in *Phelps*, NE, are maintaining their persistence with 15 and three counted, respectively, June 22 (LR, RH). Quite unexpected was a Harris' Sparrow June 14 in *Butler*, KS (PJ). An e. outlier is a group of about 35 Chestnut-collared Longspurs noted in *Holt*, NE July 14–31 (LR, RH, JJ).

At a somewhat unusual w. extension of E. Meadowlark range, 173 were counted at *Crescent Lake* (MF). The literature will likely provide the breeding boundaries for Baltimore and Bullock's orioles. In Nebraska, Baltimore's make up the majority in most of the state except the panhandle, where hybrids are the rule (*vide* JGJ).

Even with a vagabond reputation, the small incursion of Red Crossbills onto the plains this summer was exceptional. A few were noted in *Kearney*, NE, during July (LR,

RH). The following were reported for Kansas: one immature July 4 *Finney* (TS); one July 10–12 in *Bulter* (MT); three July 12 in *Ellis* (TS); two July 13–15 in *Norton* (DF); one July 16–17 in *Sedgwick* (DB); and one July 30 in *Shawnee* (*vide* LM). For Oklahoma: one July 20–22 in *Okfuskee* (ES); four July 22–24 in *Muskogee* (LH); one July 28–30 in *Osage* (JK *et al.*), and a whopping 25 in *McCurtain* Aug. 9–11 (BH *et al.*). Crossbills are regular in the Sandhills of n.w. Nebraska, where they had a good nesting season with many immatures observed (RCR, DJR). A ♂ Lesser Goldfinch appeared in *Johnson*, KS June 1 (L&JB).

### Corrigenda

In processing the Winter 1995–1996 report (*NASFN* 50:186–188), an interchange occurred in which a pre-final copy was substituted for the final copy. Because this copy was a mid-level draft, numerous errors and omissions appeared. The following attempts to correct those and provide omissions of significant records for the season (with apologies).

Generic Errors: *Scottsbluff*, NE, was incorrectly presented as *Scotts Bluff*, NE; all references to *Lincoln*, NE should be changed to *Lancaster*, NE.

Observer designation errors: JoJ represents Joel Jorgensen; LEI represents Larry

Einemann; LMc represents Louis McGee.

Unspecified "cited observers:" KANSAS: John Northrup (JNo), Chuck Orte, Scott Seltman, Tom & Sara Shane, Art Smallwell, Mike Stewart, Don Vannoy. NEBRASKA: Ronald Barth (RbA), Ed Brogie, Mark Brogie, Thomas Hoffman (THo), Bill F. Huser, Jan Johnson (JJo), Alice Kenitz, James Mountjoy (JMo), Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, **Richard C. Rosche**, John Sullivan (JSu). OKLAHOMA: James W. Arterburn, Paul Bjornen, Bill Carrell, David Chapman, Vera Hughes, Martha Kamp, Larry Mays, Janet McGee (JMc), Mike Mlodonov (MMl), P. Moser, Dorothy Newell, John Prater, Jim Thayer, Ernie Wilson.

Specific Errors: The Golden Eagle reported from Ewing, NE Dec. 26 was in *Holt*, NE. A Peregrine falcon reported from Wehrspann Feb. 19 was in *Sarpy*, NE. The 22 Greater Yellowlegs counted Jan. 14 in *Cleveland*, OK were observed by N. Kuhnert and L. Mays (not JAG). Thayer's Gull Dec. 21 in *Lancaster*, NE was observed by SJD and WRS. The count of 16 Glaucous Gulls Feb. 24 occurred at McConaughy. The Great Black-backed Gull in *Sedgwick*, KS Jan 14-15 was observed by JNo and PJ. The Loggerhead Shrike reported from Hazard Jan. 1 was in *Phelps*, NE. The Ovenbird noted in *Oklahoma* Dec. 16 was found by Ernie Wilson. The White-throated Sparrow wintering in Gibbon, NE was in *Buffalo*, NE. The Yellow-headed Blackbird reported from Grand I., Dec. 16 was in *Hall*, NE; another from Kiowa W.M.A. was in *Scottsbluff*, NE. The White-winged Crossbills from Norfolk Cemetery Jan. 29 were in *Madison*, NE; the others from North Platte were in *Lincoln*, NE. The Hoary Redpoll from Wakefield, NE Jan. 29-Feb. 29 was in *Wayne*, NE.

Significant omissions: A Tundra Swan was noted in *Tulsa* Jan. 20 (NL). An Am. Black Duck was observed Jan. 28 in *Tulsa* (JL, PS). Forty Greater Scaup were counted in *Oklahoma* Feb. 18 (NK). An Oldsquaw was recorded in *Sedgwick*, KS Jan. 20-25 (DV, MLe). One hundred Red-breasted Mergansers were present Jan. 27 in *Sequoyah*, OK (MMI, DC, JP).

A Merlin roost containing five birds was discovered in *Cleveland*, OK by Nathan Kuhnert; this phenomena is almost never observed anywhere. A Peregrine Falcon was observed in *Sedgwick*, KS Jan. 25 (PJ). A Virginia Rail was noted Jan. 1 in *Cimarron*, OK (JAG). A Greater Yellowlegs was observed Feb. 18 in *Sedgwick*, KS (BD, JNo, PJ). A California Gull was located in *Sedgwick*, KS Jan. 14 (PJ). An ad. Lesser Black-backed Gull in *Oklahoma* Dec. 28-Feb. 12 (JGN, DN) may well be the

same individual reported there since 1984. Overwintering Forster's Terns were noted in *Sequoyah*, OK Jan. 27 (MMI, DC, JP) and in *Cleveland*, OK Feb. 29 (NK).

A Eur. Collared Dove present in *Muskogee*, OK remained through the winter period (VJ). A Rock Wren that wandered to *Cherokee*, OK was observed Dec. 9 (JN). A Curve-billed Thrasher Feb. 18 in *Haskell*, KS (JD) provided a new county record. A Gray Catbird in *Tulsa* Dec. 9 (PM) was unexpected. An estimated 600 Mt. Bluebirds were in *Barber*, KS Dec. 17 (PJ).

A Com. Yellowthroat was observed in downtown *Tulsa* Dec. 7 (JWA). A real surprise was a ♂ Rose-breasted Grosbeak in *Cleveland*, OK Dec. 30-Jan 7 (PB). Twenty-two Chipping Sparrows were noted in *Comanche*, OK Dec. 16 (JDT *et al.*). With almost no winter records for the Region of any kind, a Clay-colored Sparrow that appeared at a feeder in *Comanche*, OK (JMc, LMc) was quite a surprise. A Vesper Sparrow was carefully studied in *Cleveland*, OK Dec. 30 (NK). The winter status of this species is clouded by misidentifications. Swirls of Lapland Longspurs estimated at 18,000 birds were observed on one section in *Cimarron*, OK Jan. 2 (JAG, NK). A Lesser Goldfinch remained in *Tulsa* Jan 31-Feb. 29 (VH, MK, JL).

**Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):**

KANSAS: Steve Addinall, Louis & Jane Betros, Donna Borg, Roger Boyd, Bill Busby, Mark & Elaine Corder, Bob Fisher, David Fisher, Pete Janzen, Mick McHugh, **Lloyd Moore**, Dan Mulhearn, Sebastian Patti, Galen Pittman, Eric Preston, Dave Rintoul, Mike Rader, John Schukman, Scott Seltman, Tom Shane, Lawrence & Ruth Smith, Max Thompson. NEBRASKA: Laurence & Carol Falk, Marlin French, Robin Harding, Jan Johnson, Joel G. Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Lucy Koenig, Kent Lucas, Sue Lucas, Larry K. Malone, Thomas Mobraey, James Mountjoy, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Lanny Randolph, Dorothy J. Rosche, **Richard C. Rosche**, **W. Ross Silcock**. OKLAHOMA: Vicki Byre, Chet Gresham, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, Laura Hunnicutt, J. Kishner, Nathan Kuhnert, **Jo Loyd**, **Louis McGee (LMc)**, Steve Metz, Mitchell Oliphant, Aline Romero, Pat Seibert, Euelda Sharp, D. Sherry, L. Silkey, Jack D. Tyler, Jeff Webster.

—*Joseph A. Grzybowski, 715 Elmwood Drive, Norman, OK 73072.*

# Texas Region

**GREG W. LASLEY, CHUCK SEXTON, WILLIE SEKULA, AND MARK LOCKWOOD**

The continuing severe drought was "the dominant reality" (P. Palmer). Even moist east Texas was getting bone dry. There was spotty relief with rains in north Texas and the Panhandle in July, but almost universally observers described the rains as being too late to help the nesting season. Groups as diverse as gallinules, skimmer, and virtually all neotropical migrant passerines had poor success. Some species, and many individuals of some species, simply did not breed. Exceptions were few: Some swallows and Least Terns in north Texas did fine. In central Texas, early nesters (and, apparently, principally cavity nesters) such as titmice and chickadees seemed to raise more broods than other species.

The Regional exception was far west Texas which, due to its contrast with the rest of the state, deserves some detailed mention. Kelly Bryan wrote that "June was not a part of the summer season this year. It was just a continuation of the spring migration period as numerous shorebirds and passerines passed through the region late, some to the end of the month. Has the drought been broken? Well, probably. Rains appeared in parts of the Trans-Pecos as early as the first week of June. The Chisos returned to their notorious lush conditions by mid-June and Boot Spring was a raging torrent at times, but the mountains of Big Bend benefited from late May rains that the rest of the Region did not receive.

"The Davis Mountains turned green in places; however, [one good measure] of the drought is whether or not Limpia Creek reestablished a sustained flow. It did not. In Davis Mountains State Park, the lower part of the canyon was lush green by the end of July, the upper part still brown. The good news is that the moisture patterns have been repetitious for two months and if August will continue with the same pattern, then by mid-fall the drought should be significantly bashed. Folks are still praying for a Pacific or Gulf tropical storm or hurricane." It gives us a good feeling (and a touch of envy) to report that at least that part of the state came through the summer in good shape.