

Southern Great Plains



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If the theme of the 1990s was the wonderful wet cycle, the pendulum has shifted toward a different pattern in the new decade, one of generally dry conditions. Many an area, even those receiving a good rain, could not muster a pot-hole, and some moderate-sized ponds and lakes were reduced to mudflats, or were just dry. Areas that had been thriving marshlands in western Oklahoma only a few years back became dry-farming wheat fields this year.

The dry conditions had an impact on the diversity of birdlife in the Region. There are still those pockets of water to be sought out, and some upland land birds are probably not much affected by the long-term patterns as much as by local rainfalls above some minimal threshold. But numbers of waterbirds and of many landbirds seemed depressed nonetheless.

We report with great sadness the passing of Roger Sharpe. He was senior author of *Birds of Nebraska* and an enthu-

siastic individual, easy to work with, and extremely knowledgeable in many areas of ornithology. Nebraska birders will miss him greatly but treasure his many contributions.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS); Crescent L. (Crescent L. N.W.R., Garden, NE); Funk Lagoon (Funk Lagoon, Phelps, NE); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); L. Ogallala (L. Ogallala, Keith, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford, KS); e. Rainwater Basin (collective drainages in s.-cen. Nebraska); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Salt Plains (Salt Plains N.W.R., Alfalfa, OK).

LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

A stunning ad. Pacific Loon was at L. Ogallala 7–12 Jun (SJD, GC), furnishing the 8th summer record for Nebraska. Several Western Grebes were e. of normal in Nebraska, one especially so to Douglas 16 Jun (MB). At least one pair of Clark's Grebes were at L. Ogallala 7–24 Jun (SJD, GG); 10 were counted at McConaughy 7 Jun (SJD).

The Brown Pelican found earlier in Oklahoma, OK was present through the period (MO, m. ob.). A sign of the dry times, only 2 Neotropical Cormorants were noted away from Red Slough, those being in Coffey, KS 2 Jul (DS et al.) and Tulsa 30 Jul (JWA).

Vagrant or breeding ardeids wandering n. included an increasing array of Tricolored Herons this season, perhaps a consequence of their localized breeding at the Salt Plains, OK. Vagrant Tricoloreds were noted beginning 24 Jun at Quivira (SP et al., m. ob.), with 2 in Jefferson, KS 6–19 Jul (DLS et al.). Other Tricoloreds appeared in Creek, OK 17 (JL, PS) & 24 Jul (JWA, JS), at Hackberry 27 Jul (KM), Red Slough 16–29 Jul (DA), and n. to Funk Lagoon 27 Jul (LR, RH). Snowy Egrets were found n. to Harlan, NE 18–25 Jul (up to 4 birds; WRS, GH, WH), with 4 in Clay, NE 24 Jul (CG) and 2 in Platte, NE 27 Jul (JGJ). A lone Little Blue Heron wandered to Keith, NE 14 Jun (CWH). A Reddish Egret at Quivira 21 Jun–4 Jul (PJ, GF, SS, m. ob.) was the clear "zootie" of this group, the first documented for the Region.

Among dark ibises studied at the Salt Plains were one Glossy 9–23 Jun and 3 apparent Glossy x White-faced hybrids 9–10 Jun (JWA). Single Glossy Ibis were seen at Quivira 4 Jul (ML, MG) and Cheyenne Bottoms 13 Jul (JB, PJ). White Ibis numbers peaked at a meager 68 this season at Red Slough, which was also suffering lower water conditions (BH et al.).

Somewhat surprising were Roseate Spoonbills, including up to 2 at Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms 26 Jun–30 Jul (DA, m. ob.) and up to 6 in *Canadian*, OK during late Jul (*vide* DE, MO). An imm. Wood Stork wandered n. to Quivira 18–23 Jun (DH, m. ob.), with up to 17 at Red Slough through the period (DA, BH).

Red Slough maintained a good showing of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, with up to 19 there 22 Jul (DA et al.). Singles were found in *Major*, OK 5 & 15 Jun (JAG) and at Cheyenne Bottoms 11–13 Jul (*vide* LM; m. ob.). An infrequent but persistently noted species in the Region, Mottled Ducks made three appearances: 6 Jun in *Barber*, KS (PJ), 10 Jun at the Salt Plains (JWA), and 4 Jul at Quivira (PJ, KG, DA).

Among the oddball ducks summering s. were a Green-winged Teal at Funk Lagoon 28 Jun (LR, RH), with 2–3 in the e. Rainwater Basin, NE 14–28 Jun (JGJ). Two pairs of Cinnamon Teal were found at Cheyenne Bottoms, with a single at Quivira 21 Jun (B&NB). Four Canvasback were in *Sheridan*, NE 15 Jun (WRS). Ring-necked Ducks were at Red Slough 2 Jun (DA, BH), *Lancaster*, NE 5 Jun (4; LE), *L. Ogallala* 7–12 Jun (SJD, GC), and *Comanche*, OK 22 (VF, MBo) & 31 Jul (SM, KM). A Bufflehead pair was at *L. Ogallala* 7 Jun (SJD), the female last noted 12 Jun (GC). And 3 Common Goldeneyes were at *L. Ogallala* 7 Jun (SJD), with one still present 12 Jun (GC).

RAPTORS THROUGH TERNS

A few Ospreys were located, one possibly a late spring migrant 1 Jun in *Douglas*, KS (GPa), with possible early fall migrants 14–27 Jul in *Geary*, KS (C&JO) and 28 Jun in *Tulsa* (JWA). There were two reports of Crested Caracaras this season, a great find, but one only seen briefly from car (*Johnson*, KS), the other undocumented (*Carter*, OK). The status of a Merlin noted in *Chase*, NE 6 Jun (MB) was difficult to interpret. A nesting attempt by Peregrines in *Lincoln*, NE was unsuccessful, the eggs apparently not hatching (JD).

This season fostered the usual array of Common Moorhens and Black, King, and Virginia Rails from Quivira and *Comanche*, KS (*vide* LM), strongholds in the cen. part of the Region. Virginia Rails were located at marshes in *Chase* (MB), *Hayes* (TJW), e. Rainwater Basin (JGJ), and *Lincoln*, NE (TJW). Soras appeared at wetlands in the e. Rainwater Basin that had been dry prior to recent rains, with up to 16 counted 19 Jul (JGJ). Seven Soras were in *York*, NE 27 Jul (JGJ), with 2 in *Johnson*, KS 13 Jul (M&EC). Purple

Gallinules were again at Red Slough, with up to 4 there 22 Jul (DA). Quite surprising was one found dead in *Montgomery*, KS 21 Jul (IP). The odd disjunct breeding of Sandhill Cranes continues in e. Rainwater Basin, with a family group of 4 sighted 28 Jun (JGJ). Single Sandhills were seen in *Furnas*, NE 22 Jun (LO) and *York*, NE 12 Jul (JGJ).

One species benefiting from the drying flats at McConaughy is Snowy Plover, with at least three pairs fledging young at this n. location this season (GW). Piping Plovers are also benefiting from the flats, with 89 pairs counted and 117 nests located this summer (GW). Four Piping Plover pairs attempted nesting on the Kansas R. in *Wabaunsee*, KS during Jun (RB), with a single bird noted in *Sumner*, KS 7 Jul (MT). About 25 Mountain Plovers were located in *Cimarron*, OK 25 Jun (JSh). Black-necked Stilts continue to do well in the Sandhills of w. Nebraska, along with a successful nesting at Funk Lagoon (JDr), but many recent breeding localities in Oklahoma were dry this season. An ad. Willet with 3–4 chicks was in *Sheridan*, NE 28 Jun (AK).

As usual, observers struggled to distinguish among late northbound, early southbound, and oversummering shorebirds, as though that were possible! Among the merely tardy were 4 Semipalmated Plovers in *Sheridan*, NE on 12 Jun (GC). A surprising 42 (!) Sanderlings and 121 Semipalmated Sandpipers were at McConaughy 7 Jun (SJD); the last Semipalmated and Baird's Sandpipers were noted 14 Jun in the e. Rainwater Basin (JGJ). Also tardy were 2 Stilt Sandpipers in *Major*, OK 5 Jun (JAG), with 4 at McConaughy 7 Jun (SJD).

Greater Yellowlegs at McConaughy 7 Jun were probably northbound (SJD), with the earliest (possible) fall migrant 25 Jun at Crescent L. (GG). Other likely early migrants were a Lesser Yellowlegs in *Sheridan*, NE 25 Jun (GG) and a Solitary Sandpiper in *Lancaster*, NE 29 Jun (LE). Latest of the late, or stalled, was a White-rumped Sandpiper in *Sumner*, KS 7 Jul (MT).

In the "what-the-hay?" category were 2 Black-bellied Plovers and one American Golden-Plover at Cheyenne Bottoms 22 Jun (GP), 6 Marbled Godwits 7 Jun at McConaughy, plus one at Crescent L. (SJD) and 9 at McConaughy on 12 Jun (GC). Four Marbleds at Quivira and 5 at Cheyenne Bottoms 25 Jun (SP, CH) were likely fall migrants.

A clear treat and a good sign were the 317 Buff-breasted Sandpipers in *Clay*, NE 30 Jul (JDr). The earliest Buff-breasted were 2 at Cheyenne Bottoms 20 Jul (NL,

MP). The short array of Short-billed Dowitchers included 2 in the e. Rainwater Basin 12 Jul (JGJ) and 2 in *Kearny*, KS 13 Jul (T&SSH), with singles in *Creek*, OK 11 Jul (JWA), *Harper*, KS 13 Jul (JB, PJ), *Clay*, NE 18 Jul (WRS) and *York*, NE 27 Jul (JGJ). The one to 2 Red-necked Phalaropes in *Scotts Bluff*, NE through 15 Jun (KD) lingered quite late.

Rare vagrants in the Region were Laughing Gulls in *Wagoner*, OK 7 Jul (2; JWA), Quivira 13 Jul (M&ER), and *Osage*, OK 24 Jul (JWA). The 2 Bonaparte's Gulls at McConaughy 7 Jun (SJD) were quite tardy. The best tally for California Gull this season was of 84 at McConaughy 19 Jul (WRS). Quite unusual were summering Herring Gulls at McConaughy (3 different birds) 7 & 15 Jun (SJD).

Surprising for summer and thus carefully observed were 4 Common Terns in *Antelope*, NE 7 Jun (WRS) and one in *Sheridan*, NE 15 Jun (WRS). A stronghold for Black Terns is Cheyenne Bottoms, with 400+ present 29 Jul (ML, EL).

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

Eurasian Collared-Doves have now been observed in 59 Nebraska counties (*vide* WRS), with reports widespread also in Kansas and Oklahoma. Nebraska added another 8 White-winged Doves to the now 25 records for the state (*vide* WRS), with another 8 recorded in Kansas this season (*vide* LM). Perhaps not as noticeable, Inca Doves appeared in three locations in Kansas (*vide* LM) and are becoming background birds in a number of towns in Oklahoma, particularly in the southwest (JAG).

A Whip-poor-will in w. Nebraska is quite a find, even more so when it is determined to be the first of the western race *arizonae* for the Region; such was the bird heard in *Sioux* 25 Jun (HKH). Chuck-will's-widows in *Beaver*, OK 7–19 Jun (BH, JSt et al.) may represent the most westerly breeding location in Oklahoma.

Reports of *Archilochus* hummingbirds from *Keith*, NE are intriguing, as they could as easily refer to Ruby-throated as to Black-chinned; reports included a nest this season in *Ogallala* (*vide* CWH). A male Broad-tailed Hummingbird buzzed into *Sioux*, NE 29 Jun (GG)—also intriguing as to status. Rufous Hummingbirds began appearing rather early in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 9 Jul (KD); the first for Kansas was 19 Jul in *Pawnee* (D&KK) and first for Oklahoma 25 Jul in *Osage* (RC). Even given the showing of the last two seasons, the Calliope Hummingbird in *Finney*, KS 27 Jul

(MOs) was a very nice find.

A female Ladder-backed Woodpecker noted 9 Jun has apparently established herself at an extralimital site in Riley, KS (LJ). More evidence of the belated spring migration was an Olive-sided Flycatcher in Jefferson, KS 13 Jun (GP). Nesting Cordilleran Flycatchers were noted for the first time in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 24 Jun (TJW, LB). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher wandered n. to *Seward*, NE 3-4 Jun (LK, *fide* JG). The 4th Cave Swallow for Nebraska, a juv., was netted at L. Ogallala 8 Jul (CB). Two Sedge Wrens were noted w. to *Kearney*, NE 27 Jul (LR, RH).

Rather late was a Veery at Crescent L. 7 Jun, and quite westerly was a Wood Thrush there the same day (both SJD). A Swainson's Thrush in *Finney*, KS 10 Jun was late (T&SSh). Extending its extralimital stay was a Curve-billed Thrasher in *Sioux*, NE through the period; it was found trying to feed a nestling American Robin (*fide* LF).

Among a hodgepodge of warblers displaced a bit westward were a Northern Parula in *Roger Mills*, OK 7 Jun (PM et al.) and a Prothonotary Warbler in *Major*, OK 15 Jun (JAG). Tardy migrants were a Magnolia Warbler in *Knox*, NE 4 Jun (MB), an Ovenbird at Crescent L. 7 Jun (SJD), and a Cerulean Warbler in *Leaven-*

worth, KS 5 Jul (JSc). A MacGillivray's Warbler singing in *Sioux*, NE 14 Jun (WRS) may support the notion of breeding in this area. Without question, the most exceptional and serendipitous find of the season, if not year, was a male **Painted Redstart** at *Coldwater L.*, *Comanche*, KS 23-29 Jun (PS, VS, JL, VH, m. ob.).

The drier conditions may be encouraging Cassin's Sparrow to expand its range, with at least one bird in *Sioux*, NE 8 Jun (HW) and another near Crescent L. 17 Jun (BW, DW) heard singing. A Savannah Sparrow in *Arthur*, NE 26 Jun (GG) was pushing the s. fringe of the species' range in the Region. Far afield from subarctic breeding grounds was the Harris's Sparrow in *Dixon*, NE 8 Jun (JJ).

A Bobolink pair in *Linn*, KS 4 Jul (DS et al.) presents some interesting possibilities. An Eastern Meadowlark seen several times through 12 Jul in *Dundy*, NE (TJW) furnished only the 3rd local record. Lesser Goldfinches were noted n. to *Finney*, KS 20 (BC) & 24 Jun (L&BR).

Cited observers (state editors in bold-face): KANSAS: David Arbour, James Barnes, Bill & Nancy Beard, Roger Boyd, Barbara Campbell, Mark & Elaine Corder, Greg Friesen, Mark Gearheart, Kevin

Groeneweg, Vickie Hatfield, David Hilley, Chris Hobbs, Pete Janzen, Lowell Johnson, Don & Kathy Kasmaier, Eileen Land, Mark Land, Dan LaShelle, Nancy Leo, Lloyd Moore, Marie Osterbuhr (MOs), Chuck & Jane Otte, Gary Parkinson (GPa), Sebastian Patti, Ivan Pfalser, Galen Pittman, Melody Pollom, Mike & Ellen Rader, Leonard & Betty Rich, John Schukman (JSc), David Seibel, Pat Seibert, Virginia Seibert, Scott Seltman, Tom & Sara Shane, Max Thompson. NEBRASKA: Laurel Badura, Mark Brogie, Charles Brown, Gerry Colborn, Kathy DeLara, John Dinan, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Jeff Drahota (JDr), Larry Einemann, Lonnie Frimann, Carlos Grande, Greg Grove, Joe Gubanyi, Robin Harding, Glen Hoge, Wanda Hoge, Helen K. Hughson, C.W. Huntley, Jan Johnson, Joel G. Jorgensen, Lloyd Kaufman, Alice Kenitz, Linda Ollinger, Lanny Randolph, W. Ross Silcock, Bruce Walgren, Donna Walgren, T.J. Walker, Gabe Wilson, Harley Winfrey. OKLAHOMA: David Arbour, James W. Arterburn, Mike Boyd (MBo), R. Churchwell, David Elmendorf, Vic Fazio, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, Jo Loyd, Kurt Meisenzahl, Patty Muzny, Steve Metz, Mitchell Oliphant, Pat Seibert, John Shackford (JSh), Jerry Sisler, John Sterling (JSt). ☉

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