

# Kansas Ornithological Society

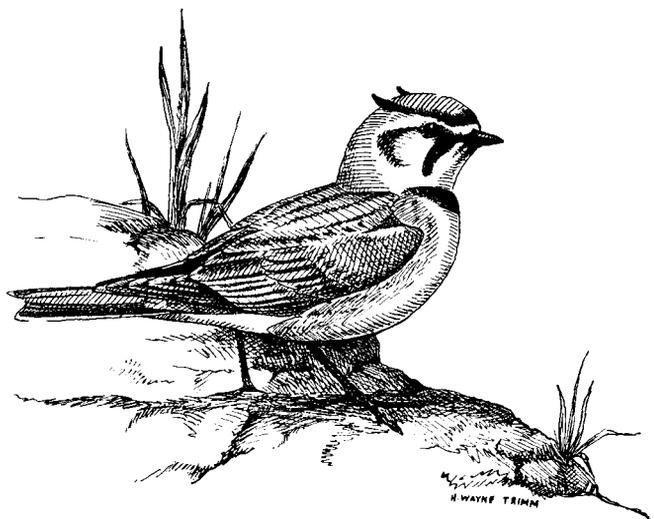
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## SISKINS NEST AT ST. MARYS

REV. THOMAS A. HOFFMAN

Two pairs of Pine Siskins picked the cedar trees on the St. Mary's College campus, St. Marys, Kansas, as nesting sites this spring.

Fr. Tom Hatrel's experience here (1949-1953) was that Siskins were rather uncommon until the spring of 1953, his last year at St. Mary's. In 1954, the year Dr. Porter found a Siskin nest in Cloud County, several small flocks of Siskins stayed on the St. Mary's campus till mid-May, and Fr. Mulligan and I thought we had found a nest in a cedar behind the college chapel, but it was almost inaccessible, and the birds left before we were even able to check their identity. There were still Siskins on the campus on May 31 that year.

Last spring (1955) the Siskins were few, and the last ones were seen on April 15. This year (1956) the flocks in April were even larger than in 1954. The seed crop on the elms was very good, and flocks feeding on the seeds contained 50 or more birds at times. There were always several flocks on the campus. Under the circumstances, we were on the look-out for a nest.

Fr. Mulligan found the first nest right on our front doorstep, in a cedar standing at the corner of the front porch of Loyola Hall, the residence hall for all the divinity students, on May 9. There were no eggs, but the birds were staying very close to the nest. On May 11, Fr. John Welch, who has accompanied us on many of our bird hikes, reported that he was quite certain there was a Siskin nest in one of the cedars behind the college chapel. On May 12 we confirmed Fr. Welch's find, and, using a small mirror mounted on a golf club, discovered 4 eggs in that nest. By this time there were two eggs in the Loyola Hall nest. We decided to take one of these, since we knew them to be fresh, to send to the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. The first attempt on May 12 was a failure owing to the clumsy fingers of the collector and the fragile nature of the egg shell. On May 13 a third egg was laid, and we were successful in obtaining that. On May 14 at least one of the eggs in the chapel nest had hatched, and the Loyola Hall nest had 2 eggs in it again. On the 15th, no eggs were visible in the chapel nest by means of our mirror-

on-a-golf-club periscope. We could only make out two beaks in the mass of down and pink skin, but a two inch square mirror on the end of a no. 2 wood held at arm's length while standing on tiptoe at the edge of a high stone wall is not the ideal tool for minute examination under the best of conditions.

The situation remained the same (i.e., two eggs in the Loyola Hall nest and four? nestlings in the chapel nest) until the 22nd. We hadn't checked for three days. On the noon of the 22nd we found the chapel nest empty, and only one egg in the Loyola Hall nest. We collected the chapel nest the next day (23rd) and took some pictures of the incubating bird on the Loyola Hall nest. Fr. Mulligan left the egg (collected May 13) and the nest at K.U. Museum on the 24th.

On the evening of May 27, there was a tiny nestling in the Loyola Hall nest. For the next week one parent bird was almost always on the nest, but after June 2, it was only rarely that the parent birds were seen around the nest. On the morning of the 8th, the young bird left the nest when I touched the branch while making a routine check, and flew off at a rather good rate to a tree some 50 feet away. I attempted to follow it, but never got another look at it.

Enlargements of the two best black-and-white pictures (see Fig. 1) have been sent to the K.U. Museum, and, as soon as duplicates can be made of the color transparencies, they will be sent too. These are the facts as we observed them, of the third and fourth known nests of the Pine Siskin in Kansas. These nestings outside of the "normal" range of the species raise many questions, but my answers to them would only be guesses.—*St. Mary's College, St. Marys, Kansas, July 11, 1956.*

## THE AVOCET ON CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

ORVILLE O. RICE

Since the Avocet has been found to nest in central Kansas only at infrequent intervals in recent years, I feel that the following record should be made available to those interested in this bird.

On April 30, 1954, a group of Topeka K.O.S. members and I, while enroute to the Annual K.O.S. meeting in Hays, decided to take a side trip to Cheyenne Bottoms, Barton County. Among the birds we saw there were 3 or 4 Avocets feeding along a half-submerged island near the north shore of the lake.

On May 2, after several showers, the annual field trip under the guidance of Mr. Frank Roble took us back to Cheyenne Bottoms. This time, while a strong north wind pelted the lake with sleet and rain, we found close to 100 Avocets and dozens of Wilson Phalaropes feeding in groups along the north shore where they were somewhat sheltered by the embankment. The Avocets fed in hurried groups in the water along the shoreline, swinging their heads to and fro, sickle-fashion. Sometimes they worked the deeper water, swimming and completely submerging their heads in a search for food.

On June 2, I visited Cheyenne Bottoms again and found that dry weather had caused the water in both the lake and the surrounding ditches to recede, leaving many areas of exposed mud and shallow pools. Several Avocets were seen in the area, and it soon became evident that some of them were nesting. While attempting to approach a pair of the birds to take photographs, I was assailed by an incessant clamor as both birds rose above my head on wings beating rapidly, but with a peculiar stiff, partially restrained half-stroke. They planed down a short distance away, but repeated the performance several times during my approach. Soon they were joined by another pair and the air was filled by their troubled "quee-quee-quee-quee." As I came closer, the birds discontinued the flight display and began a very striking series of injury-feigning displays. The birds nervously picked at the water as they approached me, then crouched low and crept away with heads held horizontally near the water. After this performance had been repeated several times and ignored by me, the birds approached again and fluttered away, each dragging one of their wings in a most helpless attitude.

Two exposed nests were located on the mud—one containing four eggs and the

other three. Both of these nests were found in the ditch on the northwest side of the lake. Two other birds were seen on the edge of the marshy meadow beyond the ditch on the southwest side of the lake and appeared to be nesting.

I was unable to return to Cheyenne Bottoms for the remainder of the nesting period and have no information concerning the success of these nests. It is significant, however, that these Avocets found conditions suitable to attempt nesting.

Other species were apparently similarly attracted. During my visit of June 2, a pair of Ruddy Ducks, one male American Merganser, several Coots, one Franklin Gull and two Snowy Egrets were seen. It is possible that some of these were laggards or unmated birds—but they were there. Dr. Ted Andrews (*K.O.S. Bull.* 1954, 5(4):30) reports that he and Homer Stephens found a Wilson Phalarope with downy young in Cheyenne Bottoms on June 26, 1954.

I returned to Cheyenne Bottoms in June, 1955, fully expecting to see some of these birds again, for spring rains had filled the lake and surrounding ditches. I was disappointed to find only a single Killdeer.

What caused the difference in bird population between the two years? A cursory visit such as mine can only suggest an answer. The cold front with accompanying rains between April 30 and May 2, 1954, may have forced a delay in migration at a critical point in the sexual cycle of those birds who remained to nest. Cheyenne Bottoms may have been by-passed in 1955 during ideal flying weather and consequently remained unnoticed as a possible nesting site. Nesting difficulties or failure in 1954 (caused by predators, fishermen, or birders!) may have discouraged the birds so that they were obliged to seek other areas in 1955. However, I believe the most significant factor is the level of the water. Low water in 1954 resulted in shallows, mud flats and marsh conditions in the ditches and parts of the lake. These shallows and mud flats were absent in 1955 when the lake and ditches were well filled with water.

If this assumption is true, it would seem that more study should be given to the preparation of future areas such as Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area so that a water level attractive to wildlife is maintained.—*Topeka, Kansas, May 1, 1956.*

## NOTEWORTHY RECORDS OF BIRDS FROM SOUTHWESTERN KANSAS

MARVIN D. SCHWILLING

In the spring of 1955 while I lived at Garden City, I obtained records of occurrence or nesting of seven species of birds which seem worthy of publication.

*Buteo regalis*. Ferruginous Rough-leg.—On June 9, 1955, I discovered a nest of this species containing three young in the sandhill-sage brush area about two miles southeast of Garden City, Finney County. The nest was a huge collection of sage brush stems, cow chips, and weed stems, about six feet deep. It almost filled the wind-formed, sand-beaten mulberry tree that harbored it. The nearly fully grown young were still in the nest on July 7. (This nest was used the previous year by a pair of Swainson Hawks, *Buteo swainsoni*.) This is the third and southernmost nesting record of this rough-leg for the state (see Tordoff, 1956. Check-list of the Birds of Kansas. *Univ. Kansas Publ., Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 8(5):319).

*Charadrius alexandrinus*. Snowy Plover.—On June 12, 1955, Larry Mosby, William Lynn and I saw twelve birds of this species at Pronghorn Lake, five miles north of Garden City, Finney County. The observation extends westward the known summer range of this plover in Kansas.

*Numenius americanus*. Long-billed Curlew.—In June 1955, a nest with four eggs was plowed up by Wes Felts about seven miles northwest of Johnson, Stanton County, Kansas. The eggs were salvaged by Felts and placed under an incubating domestic chicken, which unfortunately broke them. Felts' description of the adult birds together with my examination of the shell fragments leaves no doubt in my mind that this is a valid nesting record for Kansas of the Long-billed Curlew.

*Recurvirostra americana*. Avocet.—On June 12, 1955, I found five nests of this

species at Pronghorn Lake, five miles north of Garden City, Finney County. Two additional nests were found there by me on July 7, 1955. Most of these nests were on an island. Judging from recent observations the Avocet is a much more common nesting species in the state than was previously supposed.

*Asyndesmus lewis*. Lewis Woodpecker.—On June 6, 1955, I flushed an adult of this species from a highline pole two miles north of Holcomb, Finney County, and followed it for two miles as it flew a few poles at a time along the roadway. The bird was wary and finally eluded me by flying into a grove of cottonwood trees to the north of the road. According to Tordoff (*op. cit.*:332) Lewis Woodpecker is possibly a rare summer resident in southwestern Kansas. There are several specimens and previous sight records from western Kansas.

*Sialia currucoides*. Mountain Bluebird.—On June 5, 1955, while in my company, S. G. Van Hoose shot an adult male of this species on the south bank of the Arkansas River one mile west of Pierceville, Stanton County. The specimen is now in the University of Kansas collection (KU 32576). The bird was in breeding condition (testes 12 × 8 mm.) and is the second strong indication that this species nests in the state. Bunker and Rocklund took a full-grown juvenile in Hamilton County in 1911 (Tordoff, *op. cit.*:340).

*Piranga ludoviciana*. Western Tanager.—On May 27, 1955, I observed an adult male of this species in breeding plumage, one-eighth mile south and one-half mile east of Garden City, Finney County. The bird was seen from a distance of 30 yards and was perched in a cottonwood tree in the Buffalo Game Preserve. This species was previously known in Kansas only from Hamilton and Morton counties, on the Colorado border (Tordoff, *op. cit.*:348).—Box 62, Pleasanton, Kansas, May 1, 1956.

**Nesting Records of the Sharp-shinned Hawk in Kansas.**—Only two records are known of Sharp-shinned Hawks nesting in Kansas, according to Dr. Tordoff of Kansas University. The first record is of a nest found in Cloud County, July 11, 1938, by the late Dr. J. M. Porter. I belatedly sent Dr. Tordoff the second record, for St. Marys, Pottawatomie County, in the spring of 1954, after Mr. L. B. Carson told me of the importance of the record during a recent trip to Topeka. The bird was first identified on April 12, 1954. It attracted attention by loud, whiney squawks. Although the spot was close to the College, I didn't find the bird again until April 30, when I was again attracted by the squawks. The nest was discovered on this date. The bird was seen or heard regularly every few days up until the first week of June, after which time exams, ordination ceremonies, followed immediately by our departure for the summer, prevented further observation. Since we did not realize the importance of our find, no attempt was made to look into the nest. As far as I can recall, we never saw or heard anything of the nestlings if there were any, although the length of time that the bird was fiercely attached to the nest would seem to indicate that the eggs should have hatched. In 1955 the nest was used by a Horned Owl.—THOMAS A. HOFFMAN, *St. Marys, Kansas, Feb. 13, 1956.*

**Notes from Linn County.**—Since its organization, the Linn County Audubon Society has kept a record of the species of birds seen in this region, which includes Linn, Anderson and Bates (Mo.) counties.

The first full year (1954) 192 species were seen in this area, and in 1955, 193. However, the lists are more dissimilar than the figures indicate. More ducks and waterfowl were observed in 1955, largely because of the attraction of the newly established Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Refuge. The shorebird migration was poor in 1955, especially in the fall, and the warblers were either shy or rare in the spring. The winter population was high, especially among the Robins, Red-headed Woodpeckers and the sparrow family.

Best finds of 1955 were Prairie Falcon, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Townsend Solitaire in January, a Yellow-throated Warbler in April, a Roadrunner in June, a Western Kingbird in August, and a Sandhill Crane in October.—EUNICE DINGUS, *Mound City, February 21, 1956.*

**Records of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Morris County, Kansas.**—[The following records are well worth publishing inasmuch as they cover several years observation at a point which seems formerly to have been nearly or quite outside of but now is well within the range of the species involved.—Ed.]

October 2, 1938. While living on a farm near Wilsey, Morris County, Kansas, I received a telephone call from a neighbor who told me of six or eight birds flying about her home. One had fallen with a broken wing. From her description it seemed certain that these birds were Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, birds I had long wished to see. I was unable to go to her home until October 7 and by that time the birds had departed, except the injured bird, which had died. It was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

July 28, 1939. I noticed a bird note somewhat like that of the Arkansas Kingbird. I went outside and saw six scissortails departing from a tree in the dooryard.

August 16, 1939. One scissortail was seen leaving the yard in the same direction the six had taken in July.

June 15, 1941. One scissortail tried for several minutes to untangle a piece of string from a tree near the back porch. Unsuccessful, it flew to a telephone wire, then off in the direction the birds had gone in 1939.

September 10, 1941. Mr. Adams and I were driving on a country road about seven miles from our home when we saw six scissortails catching insects in a weedy pasture. We stopped and watched these birds for awhile.

May 3, 1955. A scissortail was observed along a country road in Morris County.

May 24, 1955. A scissortail was seen several miles from the May 3 locality.

May 29, 1955. A scissortail was seen flying to and from a nest in a large cedar tree in the Delavan Cemetery. I had suspected that these birds nested in Morris County, but this was the first nest I located.

May 30, 1955. Saw the scissortails in the cemetery again.

September 21, 1955. Two scissortails were seen at my home near Wilsey where they were seen in 1939 and 1941.

September 22, 1955. One scissortail seen perching on the telephone wire near my old home and another seen flying across a road four miles away.—MRS. HENRY ADAMS, 4227 Holdredge St., Lincoln, Nebraska, May 1, 1956.

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Members are requested to submit papers, notes, and news to the Editor as promptly as possible. Please note that this issue is a composite summer and fall issue; insufficient material made this necessary. We can achieve punctual publication and efficient use of our limited printing budget only when an adequate backlog of copy is on hand. Factual information on birds in Kansas, with dates, localities, and observers, is earnestly solicited from all members.—H. B. T.

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Officers and members of the Kansas Ornithological Society gratefully acknowledge their debt to Dr. Maurice F. Baker for his recent service to the Society as Editor of the K.O.S. Bulletin. Dr. Baker reports that he is enjoying his new position in Alabama; we send him our best wishes for the future.

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