



The Official Newsletter
of the
Kansas Ornithological Society

The Horned Lark

Box 36, Nekoma, Kansas 67559

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ATTENTION LIBRARIANS - VOLUME ERROR

A typographical error in the heading of the last newsletter probably went unnoticed by the regular membership but created bedlam in libraries around the world. Volume 16 of The Horned Lark had only had two issues, March 1989 and August 1989. Volume 17 began with the December 1989 issue (which was No. 3) and will continue in sequence through 1990. Volume 17, Numbers 1 and 2 do not exist.

KANSAS RARE-BIRD-ALERT 913-329-4499

The Kansas RBA has moved to Nekoma and is being operated by Scott and Diane Seltman. Marvin Schwilling ran the hotline from its initiation in June of 1984 and continued its operation until February of this year. Marvin did a great job and deserves many thanks from all the state's birders.

The KOS Hotline had always been financed through the KOS treasury with occasional donations being given towards its operation by a few individuals. At the Winter Board Meeting it was suggested that a new operating fund be created and that donations be solicited from the most frequent users of the hotline. The idea was approved by the board and in late February fifty letters were sent out to some of our state's more active birders. The response was fantastic with over \$350 collected in just a few weeks. With the money collected so far the club purchased a new high quality answering machine which should improve the sound quality of the phone message and will allow unlimited message lengths. The old machines would only allow a maximum message length of three minutes which meant that directions and descriptions of rare birds seen had to be quite brief. Now, if a Jacana, a White-tailed Tropicbird and a Ross' Gull are all seen in Kansas the same weekend, detailed directions can be given for finding each of them. (Perhaps directions to counseling centers as well!)

Here are a few helpful bits of information on how the Rare-Bird-Alert works and how it is operated: Users of the hotline leave their messages after the beep just as on any regular answering machine. Frequent callers who want to leave a message without listening to the tape can push #5 on their touch-tone phones. This stops the outgoing message and immediately begins the record mode. All incoming messages are entered into a personal computer and the outgoing messages are usually read directly from the computer printouts. Updates will be made as often as necessary, even more than once a day if the situation

warrants. All significant sightings will be mentioned if time allows but rare birds will always be given top priority. Rarities will be featured on the tape for several days after they are last seen but even the best birds will be dropped if not reported for a full week. If you have reported a good bird that does not make the tape please bring it to my attention. Machines and people have both been known to malfunction.

The RBA fund has enough money to meet all current expenses as well as those for the next few months. However, donations for future bills are still being accepted and will be held for that purpose. Just write a check to KOS with a note that it is for the RBA and mail to: Rose Fritz, 1816 Cypress Lane, Newton, KS 67114.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Beginning with the next issue, The Horned Lark will have a new editor. Don Vannoy of Wichita has recently taken early retirement from his accounting profession and has enough free time to take on this job. Don and his wife Fran have been avid birders for about twenty years and have taken many birding trips here in Kansas and throughout the United States and Canada. In the future all materials for publication should be sent to: Don Vannoy, 2458 Coolidge, Wichita, KS 67204.

I have enjoyed being the editor these last three years. It is a challenging job, actually a little too challenging at times. Unfortunately, the traditional publication dates for the newsletter often conflicted directly with the seasonal demands of farming and ranching. That is one of the reasons that you have received no June issue for two years. I intend to continue writing the seasonal bird reports for The Horned Lark, a job that ties in directly with my new duties as RBA operator. Good Luck to Don and Thanks to those who helped me as editor.

Scott Seltman

BIRD KANSAS! / May 18-26, 1990

John Zimmerman will lead a nine day birding trip through Kansas on the above dates. The itinerary includes: Konza Prairie, Perry Lake, Clinton Lake, Ft. Leavenworth, Hillsdale Lake, Marais des Cygnes WMA, Dingus Natural Area, Neosho WMA, Schermerhorn Park, Elk City Lake, Barber-Comanche counties, McCoid Lake, Cimarron National Grasslands, Lake Scott, Cedar Bluff Reservoir, Cheyenne Bottoms WMA, Quivira NWR, Wilson Lake, Waconda Lake, Milford Lake, and points in between. The trip will depart from and return to Manhattan. Travel will be by university van, with camping (sometimes primitive) and food for an estimated cost of \$150/ person. Group size is limited to 10. For information contact: J.L. Zimmerman, Division of Biology, Ackert Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506.

MIST NETTING ALONG MISSOURI RIVER / May 19, 1990

John Schukman and Galen Pittman plan to set up a series of mist-nets along the banks of the Missouri River at the Weston Bend area of Ft. Leavenworth on May 19. The nets will be put up in the narrow strip of vegetation that is between the river bank and the levee. This area is featured on pages 96-99 of Zimmerman and Patti's Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri. Persons wishing to help or observe can call Galen at 913-842-7105 or John Schukman at 913-727-5141.

FALL ROUNDUP/ August through November 1989/ by Scott Seltman

WOW! The fall season started off with a bang in the first week of August and birders with a taste for rarities had a full plate until the last day of November. It was a season that saw the addition of two new species to the state checklist and unprecented numbers of several other species invading the west. As is often the case in autumn, the majority of the good birds were seen in the southwestern corner of the state.

The August excitement came from the north end of Tuttle Creek with the report of an adult Black-shouldered Kite first seen by Gary Radke on the 6th. Over the next several days a steady stream of birdwatchers made several additional discoveries. First a second kite was found, obviously the mate of the original bird. Then the female kite was seen sitting on a nest. Eggs were hatched about August 20 and during the next two weeks the adults were seen feeding the young. Unfortunately, on September 8 a severe thunderstorm destroyed the nest and the young were presumably killed. The adults disappeared a day or two later.

Birders visiting the area this spring and summer should keep an eye out for these kites. Like many raptors Black-shouldered Kites often return to the same locality to nest year after year and the partial success of this pair might inspire them to come back this year. After the Tuttle Creek sighting another bird came to light. It was seen near Mound City in Linn County in mid-July by Don George. Don watched the kite devour a rodent. In the spring of 1989 one bird was reported from Cheyenne Bottoms but details are not known (at least by your editor). Tom and Sara Shane photographed a mystery raptor in southern Gray County in June of 1988. The slide has not yet been positively identified but appears to me to be a Black-shouldered Kite. The Black-shouldered Kite has been seen in all of the states surrounding Kansas except Colorado and has wandered north to both Dakotas and to Minnesota. The Texas population is apparently increasing and kites are nesting in southern Oklahoma. Kansans can certainly expect this bird in our state again and it could conceivably become a regular nester.

As remarkable as the kite event was, it was thoroughly eclipsed during September, October, and November by the most remarkable invasion of western and southwestern birds ever recorded in Kansas. On Labor Day weekend about 15 birders traveled to Morton County expecting great things. About the only birds of interest seen that weekend were a single Black-capped Chickadee (rarer than Mountain Chickadees in Morton County) and an unusually high number of Red-breasted Nuthatches, a very disappointing showing for what should have been one of the better migration weeks of the year. So it was with a real sense of reluctance that the Seltmans and Mark Corder returned to Morton County two weeks later.

We drove straight to the Wilburton Crossing of the Cimarron and got out of our cars. Almost the first birds we saw were a group of three dark jays flying across the road. We finally caught up with them on foot and confirmed that they were Scrub Jays. A short time later we were at the Boy Scout Area and saw a flock of 20+ dark jays flying downriver. Most of these birds disappeared but we did confirm that at least five or so were definitely Scrubs. At the Boy Scout Area we also saw a flock of ten or twenty finches flying over. I joked that they sounded like Lesser Goldfinches. A few moments later Diane looked up to see a Lewis' Woodpecker flying east high overhead. At the stock tank below the sand bluff we were temporarily distracted by a Chestnut-sided Warbler. A few hours later two little finches flushed from the side of the road about a mile east of Middle Springs. This time the black wings with prominent white windows were unmistakable as the pair zipped past the windshield. They disappeared but Mark found a small flock of goldfinches just minutes later about a half-mile away at the waterfowl ponds. They were indeed Lesser Goldfinches.

The Seltmans returned to Morton County on September 23 but could find no jays at all. We did hear several Lesser Goldfinches flying by but were unable to study them with our binoculars. A month passed and on October 21, the Seltmans, Greg Griffiths and Lloyd Moore returned to look for Scrub Jays. We found 15 at six different locations in Morton County. More importantly, while walking along the Cimarron about a mile east of the Boy Scout Area three Steller's Jays flew past! This was apparently the first time multiple Steller's Jays had ever been recorded in Kansas. Late in the day we found two more about two miles downstream. Other good birds for the day included a Mountain Chickadee, 100 Mountain Bluebirds and 2 Northern Shrikes. Two Canyon Towhees and 2 Rufous-crowned Sparrows found the week before by Sebastian Patti and Mike Rader were also seen on October 21.

The Steller's Jays created considerable excitement among the state's avid birders and the next weekend several people made the trip to Morton County once again. Max Thompson and Sebastian Patti not only got their Steller's Jay but found another new species as well. While birding at the Cimarron Grasslands Work Station on Saturday, October 28 they heard a loud chip note. It proved to be Kansas' first definitive Pyrrhuloxia. Over the next two weeks a good number of birders traveled to Morton County to see this bird. At times the Pyrrhuloxia was very difficult to observe as it spent much of its time hiding in the center of the numerous junipers, but at other times it was remarkably tame. Apparently all who went looking eventually saw the bird. It is not known at present when the Pyrrhuloxia was last seen alive, but a pile of feathers was found in late December at the Work Station. Colorado added Pyrrhuloxia to its state checklist on December 17, when a female bird quite similar to ours was found by Mark Janos and Kendall Knaus about 3 miles southeast of Holly and about a mile west of the Kansas border. These two sightings were obviously related.

By early November Scrub and Steller's Jays had spread throughout southwest Kansas. On November 4 a Steller's Jay was seen hopping across Main Street in downtown Hugoton. One bird made it to Satanta where it spent the entire winter. Scrub Jays fanned out in small flocks and were seen in Morton, Stevens, Seward and Haskell counties through November. Eventually during December some of these jays arrived in Hamilton and Finney counties. Meanwhile Mountain Chickadees also invaded the state with reports from Morton, Stevens, Seward and Kearny counties. During the winter months they strayed to Garden City and Scott State Lake. Black-capped Chickadees remained in Morton County all fall with as many as three at a time being seen at the North Fork of the Cimarron. Evening Grosbeaks also invaded, apparently from the Rockies, and were incredibly abundant in some western towns by the end of November. Other birds of note seen in Morton County in November included Long-billed Curlew (at Nov. 11 surely the latest state record), White-breasted Nuthatch (many), Pine Warbler, Northern Cardinal (10+), Cassin's Sparrow (latest record for Central Plains?), Smith's Longspur (first county record), Cassin's Finch and Red Crossbill.

It is likely that some of these birds were found simply because coverage of certain areas was very high. But for several species, (Steller's Jay, Scrub Jay, Mountain Chickadee and Lesser Goldfinch), the numbers of birds seen and the scope of their invasion had no precedent in Kansas ornithological history. Whenever there is any sort of avian invasion the natural reaction is to assume that the invading individuals are from the nearest populations of each species. But early reports from Arizona and New Mexico suggest several species, especially Steller's Jay, were at locations and elevations that were without precedent in those states as well. This means that there must have been either a population explosion or a food crop failure somewhere, perhaps on the Colorado Plateau. The western jay invasion was even more dramatic in southern Colorado and at Black Mesa Oklahoma. The Christmas Bird Count at Kenton tallied 86 Scrub Jays, about 60 more than normal. The count also recorded 57 Steller's Jays up from a previous record high of one. It will be interesting to see

what American Birds will make of this invasion. A national publication is obviously required to give us "The Big Picture."

Other great birds were seen throughout the state this fall but no real patterns of occurrence are evident. Many birds took advantage of the mild, stormless periods of October and November to linger somewhat longer than normal in Kansas. A few of these birds stayed extremely late and their dates are underlined below. The autumn weather was pleasant for the most part but also very dry. November turned out to be the driest November on record for the State of Kansas with a few reporting stations recording trace amounts of precipitation and all others recording none at all.

Bird records for the winter months, December through February, should be mailed to Nekoma by May 1st. All of the following records are subject to review by the KOS Bird Records Committee.

BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS/ August through November 1989

Pacific Loon	1 on Wilson	MR	11-07-89	Russell
Common Loon	5 on Lake Wabaunsee	DLS	11-11-89	Wabaunsee
Western Grebe	1 on Cedar Bluff	LM,MM,SP,MR	10-14-89	Trego
Western Grebe	1 on Coldwater Lake	SP,MT	10-27-89	Comanche
Anhinga	1 n. Belle Plaine	R&MW	9-16-89	Cowley
(This bird was flapping and gliding, like anhingas but unlike Double-crested Cormorants. It had long thin wings, long tail, pointed bill.)				
Great Egret	1 late bird Harvey East	PJ	<u>10-27-89</u>	Harvey
Cattle Egret	1 late bird State Lake	DG	11-13-89	Ottawa
White-faced Ibis	1 flying over Sim Park	PJ	9-10-89	Sedgwick
White-faced Ibis	1 at Perry WMA	DLS	9-21-89	Jefferson
Tundra Swan	5 on Wilson	MR	11-17-89	Russell
Tundra Swan	2 on Wilson	MR	11-29-89	Russell
Ross' Goose	<u>38</u> on Lake McKinney	DS,SS	11-12-89	Kearny
Greater Scaup	1 photographed	TSh,SSh	11-05-89	Scott
Oldsquaw	1 on Wilson	MR	11-07-89	Russell
Oldsquaw	1 on Wilson	MR	11-16-89	Russell
Black Scoter	1 at Liberal	MM,GP,SP	11-11-89	Seward
Surf Scoter	1 at Liberal	SP,MT	10-27-89	Seward
	still present	MM,GP,SP	11-11-89	Seward
White-winged Scoter	1 at Liberal	MM,GP,SP	11-11-89	Seward
<u>Black-shouldered Kite</u>	1 bird discovered	GR	8-06-89	Pottawat.
	confirmed	TC	8-06-89	"
	bird sitting on nest		8-12-89	"
	2 young being fed	TSh,SSh	8-27-89	"
Bald Eagle	1 marked bird	Wichita Aud.	9-24-89	Barton
(This eagle with a patagial wing marker was confirmed as one injured in n. Minnesota in 1987 and released from a rehabilitation center in 1988.)				
Northern Goshawk	1 imm. just w. Moscow	DS,SS	9-17-89	Stevens
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	DR	9-07-89	Pottawat.
(This bird was seen flying south along the east side of Tuttle Creek Res.)				
Golden Eagle	1 imm. along Smoky Hill	DLS,BLS	11-26-89	Geary
Peregrine Falcon	1 at CB	KB,JH,MS	10-04-89	Barton
Peregrine Falcon	1 over Wichita	PJ	10-10-89	Sedgwick
Sora	2 along Clinton shore	DG	10-08-89	Douglas
Common Moorhen	pair with four young	MM,m.ob.	9-02-89	Barton
Whooping Crane	2 adults with Sandhills	DS,SS	11-10-89	Pawnee
Black-bellied Plover	3 at Wilson	MR	11-07-89	Russell
Lesser Golden Plover	300+ at Quivira	PJ	10-01-89	Stafford
Piping Plover	1 at Q	Wichita Aud.	9-24-89	Stafford
Greater Yellowlegs	1 late bird	DLS	11-19-89	Lyon
Long-billed Curlew	1 incredibly late bird	MM,GP,SP	<u>11-11-89</u>	Morton

