

Kansas Ornithological Society

BULLETIN

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 21

December, 1970

No. 4

GRUIFORM BIRDS OF CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

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The following is our second account of the birds of Cheyenne Bottoms, Barton County, Kansas,¹ the first having included charadriiform species (see *Kans. Orn. Soc. Bull.*, 20:9-13, 17-24, 1969). The gruiform birds included here are the cranes, rails, gallinules, and coots.

Most of the 10 gruiform species recorded for Kansas occur at Cheyenne Bottoms. The Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*), a species rare to Kansas generally, has not yet been reported there. The Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) reportedly has been seen at Cheyenne Bottoms by other observers, but these sight records are vague. We place this species in the hypothetical category in lieu of a specimen.

Of all the bird species at Cheyenne Bottoms, the rails and gallinules are the most difficult to appraise because of their retiring and elusive habits. No attempt was made to census their populations, though such studies would be highly desirable. In roughly estimating their densities, we use the standard terms abundant, common, uncommon, and rare (see charadriiform account).

Breeding records, based on nests or small young, cover a span from at least mid-May through mid-August. All species known to breed at Cheyenne Bottoms are marked with an asterisk in the list below.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

Grus americana (Linnaeus): Whooping Crane

Irregular, rare transient. Recorded only in October: 1961 (one bird remained in area for more than a week but precise October dates not recorded); 5 October 1968 (two birds in Pool 2 observed by L. O. Nossaman; 7 October 1968 (one bird in Pool 2 observed by H. L. Lichter, E. F. Martinez, F. R. Palmer, and Schwilling); 8 October 1968 (one bird north of Pool 2 observed by E. F. Martinez).

Remarks.—Presumably these rare birds may at times visit or pass close to Cheyenne Bottoms on their northward flights, since there are spring records for other parts of Kansas.

Grus canadensis (Linnaeus): Sandhill Crane

Regular, common to abundant transient; rare in winter. Extreme dates of northward migration 26 February and 13 April; most numerous 26 February-21 March; largest daily counts: 21 March 1962 (3,000 birds); 6 March 1963 (3,000 birds); 15 March 1963 (1,200 birds); 16-19 March 1966 (thousands each date); 3 March 1967 (thousands); 26 February 1969 (2,000 birds). Extreme dates of southward

¹ Acknowledgments.—Kansas State Teachers College, Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, and the University of Oklahoma (National Institutes of Health, AI 05232-01) contributed financial support to the project. Many persons assisted in various ways, but we are most grateful to Charles A. Ely, Richard F. Johnston, Edmund F. Martinez, and Merrill G. McHenry.

migration 6 September and 16 December; most numerous 20 September–20 November; largest daily counts: 20 November 1964 (460 birds); 7 October 1965 (375 birds); 17 October 1969 (thousands). One winter record: 2 January 1969 (one bird).

Remarks.—According to Buller (1967), the races *G. c. canadensis* and *G. c. tabida* may migrate through central Kansas in about equal numbers.

**Rallus elegans* Audubon: King Rail

Regular, uncommon to common summer resident; transient status unknown. Nests on dry ground near marsh or in rushes over water. Recorded 21 March–19 October; most numerous 12 May–30 September. Eggs recorded 23 May–27 June. Newly hatched young recorded 6 June–11 July.

Remarks.—1968 breeding population estimated by Schwilling to be at least 50 pairs.

**Rallus limicola* Vieillot: Virginia Rail

Regular, abundant transient and common summer resident. Nests in rushes over water. Recorded 21 March–15 October; most numerous 19 July–30 September. Eggs recorded 7 June–13 July.

Remarks.—A nest with six eggs found by R. Zuvanich in Pool 4 on 7 June 1963 was the second nesting of the species recorded for Kansas (Zuvanich and McHenry, 1964).

**Porzana carolina* (Linnaeus): Sora

Regular, abundant transient; apparently irregular, uncommon to abundant summer resident. Recorded 27 April–19 October; most numerous 19 July–30 September. Three nesting records to date: in 1967, E. F. Martinez found a nest with four eggs in a wet, grassy area east of Pool 4 on 20 July (three newly hatched young found dead in this nest on 12 August were preserved as specimens—Kansas State Teachers College nos. B1422, B1423, B1424). A nest with five eggs was found in the same area that year by Schwilling on 25 July and another with nine eggs by Martinez on 6 August.

Remarks.—Excessive rainfall in mid-July of 1967 raised the water levels of the pools more than 30 inches and flooded several thousand acres of grassland near by. Soras moved into this flooded grassland habitat later in July when thousands of singing males could be heard. Schwilling believed that many of these birds nested then.

**Laterallus jamaicensis* (Gmelin): Black Rail

Status largely unknown; summer resident some years. Nests in spike rushes over shallow water. Recorded 6 June–6 July. Three nesting records to date: in 1963, Parmelee found a nest with two eggs at outer edge of Pool 4 on 20 June (nest destroyed by predator before completion of clutch); another found by him in same area had seven eggs on 25 June and eight eggs on 27 June. A nest found by J. Nilsen in the same area that year had six eggs on 2 July and eight eggs on 6 July.

Remarks.—According to Tordoff (1956), the only nesting records for Kansas date back to the past century: nest with eight eggs, Riley Co., June 1880; nest with nine eggs, Finney Co., 6 June 1889. Johnston (1964) includes Meade and Franklin counties within the breeding range for Kansas on the basis of birds taken in the breeding season.

**Gallinula chloropus* (Linnaeus): Common Gallinule

Regular, uncommon to common summer resident; transient status unknown. Nests in rushes over water. Recorded 6 April–9 October; most numerous 15 May–1 October. Eggs recorded 4 June–10 July. Newly hatched young recorded 13 June–12 August.

Remarks.—A laying female collected 18 June 1961 was the first breeding record for Cheyenne Bottoms (Parmelee, 1961). A good number of nests have since been found, indicating that the birds may be more common than previously believed. The birds are not often seen from the dike roads and are therefore largely overlooked.

**Fulica americana* Gmelin: American Coot

Regular, abundant transient; regular, uncommon to abundant summer resident; no January records to date. Nests in rushes over water. Recorded 7 February–16 December; most numerous 28 March–5 December. Eggs recorded 19 May–18 July. Newly hatched young recorded 25 May–17 July (Ely found a nest with ten eggs, several pipped, and three newly hatched chicks on 25 May 1962, indicating early egg laying).

Remarks.—This usually abundant and conspicuous species may be decidedly uncommon some summers.

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BOOK REVIEWS

An eagle to the sky. Frances Hamerstrom. 1970. The Iowa State University Press (142 Press Building, Ames, Iowa 50010). 142 pp. + 40 pen and ink drawings by Deann De Le Ronde and 22 photographs. Price \$4.95.

This is the most enjoyable bird book that I have read in a long time. The book reflects Mrs. Hamerstrom's deep affection for and understanding of wild animals especially raptors. She is a keen observer of nature and relates her experiences in a popular style that makes fascinating reading for readers of all ages while retaining scientific accuracy.

Part I describes attempts to mate Chrys, a captive female, in hopes of breeding Golden Eagles in captivity. Attempts over a four year period were unsuccessful but the experience gained suggests that future attempts will be successful. After one male died and a second proved unacceptable to Chrys, artificial insemination was attempted but again without success. Descriptions of these experiments make fascinating reading and one marvels at the patience and perseverance of Mrs. Hamerstrom. The wealth of data collected will be of special interest to those interested in the nesting biology of raptors.

Part II describes her experiences in rehabilitating a captive Golden Eagle for later release in the wild. Nancy was heavily tick infested and in poor health when taken from the nest as an eaglet and was in heavy molt and poor physical condition when received by Mrs. Hamerstrom. During the next year Nancy was conditioned and learned to fly and then was trained to hunt and was finally released in Wyoming.

Numerous anecdotes (both sad and humorous) are related and it is very obvious that Mrs. Hamerstrom and her eagles share a rare relationship.

The reader develops a greater sympathy for the plight of eagles and other endangered wildlife and a greater insight into the extent of our loss if this and other magnificent species are allowed to become extinct. I recommend this book for everyone interested in nature and conservation. C. A. ELY.

The storm petrel and the owl of Athena. 1970. Louis J. Halle. Princeton University Press (Princeton, New Jersey 08540). 268 pp. + over 60 sketches by the author. Price \$7.50.

This is more than a bird book—it is a book of “birds and men.” The author has written extensively on international affairs and political philosophy and in this book combines ideas from those areas with observations of birds, both from personal experience and the literature. Mr. Halle relates much of his philosophy on man and nature, his style is pleasant reading and his comments merit reading and thought.

Part I deals with seabirds, his admitted first love, and is based on personal observations of breeding seabirds on the Shetland Islands in 1968. Seven chapters are devoted to storm petrels and other seabirds and a considerable amount of useful information is included. The author sees birds in global terms and he discusses a broad series of topics related to seabirds. In Chapter 8 he discusses past, present and future relationships of birds and man and concludes that man has a responsibility to help wildlife species find places for themselves in the modern world. Part I ends with a thought-provoking epilogue and a plea for the reverence of life and beauty which has been the result of millions of years of evolution.

Part II is a series of 10 essays on the general topic of birds and man. These essays skillfully combine bird-watching and philosophy and are very worth-while. In “The Water Rail” he presents anecdotes concerning birds, men and boundaries. On page 151 he states, “If mankind inhabited a land bounded by a mountain range beyond which no one had ever seen, there still would be men to describe the landscape on the other side. And we would believe them rather than bear the burden of recognized ignorance.” In “The Owl of Athena” the author visits the ruins of ancient Athens and combines bird-watching with a review of the events that occurred at that spot. The essays are followed by an epilogue in which Mr. Halle discusses man, God and nature. He closes with these lines “I need hardly say that the dual view of the world and man’s mission in it gives rise to the hope of a day when God’s perfection will no longer be marred.” C. A. ELY.

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Published 23 December 1970