

# Kansas Ornithological Society

## BULLETIN

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**Curlew Sandpiper in Kansas.**—At 1900 hours on 3 August 1972, I observed a medium-sized shorebird in Pool 2 at the Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area. It had a decurved bill, brown back and head, rusty breast, light belly and white wing stripe (visible in flight). These field marks did not match closely the descriptions of any species in available field guides. Consequently, next morning, I conferred with Marvin Schwilling before again seeking what we decided might be a Dunlin (*Erolia alpina*) in very unusual plumage. The bird was soon found in the same vicinity as the evening before but 15 minutes later when I returned with Schwilling the bird was gone. At 1600 hours I found the bird about 100 yards from the original location and this time the bird remained until I returned with Marvin Schwilling who collected the bird.

We examined our "Dunlin" and concluded that we had a Curlew Sandpiper (*Erolia ferruginea*), an Old World species casually recorded from the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts but to our knowledge not taken previously in the interior United States. I then showed the specimen to Charles A. Ely who, after checking various shorebird references and technical keys, concurred with our identification. Final confirmation was made (at the Grand Forks A. O. U. meeting) by Mrs. Roxie C. Laybourne, Chandler S. Robbins, and Richard L. Zusi.

The specimen (CAE 4113) is now at Fort Hays Kansas State College (FHKSC 2585). It was an adult female (ovary  $7 \times 4$  mm., granular) undergoing heavy molt, especially on the head and neck. It is in transitional plumage but retains rusty breeding plumage on much of the upper breast. The bird was very fat, weighing 71.5 gms. The bill was black, the irides brown and the legs and feet grayish-black.

During the time that I observed the bird its habitat preference and behavior were similar to that of a Dunlin. It seemed to prefer the margin between shore and the shallow water punctuated by clumps of sedge. It spent more time at the margin or well up on the shore than it did completely in the water.

Palmer (*in* Shorebirds of North America, Viking Press, New York, p. 228, 1967) commented that though most North American records are coastal, the species "might turn up almost anywhere." There are two previous sightings of Curlew Sandpipers at Cheyenne Bottoms by Edmund F. Martinez. The first, on 8 August 1969 was a single bird in transitional plumage; the second, a single in breeding plumage, was on 15 May 1971. STAN SENNER, R. R. #2, Newton, Kansas 67114.

**Arctic Loon taken at Wilson Reservoir.**—On 19 March 1972 Kenneth Morgan, Great Bend, Kansas, brought me a small loon that proved to be an Arctic Loon *Gavia arctica pacifica*. The bird had been shot by a duck hunter at Wilson Reservoir in Russell County, Kansas. The exact day the bird was shot is not known but was in late October 1970. It had been stored in his deep freeze since that time. According to Mr. Morgan the bird was one of a group of six that were in relatively shallow water in the upper end of the reservoir.

The loon was taken to Dr. Charles A. Ely, Fort Hays Kansas State College, and prepared into a museum skin (CAE 4085). It was later sent to Dr. George M. Sutton, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, who further verified identification. The specimen is now at Fort Hays Kansas State College (FHKSC 2559).

The bird is a female with ovary  $8 \times 4$  mm. and is in juvenal plumage (with

conspicuous light gray tips to the dark dorsal feathers). Measurements are: flattened wing—291 mm.; culmen (from feathers)—46; tarsus—73.

The Arctic Loon breeds in the western Arctic and winters offshore along the Pacific Coast; apparently accidental (or overlooked) in the interior United States. There are recent records from Colorado (Aud. Field Notes, 20:447, 1966) and Missouri (Easterla and Lawhon, Auk, 88: 175, 1971); apparently none from Oklahoma and Nebraska.

The only reported Kansas sight records are single birds at the River Pond, Tuttle Creek Reservoir, Riley County by L. K. Edmunds on 13 November 1965 and 23 October 1966. MARVIN D. SCHWILLING, *Route 1, Great Bend, Kansas 67530*.

**Brown Towhee—a species new to Kansas.**—In late afternoon of 10 June 1972 while birding along the old bluffs of the Cimarron River, 7 miles north and 2½ miles west of Elkhart, Morton County, I was attracted by a metallic “peenk” note not unlike that of an Indigo Bunting. Upon closer investigation, I saw a generally brown bird with a lighter, splotchy throat, a conical seed-eating bill and a long, rounded tail. I decided from these field marks that the bird was a Brown Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*). It was soon joined by a second individual. As the birds flew away from me I also noted that they pumped their tails in typical towhee fashion, and that their caps and tails were a darker brown color than the rest of the body; the undertail coverts were of a buffy straw color.

I immediately called Mrs. Elizabeth Cole, who accompanied me on the trip, to corroborate my identification. After observing the birds well and noting all field marks, she also was confident they were Brown Towhees. The bird seemed *much* darker than various field guide illustrations of the Brown Towhee, but in view of the many races recognized, a great deal of individual variation can probably be expected. Next morning I succeeded in obtaining two photographs of one individual. Unfortunately, even with a 400 mm. lens the resulting images are too small and indistinct for publication.

Both Mrs. Cole and I have observed this species in other parts of the country and are familiar with its preferred habitats. We saw one individual carrying what appeared to be nesting material (dried grass) and this together with the presence of two birds at this season suggests possible nesting in the area. No nest was found, but we feel strongly that collecting should be avoided at this time since the species might become a regular breeder in Kansas.

Presence of the Brown Towhee in southwestern Kansas is not unexpected. The species breeds regularly in the mesa country of western Cimarron County, Oklahoma (Sutton, *Birds of Oklahoma*, Norman, p. 602, 1967) and is a common breeding bird in Baca County, Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach, *The birds of Colorado*, Denver, p. 796, 1965). The nearest reported breeding locality is near the Cimarron River north of Boise City (Oklahoma) only 35 miles (airline) from the Kansas locality. There is also one record from Eva, Texas County (Oklahoma) due south of Elkhart (Sutton, *op. cit.*). SEBASTIAN T. PATTI, *6528 Wenonga Terrace, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66208*.

**Two cowbird hosts new to Kansas.**—While preparing a study of the birds of Shawnee County, Kansas, I discovered two unusual records of nests parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). Both nests represent species previously unrecorded as cowbird hosts in Kansas by Johnston (*A directory to the birds of Kansas*, Univ. Kans. Mus. Nat. Hist., Misc. Publ., 41:52–53, 1965).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*): A nest found in Shawnee County on 20 June 1962 by T. W. Nelson held 1 cuckoo egg and 1 cowbird egg. On 25 June the nest was empty. Friedmann (Host relations of the parasitic cowbirds, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull., 233:48, 1963 and Auk, 88:241–242, 1971) reports only five instances of parasitism of this species (all east of the Mississippi River) and hence this record may be regarded as very unusual.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*): L. P. Dittmore built and maintained hundreds of bluebird nest boxes in and around Shawnee County and kept records of the nesting activity in each box. These records include 290 cases of House Sparrows nesting in boxes in Shawnee County. One such box contained an empty Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) nest on 23 June 1964, which held 1 cowbird egg on 28

June. This egg was then probably removed by Dittmore as it was his usual policy to do so. On 16 July the nest held 1 House Sparrow egg and 1 cowbird egg. It is possible the cowbird egg was in the nest prior to its occupation by the sparrows; if so, the House Sparrow was not the intended host. Dittmore then destroyed the nest and contents. Friedmann (1963:125; 1971:246) shows the House Sparrow to be only a rare host of the cowbird and he cites but few records. Woods<sup>1</sup>, 615 W. 17th, Topeka, Kansas 66612.

### Field Notes—How To

To keep good bird records is a fairly simple matter. In fact, so simple I expected every serious amateur kept good notes. But such is not the case! In preparing an extensive local distributional study recently, I found observers had notes of all calibers, and some even had no notes. Several people asked me how to keep notes—here are some suggestions.

Your notes will be worthwhile to someone some day—but only if they include *basic data*. One field observer in my study area accumulated a vast monument of records, all nearly valueless. He neglected basic data—that is, he failed to record the exact *date and location* of birds he saw. Such vague records are of little help to anyone. Similarly, “year lists” without basic data are for yourself, no one else. And, unless you have a reputation of being very familiar with the particular species, your report of a rare bird should be accompanied by a thorough description.

From those who do not keep notes I have heard the attitude: “What I see is not that unusual, is not worth recording.” That attitude is a sorry one. I sometimes wonder if such people are overwhelmed by formidable professional attitudes in ornithology. The fact is, some non-competitors have accomplished much. The most important set of records in my study area came from a quiet bird watcher whom I little suspected had such thorough and well-kept notes. Another “lowly amateur,” Margaret M. Nice, contributed a major milestone in ornithology with her careful studies of the Song Sparrow. Bird life in your back yard can be very significant, depending on your attitude toward it. Every time I go into the field I encounter little understood and poorly published aspects of bird life and distribution. Your notes, if well kept, will be worthwhile.

A wide variety of material can go into notes. Here are some important items: Be sure to record the common birds as well as the uncommon, whether you are home or visiting some new area. Give the exact and correct date. In most states the most useful locality datum is the county—record it with your observations, it can make a big difference to a compiler. It is a good idea to record numbers of birds seen in flocks or all at once, especially if this number seems unusually large, and to note the peaks of migration for each species. The nest data that can be provided by amateurs is especially valuable. The number of eggs, young, and other data, should be recorded, and for all common birds too. Summer and fall are the least-studied seasons; if you get out at these times take your notebook. All rare birds should be carefully described—look closely at the bird, careful note-taking will teach you better observing. When you write down the description of a rare bird don't do it with an open field guide in front of you. It is far better to write a description before you look at a field guide. Don't depend on printed field cards—they don't provide enough room to write notes. Two other points are very important. Write clearly—I am sorry about illegible records I have had to reject. Also, make your notes on the same day you see the birds. This is important—memory is very capricious.

Do your own personal thing. An artist I know puts sketches of birds in his notes. Others add detailed descriptions of bird behavior or plumages. Some notes are kept as diaries, some on filing cards, some as lists in ledgers; the list of variations is long, the ideas all good if they please you and provide others with a useful record. *Good note-taking will enhance your enjoyment and understanding of birds.*

I thank Charles Ely, who as a compiler has faced similar problems, for some of the suggestions used in this paper. THE MAN WHO WALKS IN THE WOODS, 615 W. 17th, Topeka, Kansas 66612.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Sutherland prefers to be known as “The man who walks in the woods” or “woods.”

**A partially albinistic Red-tailed Hawk.**—On 20 November 1971 at 12:15 hours, on Kansas Hgw 7 about one mile north of its intersection with the Kansas Turnpike, in Wyandotte County, Kansas, we sighted a partially albinistic Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*). When first observed the bird was perched near the top of a cottonwood tree and some 10 feet above a normal plumage red-tail. The albino appeared completely white while perched but when it flew we observed that the tail was light red or pink. It appeared quite nervous compared to the other bird (as evidenced by rapid head and body movements) despite the fact we were observing it from a car 80 yards distant and were careful not to make unusual sounds or movements.

The albino seemed to be normal in size for an adult. Lee and Keller (Auk, 68:83, 1953) reported an albino that was extra large and robust for the species. The albino left its perch and soared around within our range of vision for some ten minutes. The normal bird began soaring a few minutes after the albino took flight.

Among the literature references to albino red-tails are two by W. O. Emerson (Nidologist 1:43, 1893 and 1:98, 1897). An excellent photograph of an albino red-tail by G. Ronald Austing, National Audubon Society, is published in "A new dictionary of birds" (edited by A. Landsborough Thompson, McGraw-Hill, N. Y., facing p. 49, 1964). HOWARD FREEMYER and SUE FREEMYER, Box 21, Jayton, Texas 79528.

#### NOTES AND NEWS

This issue of the *Bulletin* was delayed in part by a lack of appropriate manuscripts. Both the *Bulletin* and the *Newsletter* need material for future issues. If you have appropriate material please consider preparing it for publication. Information held in your files is of limited value to other birders. Material of long term importance and dealing with Kansas birds is suitable for the *Bulletin*; material of short term importance, casual observations and random data are more appropriate for the *Newsletter*. If you are hesitant about writing in "scientific jargon" we will help with your manuscripts. If you have any questions about the suitability of material just write one of the Editors. Manuscripts should be sent to the appropriate Editor.

Requests for missing and back issue *Bulletins* should be sent to the K.O.S. Librarian, Mrs. Ruth Fahl, Dyche Reading Room, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66044.

The 50th Annual meeting of the Inland Bird Banding Association held in Hays 22-23 September 1971 was attended by 142 people—about one-third of them K.O.S. members. On the 24th, IBBA members joined the K.O.S. at the Cheyenne Bottoms for their annual fall field trip.

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