

# Kansas Ornithological Society

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### IN MEMORIAM DR. RAYMOND F. MILLER

Ivan L. Boyd

Dr. Raymond F. Miller of Baldwin City, Kansas passed away November 13, 1974 at age 87 after a year of failing health from a heart condition and complications.

Dr. Miller was a Charter Member of the Kansas Ornithological Society and attended the pre-organizational meeting. In the June 1974 *Bulletin*, Dr. Miller is Number 44 in Figure 1, and Number 1 in Figure 2 of the photographs printed on pages 14 and 15.

Dr. Miller served on the Board of Directors in 1964 and served on several committees from time to time. He contributed articles to the *Bulletin* (Vol. 4, p. 11, 1953, "Summer records of Swainson's Hawks.") and presented papers at annual meetings. In recent years he made annual presentations pertaining to his published series, "Biographies of men for whom birds were named." These were given in his own unique, amusing manner, quote, "You purchase the cover and receive the printed material free." They became known fondly as "The Miller Booklets" with each annual addition being welcomed with much anticipation. He was in the process of and looking forward to the possibility of having the seven booklets published in book form when failing health forced him to forgo his project.

He became interested in bird study as a young man and pursued it the remainder of his life. He shared his hobby while he was Physics Professor at the College of Emporia from 1913-1941, then moved to Baldwin City where he was Head of the Physics Department from 1941-1964. Dr. Miller and I arrived at Baker University the same year. Having a common interest in bird study, we spent much of our spare time together searching new habitats and observing the birds which frequented them. I learned much from Dr. Miller since he (a native Kansan) was more acquainted with the local species than was I. He kept voluminous notes and records. The latter served well for our article, "Migration records of birds in east-central Kansas," for the Kansas Academy of Science in 1947. The reprints became very popular and were widely used by K.O.S. members.

Dr. Miller was considered by his birding colleagues to be quite an expert on the identification of shorebirds, sparrows and hawks. His yard was a bird haven where he made studies of various species. His most recent study, on the Eastern Bluebird, was given as a program at the Baldwin Bird Club last February. For the past few years he reviewed bird books for the Kansas City Star.

Another interest closely associated with his chosen profession as professor of Physics and Astronomy was the building of six reflecting mirrors and three telescopes. Some K.O.S. members may recall his 4-inch telescope being used on

Spring and Fall Field Trips in assisting with identification of waterfowl and shorebirds before the days of the abundant presence of Bausch-Lomb equipment.

Raymond Foster Miller was born February 11, 1887 on a farm 8 miles north of Emporia in Lyon County. When he was seven his family moved to Emporia where he gained his elementary and high school education. He received his B.A. degree from College of Emporia in 1909, the M.A. in Geology from the University of Kansas in 1912 and the Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Iowa in 1923. He attended summer sessions at the University of Wisconsin and Northwestern University, Chicago.

Dr. Miller was a pioneer in the field of radio, distinguishing himself by being the first person in Emporia to have a radio transmitter (1915) with a government license, call letters 9WP. He had been constructing receiver sets the previous two years. He was responsible for the College of Emporia having a transmitter with call letters in 1916, an enviable college record. Dr. Miller qualified as a Commercial Operator in 1924. His article on Radio Communication was in the 1929 Edition of the World Book Encyclopedia. He was Instructor of Civil Aeronautics at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia in 1940-41.

In 1918, on leave of absence from teaching, he was a civilian employee of the United States Navy, acting as a Radio Inspector in Washington, D.C. Here he developed and supervised the installation of the first radio transmitter which would send voice signals as well as code beyond the distance of 25 or 50 miles. These instruments were installed and used on President Wilson's ship, *The George Washington*, and on the Battleship, *the Pennsylvania*, to provide the President and the Fleet Admiral private communication as they crossed the Atlantic Ocean enroute to the historic negotiating meeting which ended World War I.

Dr. Miller's interests were many and he excelled in most of them. Besides his outstanding radio record, he received recognition in college debate, baseball, football and tennis. At College of Emporia he coached winning tennis teams. He played clarinet and bassoon in the college orchestra for 20 years. After retirement he took up piano, a self-taught project. He had an exceptionally fine rock collection gathered on trips as he travelled to all parts of the country.

Dr. Miller was listed in American Men of Science, Who's Who in Kansas and Who's Who in American Education. He was a member of AAAS, AAPT, Sigma Xi, K.A.S., Baker Faculty Club, Lions Club (while living in Emporia) and was a faithful member of the First United Methodist Church of Baldwin. He also belonged to the K.O.S., Baldwin Bird Club and Burroughs Audubon Society.

Dr. Miller was a very unassuming person. Only his closest friends and acquaintances were aware of his scholarliness, his varied talents, his patience, his dry humor, but by all he will be remembered as a kindly, helpful, friendly, Christian gentleman. *Baldwin City, Kansas 66002.*

**Pine Siskin nesting in west-central Kansas.** — The Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*) nests primarily in conifer forests of Canada and the northern United States, southward in the conifer zones of the Rockies and Appalachians. In the central Great Plains it nests irregularly from the Oklahoma Panhandle to southeastern Nebraska and northwestern Iowa.

The earliest published record for Kansas appears to be from Wichita, Sedgwick County on 15 April 1915 (Larrabee, *Wilson Bull.*, 44:116, 1937). Later reports from eastern Kansas are from Lawrence, Douglas County (KU nest cards); Concordia,

Cloud County; Onaga and St. Mary's, Pottawatomie County and Hays, Ellis County (Johnston, *The breeding birds of Kansas*, Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 12: 648, 1964). More recently nesting occurred at WaKeeney, Trego County in 1973 and 1974 (MER) and at Great Bend, Barton County (Ed Martinez, pers. comm.). We suspect that breeding occurs at other stations throughout the state. Only at Hays does it breed regularly and even here numbers fluctuate dramatically from year to year.

Although most recent nestings in the Hays area are associated with plantings or ornamental conifers, nesting may have a much earlier origin. J. A. Allen, the first ornithologist to visit the area (summer 1871), reported what may have been this species (Allen, *Notes of an ornithological reconnaissance in portions of Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah*, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 3: 135, Part 2, 1872). At that time Ellis County was virgin prairie with less than a dozen homesteads so nesting, if it occurred, was most likely in the scattered red cedars along certain streams. The species is not mentioned again until L. D. Wooster and his students reported attempted nesting in 1927, 1928, 1929 (probably), 1932, 1933 and 1939 (Ely, *A history and distributional list of Ellis County, Kansas birds, Fort Hays Studies—n.s., Science Series No. 9*, p. 98, 1971). The quality and quantity of bird records improved greatly after 1958 and appreciable nesting was reported during at least 11 of the next 17 years.

We have observed 126 nests during ten seasons at Hays and have seven additional records of fledged young. The data from individual nests are too fragmentary to justify any detailed analysis, but taken collectively they provide a general picture of siskin nesting at Hays. The situation is very similar to that described for southeastern Nebraska (Swenk, *Wilson Bull.*, 41: 77-92, 1929). We are presenting a summary of our observations in hopes of stimulating further (and systematic) study of the species at the periphery of its breeding range.

In Ellis County siskins arrive in late September or early October and remain throughout the winter in varying numbers. Singing begins in February. In late March pairs separate from the wintering and transient flocks to begin nest building. Large numbers of non-nesting birds are usually present during the early nesting period. The breeding birds are much less conspicuous than the non-breeders and we feel that the former are often overlooked by the casual observer. At this time (March through April) single birds and pairs, if watched carefully, may be observed quietly collecting nest material or nest building. At Hays such birds are remarkably tame. Several call notes are distinctive, especially a high-pitched call given by the female on the nest during the early part of the cycle. We have had most success by following adults carrying nest material, by searching out nest calls and by hearing males feed females on the nest. Non-breeding individuals leave the Hays area by early May; breeding birds as soon as nesting is complete—mid-May if nesting is unsuccessful or by early June if successful fledgling occurs.

Nearly all nests (113 of 119) for which tree species was recorded were in ornamental conifers (55 in pines, 35 in cedars, 23 in spruces) located on the grounds of Fort Hays Kansas State College, Kansas State Experiment Station or in suburban Hays. The low, drooping branches of pines were favorite nest sites in 1961 but after trees were trimmed throughout the campus, birds moved to the outer branches of pines and cedars and into the higher, denser branches of spruces. Overall, the range and means for nests were: pines, 3½ to 35 feet,  $\bar{x}$  13.7; cedars, 5 to 32 feet,  $\bar{x}$  14.4; spruces, 6 to 46 feet,  $\bar{x}$  17.7 feet. In 1963, a year of high siskin density, five nests were found (MER) in the dense growth at the ends of elm

branches which had been pruned the previous year. The remaining nest was seven feet from the ground in a honeysuckle bush on the FHKSC campus.

The time spent searching for nests varied greatly during different years but was most concentrated during 1963, 1970, 1973 and 1974 (all years of high siskin populations) and 93 of the nests were found during these years. The similarity in number of nests found during these years (23, 21, 28 and 21, respectively) suggests that the peak breeding population is probably not over 30 to 35 pairs. Few nests were followed to completion but nesting success is known to have been very low. Many of the early nests were either blown down by high winds or disrupted to the point that adults deserted. On one occasion (18 May 1971) a female was killed and the eggs beneath her crushed when she was hit in the back by a large hailstone during a severe storm.

Cowbird parasitism was considerable in most years. On one occasion (25 April 1963, MER) a siskin was seen to drive a cowbird from a nest and at least 26 of 67 nests (nearly 40 per cent) observed for most of the nesting cycle were parasitized. No young, either cowbirds or siskins, were known to have fledged from a parasitized nest but young cowbirds were raised to at least five days of age. At least 18 non-parasitized nests are known to have fledged young—probably a very conservative number.

Siskins are most likely to breed during seasons when April temperatures are sub-normal (Swenk, *op. cit.*). We observed nest building from 17 March through mid-April with some building as late as early May. Eggs were present as early as 3 April and we saw young by 19 April. Fledgling occurred from 27 April (1961) to 12 June and was usually in early June. The species may even be double-brooded on occasion! In 1966, Rolfs found a nest on 24 March which eventually fledged three young by 1 May. A new nest was begun in the same tree on 2 May and another clutch was laid by 8 May. On the latter day his presence near the nest was protested by five siskins which acted like a family group.

Continued study of this highly erratic but fascinating species should be most productive. *Marvin E. Rolfs, Charles A. Ely, Jerry K. Wilson and Richard A. Hill, Fort Hays Kansas State College, Hays, Kansas 67601.*

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