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LITTLE GULL AT JOHN REDMOND RESERVOIR, COFFEY COUNTY, KANSAS Jacob H. Miller



On 3 November 1974 at about 3:30 p.m., Ross Silcock and I, along with a party of seven other observers, discovered a Little Gull, *Larus minutus*, in the picnic area at the north end of the John Redmond dam in Coffey County, Kansas. The lone bird was first seen sitting on the exposed corner of a flooded picnic table. Examination from about thirty yards revealed a slender, entirely black bill, blackish smudging around the back of the head, and a prominent black spot in the auricular region. The feet and legs were red and seemed short in proportion to body size giving the impression of squattiness. Our curiosity aroused, we flushed the bird which flew by us into the wind at about twenty yards distance. In flight, the most striking feature was the soft charcoal gray underwing linings of the gull's short rounded wings. The pale gray mantle was not marked with black or white. Only a thin white trailing edge marked the upper and lower wing surfaces. The tail was immaculate white. We concluded that the bird was an adult Little Gull in nearly complete winter plumage.

The Little Gull was observed again more extensively and photographed on 4 November 1974 by Jean Schulenberg, Ed Schulenberg, and me at the same location. Although the bird was seen near three or four Bonaparte's Gulls on the previous day, and 12+ on this day, it did not appear to be closely associated with them, only joining them infrequently for feeding or resting. It was obviously smaller than the nearby Bonaparte's Gulls and could easily be picked out of the group at a distance because of the dark under-wing linings. Its flight was tern-like, reminiscent of Bonaparte's or Sabine's Gull. In feeding, the bird repeatedly flew in a wide circular pattern, would hesitate, dip gracefully to the surface and pick its

food from the surface. The bird usually rested on a piling or on the ground after feeding for four or five minutes.

Several attempts were made to find the gull again, but neither the Little Gull nor the Bonaparte's Gulls were seen again after 4 November. It was felt that a change in water level and wind direction may have driven them to another part of the reservoir or completely out of the area.

To our knowledge, this is the first Kansas record for Little Gull, and furthermore, is one of only a few records west of the Mississippi River. We believe that this individual may have followed the Bonaparte's Gulls down from the Great Lakes region where they are reported somewhat more frequently. 301 West 11th, Emporia, Kansas 66801.

STARLINGS FEED ON RIPENING SORGHUM AT CHEYENNE BOTTOMS, KANSAS

W. C. Royall, Jr.

On October 3, 1974, shortly before sunset, I was observing birds at Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area near Great Bend, Kansas. Over 3,000 Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) on their way to roost in the nearby marshes entered a field of ripening grain sorghum. Both species perched on sorghum heads and fed avidly on the green, milk- and dough-stage kernels. With binoculars from inside a car, I saw at least 40 Starlings feeding in this way among the closest birds (15-20 meters away).

In 17 years of observing birds in western farmland, I had never seen Starlings feeding on ripening grain sorghum. Two factors occur to me as possibly contributing to this unusual and heretofore unreported Starling food habit. The 1974 drought may have curtailed supplies of customary Starling foods, but I have no data to support this idea. Second, the hybrid grain sorghum growing in this field may be unusually attractive to Starlings. Green (1973) reports that this hybrid, DeKalb C42y, has the fourth highest (78.9%) digestibility of 41 tested hybrids. It is a non-bird-resistant hybrid with a homozygous yellow endosperm and pericarp. A particularly high level of two amino acids, lysine and threonine, and high oil and low tannin levels make it very palatable and digestible for both livestock and granivorous birds.

DeKalb C42y, first available in 1969, is well adapted to the Central Plains where it is drought resistant and yields well. In 1973, it was grown on about 600,000 acres, mostly in Kansas and Texas (A. Bruce Maunder, DeKalb Ag Research, Inc., pers. comm.). With the introduction and increased acreage of this and other homozygous yellow varieties, ripening sorghum might become a more frequent and widespread item in the Starling's fall diet.

I am grateful to Marvin Schwilling of the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission for his cooperation during my study at Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area.

Literature Cited

Green, V. E., Jr. 1973.

Yield and digestibility of bird resistant and non-bird-resistant grain sorghum. Proc. Soil and Crop Science Society of Florida, Ft. Lauderdale, Nov. 27-29. pp. 13-16.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, Colorado.

A NEW RECORD OF THE VARIED THRUSH FROM KANSAS

Ronnie B. Barkley

A Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) was seen on the Goodland Christmas bird count, 23 December 1974. The sighting was made at the edge of a cottonwood stand along the North Fork of the Smoky Hill River, below an impoundment known as "Smoky Gardens" in southern Sherman County. The first sighting was made at 9:30 a.m. by Miss Mickey Moore as the bird flew from a willow tree to go into the thicket at the edge of the cottonwood stand. The rest of the party saw the bird on the wing as it entered the thicket. The first reactions were that we had seen a Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) or Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). As we approached the thicket and continued our observations, we could see we were wrong. The diagnostic marks which keyed our identification were the orange breast, wing bars, and a very pronounced black breast band. We continued observations and were able to get within ten yards of the bird.

The thrush has been observed on numerous occasions since the original sighting. The last sighting before this paper was written was on 5 April 1975.

Numerous photographs have been taken of the thrush. To document the record, photographs by John Palmquist have been deposited at The University of Kansas Museum of Natural History.

This record of the Varied Thrush is the second record for Kansas. The first record was a specimen taken at Garden City, Finney County, on 18 October 1891 by H. W. Menke (Tordoff. 1956. Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 8(5):339). The whereabouts of this specimen is unknown. 301 W. 8th St., Goodland, KS 67735

The Brown Towhee and Rufous-crowned Sparrow in Morton County.—While conducting the 1975 mid-winter bird count in Morton County, Kansas, several observers noted two species of particular interest. The following accounts refer to sightings made during that count.

Brown Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*).—On 4 January 1975, two individuals were seen at the United States Soil Service Headquarters two and one-half miles north of Elkhart. The birds were in association with ornamental conifers. Observers included JoAnn Garrett, Earl McHugh, Jananne McNitt, Jake Miller, Jean Schulenberg and Ross Silcock. There is one previous report of this species from Kansas, a mid-summer sight record from Morton County, of two individuals which perhaps nested (Patti. 1972. Kansas Orni. Soc. Bull., 23:14). The two sightings were in areas about five miles apart.

Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*).—On 4 January 1975, Earl McHugh, Jake Miller and Ross Silcock found three individuals at the Point-of-Rocks, six and one-half miles north of Elkhart. Later that same afternoon, JoAnn Garrett, Jananne McNitt, Sebastian Patti and Jean Schulenberg found two of the three birds. Two previous Kansas records exist. Grabers found a single bird at Point-of-Rocks on 21 May 1950 (Graber and Graber. 1951. Trans. Kansas Acad. Sci., 54:171.). In addition, there is an older record, that of a specimen taken in 1936, in Schwarz Canyon, Comanche County (Tordoff. 1956. Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 8:351). Sebastian T. Patti, 6528 Wenonga Terrace, Mission Hills, Kansas 66208.

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