

# Kansas Ornithological Society

## BULLETIN

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### POOR-WILL NESTING IN COWLEY COUNTY, KANSAS

David Seibel

I recently observed a Poor-will (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*) nesting approximately one mile south and one and one-half miles east of the south edge of Arkansas City, Cowley County. The nest, on top of a high, rocky plateau on Camp Keema Campfire Girls Camp, was found by a group of Campfire girls during a hike. Rosel Mulkey, a leader of the group, gave the following account of finding the nest: At about 10:15 hours on 12 June 1975 she and the girls she was leading reached the plateau and, upon accidentally flushing the adult Poor-will, noticed its two eggs lying on the bare patch of gravel from which it had flown. Miss Mulkey inspected the eggs and took the girls back to camp. She returned with another group at 13:30 hours and upon flushing the adult from the nest found that one egg had just hatched, with the shell still inside the nest. They watched the chick for some time. After its feathers had completely dried, it hopped and crawled away from the nest a total distance of about four feet. The girls tried to pick it up on a slab of rock to return it to its nest, but the chick was too lively and they finally had to touch it with their hands to return it to the remaining egg. This apparently did not bother the adult, for the chicks were in exactly the same spot when I saw them two days later. The girls left and did not return to the area for several days.

Miss Mulkey contacted me on 14 June. She described the nest in such detail that I suspected it was a Poor-will's even before seeing it. We visited the nest at 15:45 hours that afternoon. Following is an excerpt from my notes for the day:

The nest is located on top of the highest hill in the area, a rocky, grassy plateau about 200 yards above the woods bordering the creek. The slope leading from the creek to the plateau is quite steep, but has terrain otherwise similar to the top of the hill: short, dry prairie grass mingled with wildflowers and occasional scrubby bushes, and interspersed with fair-sized chunks of limestone which approach boulder size on the ridge circling the west edge of the plateau.

The top of the hill is even drier than the slope, its vegetation nearing that of a desert: there are no bushes on the plateau (except along the ridge) and the grass is sparse, mixed with rocks, gravel and cacti; most of the vegetation is under six inches tall. The nest is about 15 feet east of the west ridge (actually, there is no nest whatsoever; the eggs were simply laid on a bare patch of gravel, the nearest vegetation being a small clump of 14-inch tall plants about six inches east of the eggs (which, as I later learned, the chicks sometimes used for shade)—there was not even a slight depression made to hold the eggs).

When I first got to the nest. . . one of the adults was there, but it blended so well with the gravel that I did not notice it until it flew up in front of me (I almost stepped on it before it finally left the nest). Although I only got a brief look at it, I saw it well enough to identify it: it flew floppily and close to the ground; it had rounded wings; it was mostly grayish, with a touch of rust in its primaries; it was a very small goatsucker (no more than seven inches in length); and its long, squarish tail had small white squares in each corner.

The two chicks were huddling motionless in the 'nest', allowing me a very close inspection of them. They were nearly round, were no more than an inch and a half long, and were completely covered with short, fuzzy down, the color of which was a uniform vinaceous—or slightly pinkish-buff. There were small darkish patches on their backs, which I believe were the beginnings of pinfeathers showing from underneath their down. (Rosel told me that these were present on the day they hatched.) Their tiny bills were black, and their eyes, which they could open but which they generally kept nearly closed, were dark brown or blackish. They had no noticeable tail and their wings were mere down-covered stubs.

I never saw the eggs but Rosel described them to me in good detail: they were 'rather small, whitish, completely unspotted eggs; close inspection revealed that they were evenly washed with a creamy beige color.'

My glimpse of the adult, the habitat and construction of the nest, and the description of the eggs (which are, according to every source I checked, unique among North American caprimulgid eggs in their small size and lack of spots or blotches) would be sufficient, I believe, to verify my identification. However, I

returned to the nest several times for further substantiation and for further study of the Poor-will's nesting habits.

On 15 June, Wallace Champeny, my younger brother Kent, and I visited the nest and observed for nearly an hour through a 25 power scope, an adult shading the two chicks. At one time we approached the adult as close as eight feet without disturbing it. The adult sat motionless all the time we were there, with its eyelids open only a slit. We could clearly observe its small size and all other field marks.

On 16 June, Kent and I visited the nest from 9:15 to 10:30 hours with David Lee, a photographer and beginning birder, to photograph the nest. The adult was absent when we arrived and did not return while we were there. David took an excellent black-and-white photograph of the chicks (Figure 1) and several of the habitat. The chicks were huddling motionless, their eyes almost closed, on the gravel where the eggs had been. They were still completely downy and appeared the same size as when I first saw them—about an inch and a half long. I returned to the nest the same afternoon with Mrs. N. H. White, and the chicks were sleeping about a foot apart in the weeds just east of the nest. Again the adult was not seen.



**Figure 1. Nestling Poor-wills near Arkansas City, 16 June 1975. Photo by David Lee.**

I next visited the nest on the afternoon of 17 June fearing that the storm of the previous night (hard rain and winds reportedly up to 70 mph) might have harmed the chicks. However, as I stated in my notes for the day:

... both chicks were apparently fine, for they were sitting together, by an adult, in the original 'nest.' I approached to within three feet of the adult and it made no move whatever, its eyes remaining nearly closed all the while. The chicks, too, ignored me, one of them sleeping and the other opening its eyes and moving around a bit. They are still about the same size as when I first saw them and are still completely covered with down, but pinfeathers are beginning to show not only on their backs but also on their heads (on their crowns and above their eyes) and on their wings.

The adult that I saw today seemed to be considerably smaller than the one I saw on June 15 (the one today appeared to be no more than five inches long) with more white on its breast; much more distinct rusty coloration in its primaries; a darker, almost blackish throat with only small streaks of brown angling down the sides of its mouth; and it seemed, a distinctly longer bill. All of these characteristics were readily visible as it sat on the ground; also I believe that its tail protruded slightly beyond its folded wings, although no white was visible in the edges when the bird was sitting. Its tail was gray (when folded), finely barred at the tip with curved black lines.

As I was backing away from the nest, I apparently moved too suddenly and scared the adult, for it flew

up suddenly and flitted several feet to the next open patch of gravel, where it landed, spread its wings and tail and began quivering its wings, apparently feigning injury. In this display, the rust in its wings stood out startlingly and probably served the same purpose as the rust in a Killdeer's tail: to attract the intruder's attention. Unlike the Killdeer, however, the Poor-will was silent. With its tail fanned, it plainly showed the small but very bright white squares in each corner. These, along with the brighter rust in its wings (as compared to the female that I saw on 15 June), the more extensive white in its breast and its blackish throat make me believe that this was the male Poor-will. It is also interesting to note that this bird did not simply fly away, but instead remained nearby and tried to distract me. Perhaps this is a characteristic of this individual bird or perhaps as the chicks grow older the parents become more protective; I will try to see which is the case as time goes on (the latter was apparently the correct assumption, as I learned the next day). Still another marking that I observed, although probably shared by both adults, is a thin rusty eyering, noticeable only when the bird's eyes are completely open.

\*\*\* I again startled the (adult) Poor-will, which again flew up and flitted close over the ground to another spot a few feet away, this time giving a flight call that was new to me: a soft but excited "whert" given three or four times in rapid succession. The quality of this call was similar to the "whert" of the Swainson's Thrush but was slightly more throaty. I then walked toward its new landing spot and it again took off giving its call notes, this time flying about 25 feet (about half the diameter of the plateau) and dropping to the ground, hidden from me by the grass. Its flight was always close to the ground and very jerky, the bird flying in short spurts and then pausing, dropping down as if ready to land, only to continue on its way again. It seemed to flap its wings in very shallow strokes, spreading its tail often to maintain its balance. I left the hill after the bird's third flight, not wishing to disturb it any more.

I returned to the nest site with David Lee on 18 June, hoping to get pictures of an adult. However, we could find neither adults nor young even though we carefully searched the entire top of the plateau. Since the chicks survived the storm, I doubt that anything happened to them; rather, I believe the adults moved them to a new spot to avoid further intrusion by humans, as Chuck-will's-widows often do. Although I did not see the chicks or adults again it is very likely that the young fledged.

To my knowledge, this is the first record of Poor-wills nesting in the Arkansas City area and in Cowley County. It is not unexpected, however, because the area abounds in suitable habitat and Johnston (A directory to the birds of Kansas, Univ. Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist., Misc. Publ. No. 41, 1965) considered the Poor-will a "common summer resident" in western Kansas, "rare and local in east." There is also a breeding record for Franklin County (Johnston, R. F. The breeding birds of Kansas, Univ. Kans. Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 12:619, 1964). Sutton (Oklahoma Birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1967) cites Oklahoma records "eastward to Washington, Oklahoma, Cleveland and Murray counties," all of which are nearly as far east as Cowley County; Washington is just south of the Kansas state line and east of Cowley. I had previously considered the Poor-will as a "possibly rare, overlooked summer resident" in the Arkansas City area (A directory to the birds of Arkansas City, Kansas, unpubl. ms.). The Poor-will has been recorded in Cowley County only four other times that I know of in the past decade: 3 May 1970, 1 heard, Camp Horizon United Methodist Center; May 1973, many heard one evening, Winfield City Lake (Max C. Thompson, pers. comm.); 10 May 1975, 2 seen, Camp Horizon; and 1 July 1975, 1 heard, Cowley County State Lake. I have no doubt that diligent search could disclose more Poor-will nests in this area. 601 North 3rd St., Arkansas City, Kansas 67005.

## MOURNING DOVE INCUBATES ROBIN EGGS

Calvin L. Cink

On 26 May 1975, I flushed a Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) from its nest in a cottonwood tree in a wooded area known locally as the Sandpits, about one-half mile NE of Lawrence, Kansas. A routine check of the nest with a mirror on a pole revealed, much to my surprise, one Mourning Dove egg and two eggs of a Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). Using a ladder I then examined the nest more carefully. The nest was approximately ten feet from the ground and was supported by the trunk of the tree which was bent over and nearly horizontal at the height of the nest. The construction of the nest was that of a Robin although it was much shallower (30 mm) than most Robin nests in the area and not yet fully lined with mud. The Mourning Dove had added little if any material to the nest. I watched for the presence of a Robin in the area for some time but none was seen.

On 28 May I returned to find the Mourning Dove on the nest again and this time incubating the two Robin eggs as well as two eggs of its own. Again no Robin that may have shared incubation duties with the dove was observed in the area. All four eggs were warm from incubation. Figure 1 shows the striking appearance of the mixed clutch.



**Figure 1. Mixed clutch of Robin and Mourning Dove eggs near Lawrence, Kansas, 28 May 1975.**

On 4 June when I next visited the nest, the Mourning Dove was incubating and one of the Robin eggs had hatched and the other was pipping. The Mourning Dove eggs showed no signs of hatching but were still being incubated. No attempts to feed the Robin nestling were observed during the short time I was in the vicinity of the nest.

On 5 June I was dismayed to see the nestlings and eggs missing from the nest. Fragments of both blue and white egg shells were beneath the nest and a new lining was in place. No sign of the nestlings could be found and the Mourning Dove was not seen anywhere in the area. The fate of the Robin that laid the eggs is unknown but because the Robin eggs hatched and the female was never seen, I suspect that she was killed before she completed her clutch of eggs and the Mourning Dove took over.

How this mixed clutch came about is still a mystery, but apparently such takeovers of other birds nests by Mourning Doves is nothing new (Nickell, Jack-Pine Warbler 21:48-54, 1943; Nice, Auk 39:457-474, 1922). Robin nests seem to be a particularly favorite site (Batts, Wilson Bull., 64:114, 1952; Nice, Condor 23:145, 1921) though usually such nests are deserted and empty. Pemberton (Condor 23:133, 1921) reported a Mourning Dove incubating two dove eggs and two of a Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) in a thrasher nest near Chanute, Kansas in 1919. Davidson (Auk 4:264, 1887) reported the fantastic case of a partly built Robin nest finished by a Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) that contained one Robin egg, two cuckoo eggs and two Mourning Dove eggs and with the dove and cuckoo incubating at the same time!

The report that most closely parallels my findings is that of Raney (Auk 56:337-338, 1939) who found a Mourning Dove sharing with a Robin the incubation of two Robin eggs and a dove egg and with no antagonism between the two species. Even more interesting was the occurrence of the same event the following year in the same tree. This time there were two eggs of each species. The duties of incubation were shared, the eggs hatched and the young were fed and brooded by their respective parents for eight days before the nest was destroyed.

The presence of other birds' eggs in a newly acquired nest is apparently no problem for the Mourning Dove. McClure (Auk 62:270, 1945) found that colored eggs placed in Mourning Dove nests did not interrupt incubation or inhibit hatching. Possibly only if the eggs were infertile or cracked would they be ejected from the nest. Perhaps it is only the nest itself that provides the stimulus for the Mourning Dove to lay her eggs.

My sincere thanks to Richard F. Johnston and Peter E. Lowther for their comments on the manuscript.

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### GRASSHOPPER SPARROW WITH CROSSED MANDIBLES

David A. Easterla

Recently Gochfeld (Amer. Birds, 26:705, 1972) pointed out that information on the occurrence of mandible defects in birds is potentially valuable and should not be lost, mainly, because it has become increasingly important to document whether the incidence and distribution of such defects is changing. Recent chemical pollutants have caused considerable concern as potential teratogenic, mutagenic, or carcinogenic agents, and aberrant mandibles in birds is one example of a defect that needs closer attention.

On 3 November 1972 I collected a Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) with crossed mandibles on a mowed strip surrounding a sewerage lagoon, 1 mi. E. Maryville, Nodaway County, Missouri. It was a juvenile female (ova less than 1 mm; 12.6 gms) that appeared in good health. However, the bird possessed no fat deposits, which is highly unusual in autumn for most migratory species of sparrows. The late fall date of capture suggests some hindrance in feeding (with little or no fat deposit buildup) and a slower migration because of more feeding time during migration than is usual.



Figure 1. Grasshopper Sparrow with crossed mandibles from Maryville, Missouri, 3 November 1972.

The lower mandible is straight and normal but the upper mandible is decurved and crosses the lower mandible on the left (Fig. 1). There is no apparent sign of a previous injury. Pomeroy (Brit. Birds, 55:49-72, 1962) does not mention the Grasshopper Sparrow for any bill abnormalities. The bird was preserved as a museum skin (DAE 2736) and is at Northwest Missouri State University.

Department of Biology, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri 64468.

**Louisiana Heron nest in Barton County.**—On 22 June 1974 I observed and photographed a nest of the Louisiana Heron (*Hydranassa tricolor*) in marsh pool 4 along the east side of the Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area, Barton County, Kansas. The nest contained three eggs and was near the south edge of a large nesting colony of other species of herons, egrets, and marsh birds that were nesting in an extensive stand of scattered clumps of tall dense cattail (*Typha* sp.). The nesting area was approximately 800 yards long, NE to SW, by 200 yards wide and located in the SE corner of Section 23, beyond hunting blinds numbered 18-C-3 and 19-C-1.

The nest was well built for a heron and set high in the cattails, about 56 inches above the bottom of the marsh and was over 15 inches of water. It was within three feet of two nests of the Little Blue Heron (*Florida caerulea*) in an area of high nest density that also included Cattle Egrets (*Ardeola ibis*), Snowy Egrets (*Leucophoyx thula*) and Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). Other species nesting in the colony included Yellow-crowned Night Herons (*Nyctanassa violacea*), Great-tailed Grackle (*Cassidix mexicanus*) and Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*). Forster Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) also harassed me but no nests were observed.

The number of nests in the colony was estimated to exceed 600. About 500 of these were Black-crowned Night Heron nests in all stages of construction, egg laying and with young to 10 days of age. Other nests recorded were: Yellow-crowned Night Heron, 2; Little Blue Heron, 10; Snowy Egret, 10; Cattle Egret, 13; Great-tailed Grackle, many. The grackle and yellow-head nests were scattered throughout a large area extending beyond the heronry. Most Black-crowned Night Heron nests were located deep down in the cattails from four to 12 inches above the water. Little Blue Heron and Snowy Egret nests were about 33 inches; Cattle Egrets about 37 inches; and the Louisiana Heron nest about 41 inches above marsh water level.

Edmund Martinez and I returned to the nesting colony the following day for more photographs and also observed an immature White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) that had not been seen the previous day. Mr. Martinez revisited the nesting area to band young several weeks later and reported that hot, dry weather had lowered marsh water level and that no water remained under the nests. This had permitted raccoons and other land predators to ravage nests and young. It appeared that only Cattle Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons were successful in fledging young.

To my knowledge this is the only nesting record of the Louisiana Heron in Kansas. Marvin D. Schwillig, Route 1, Great Bend, Kansas 67530.

**American Woodcock brood in Woodson County, Kansas.**—On 30 April 1975 I observed an adult American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*) with at least two young in an unburned portion of a "habitat control" burn on the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission's Woodson Wildlife Management Area (W½ NW¼ Sec 13 T26S R14E). The burn had been made about a week earlier and I had returned with my bird dog to check the effects.

While checking the blackjack-post oak savannah habitat near the east side of the management area the dog flushed an adult woodcock that acted as though it had a nest or young. The dog froze on point and I approached to find a quarter grown young. The juvenile was rather well feathered with characteristic russet breast coloration. Nearby, a second young had been stepped on and killed. The latter specimen was preserved.

Nesting woodcocks may be of low density over a sizeable area in this habitat type in Kansas. On the previous day, 29 April 1975, while control burning a bluestem meadow in Coffey County, I flushed a woodcock from a small clump of trees. This bird did not appear broody but flew only a short distance into denser woody habitat. This was on Commission land at the Otter Creek Game Management Area on John Redmond Reservoir. I also observed a road-killed woodcock in the fall of 1973 a short distance east of the brood sighting.

There appears to be only one other positive nesting record of the American Woodcock in Kansas. Col. N. S. Goss (History of the birds of Kansas, Crane Co.,

Topeka, 1891) observed a brood on 25 May 1874 also in Woodson County but some 15-20 miles northeast of this second brood. The Goss sighting was in low bottom timber lands and my sighting was in upland bluestem-blackjack-post oak savannah, however in both instances the young were approximately one-fourth grown and may have moved a considerable distance from the nest site to the feeding areas.

This was the second year for controlled burns for habitat manipulation on these Commission lands. What effect this may have on nesting or brood use for woodcock is as yet unknown. Steve Clubine, *Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, Burlington, Kansas 66839*.

**Some limits of Mourning Dove nesting in Kansas.**—Nest locations: I have reviewed several hundred Kansas Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) nests and nest records. Kansas dove nests have been recorded up to 50 feet above the ground, not 15 feet as reported by Johnston (The breeding birds of Kansas, Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist., 12:616). Ground nests are frequent and often occur in situations where neither weather, nor season, nor lack of suitable tree sites, would account for ground site selection. Perhaps doves raised in ground nests are inclined to select ground nest sites.

On 23 May 1973 in Shawnee County I found an apparently unique example of Mourning Dove nesting—a ground nest in a wet cattail (*Typha*) marsh. The nest was on a small slightly raised mound of mud which was drier than the surrounding area. A female was incubating two eggs. Although I was careful not to disturb the area and thus reveal the nest to predators, on 25 May the nest was empty and a small pile of dove feathers was close by. Some may consider this an example of natural selection in action.

Early nest dates: Johnston (*op. cit.*) gives 21 March as the early nest date for doves in Kansas. This is based on an active tree nest with eggs found 31 March 1959 in Shawnee County. The apparently earlier published date is due to Johnston's method of assigning nest records to one-third month periods. On 26 March 1973 I flushed a female Mourning Dove from a ground nest containing two fresh eggs in Shawnee County. Also, Orville Rice (*pers. comm.*) saw a Mourning Dove carrying nesting material in Shawnee County on 3 March 1973.

Late nest dates: Johnston (*op. cit.*) gives the late date for egg-laying in Kansas as 10 September. He and others have overlooked a published record (Lantz, Ornithologist and Oologist 8:20, 1883) of an active nest with two apparently fresh eggs on 1 October 1882. Also, Orville Rice (*pers. comm.*) photographed a nest with two young in Shawnee County in October; he has been unable to locate his notes containing date and year. One young fledged and the other died in the nest.

I thank Mr. Rice for his helpful information. Most of the nest records used for this study are on Kansas Breeding Bird Survey nest cards filed at the University of Kansas. Woods\*, *Ettersburg StarRoute, Garberville, California 95440*.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Birds of the World: A Check List.** James F. Clements. 1974. Two Continents Publishing Group, Ltd., New York. xx + 520 pp. \$15.00.

A handy one-volume listing of the birds of the world is long overdue. This is one of four check lists to appear within a year and a fifth has been held up by the publishers for several months.

It is a little alarming to read a page entitled "How to use this book" and to find two words misspelled—worse is yet to come. For example, on page 106, "Columba" is misspelled "Colomba" three times; other scientific names are frequently misspelled; locations are haphazardly named ("Cameroun", "Cameroon", "Camerouns", "Camerouns"); genera are not in the index

\* Robert Sutherland prefers to be known as "Woods."

although they appear in the text. Confusion results from the Black-crowned Night Heron's listing as "Cosmopolitan—worldwide distribution", the Osprey's as "Worldwide distribution" and the Great Egret's as "Cosmopolitan." The Lesser Prairie Chicken and the Whooping Crane are "endangered", the Kirtland's and Backman's Warblers are "rare" and the New Caledonian Lorikeet is "seriously endangered." No explanation is given about the method of determining these various categories, much less the difference between "endangered" and "seriously endangered." The Bermuda Petrel is listed as "possibly extinct" although its very small population is surely still with us. Some endemics are listed as such, many are not.

Although larger than field guide size, the volume is light enough to carry on a long trip. The end papers have excellent color-coded maps of the major faunal regions of the world. There is, in addition to a bibliography, a geographical listing of major field guides and references. A listing of the orders and families precedes the main body of the text with the English name in bold-face type. The print is exceptionally clear and there is sufficient space beside each species name to list the date and location where it was first seen. Each page has an English heading and anyone familiar with phylogenetic order should be able to find a species without reference to the index (although many species are not in the usual sequence). The index is to genus only but as families and orders are listed at the beginning of the book this is probably adequate. An "international" birder might find this book useful for his life list despite its many inaccuracies. *Jane P. Church, Janelia Farm, Ashburn, Virginia 22011.*

## Kansas Ornithological Society

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