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REVIEW OF KANSAS SCOTER RECORDS

Marvin D. Schwilling

Col. N. S. Goss listed only one of the three scoters now known to Kansas (1891, *History of the birds of Kansas*, Crane, Topeka). The Surf Scoter was listed as a rare visitant on the basis of a specimen taken from the Kansas River above the dam at Lawrence, Douglas County, on 29 October, 1887 by Mr. A. L. Bennett of Emporia.

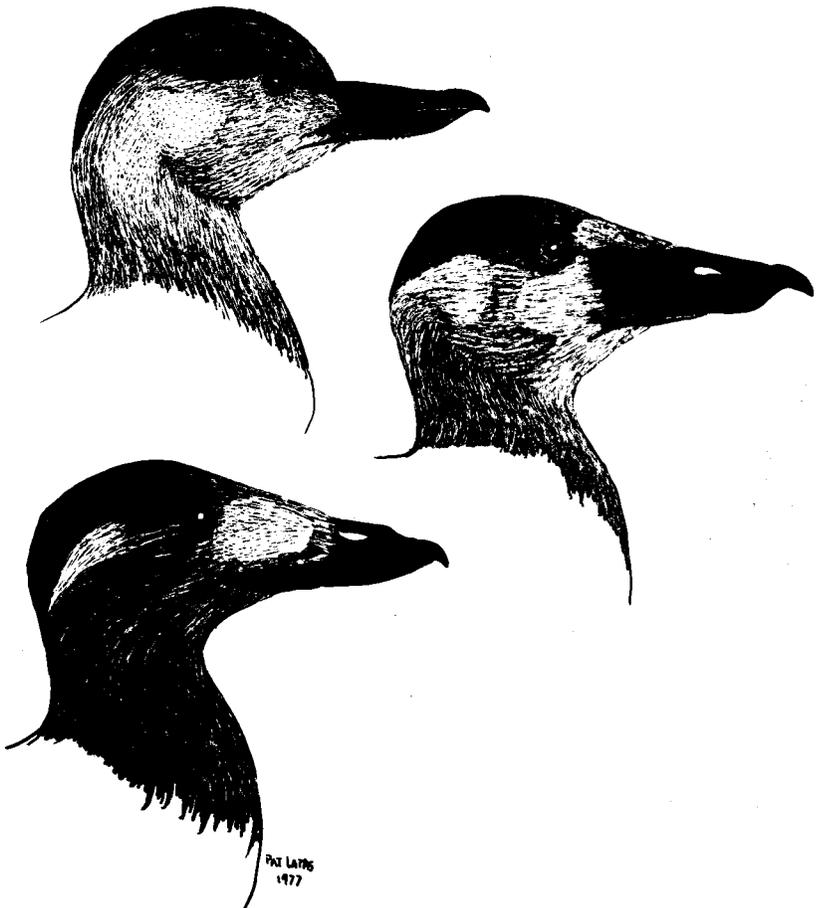


Figure 1. Heads of juvenile male scoters (Black Scoter, above; Surf Scoter, center; White-winged Scoter, below) drawn from specimens in FHSU collection by Patricia J. Latas.

By 1940 Dr. W. S. Long listed all three scoters as occurring in Kansas (1940, *Trans. Kansas Acad. Sci.*, 43:438). The Surf Scoter was listed as a "rare straggler" known from six specimens in Douglas and Sedgwick counties. The White-winged Scoter was also listed as a "rare straggler" known from eight specimens taken in Leavenworth and Douglas counties between 1927 and 1932. The American Scoter—later known as Common Scoter and now the Black Scoter—was listed as "accidental" known from two specimens taken in Douglas County in 1908.

Dr. Harrison B. Tordoff listed the White-winged Scoter as a rare transient with nine specimens, all from Douglas and Leavenworth counties between 1927 and 1938 (1956, *Univ. Kansas, Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 8:307-359). The Surf Scoter was also listed as a rare transient with eight known specimens, seven from Douglas County and one from Sedgwick County and with other sight records from eastern Kansas (Johnson and Wyandotte Counties). The Common (Black) Scoter was still listed as accidental. The two specimens reported by Dr. Long were found to be actually Surf Scoters—even experts misidentify birds! L. B. "Buck" Carson, however, identified an adult male Common Scoter shot by a hunter at Horton Lake, Brown County, in the early 1930's. There were also other sight records (Johnson Co.). Dr. Richard F. Johnston listed no further additions (1960, *Misc. Publ., Univ. Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 41:14-15).

Probably due primarily to the addition of large water bodies, reservoirs and waterfowl management areas, scoter specimens and sightings have increased in recent years.

The White-winged Scoter is the most numerous of the three species. A sight record at Lyon County State Lake, two birds on 15 April 1950 (McLeod and Andrews, 1950, *Kansas Orn. Soc. Bull.*, 1:10) may have been one of the eastern Kansas sight records referred to by Tordoff. A hunter bag check record kept at the Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area lists six White-winged Scoters taken by hunters in 1957; two on 9 November, one on 14 November, one on 22 November and two on 25 November. A specimen dated 1 November 1961 from Cheyenne Bottoms is in the Fort Hays State University Collection.

A sight record from Wyandotte County, 7 November 1964 is recorded in the KOS Newsletter, 9 (2) 1965. In 1968 the Cheyenne Bottoms check station record lists two white-wings taken on 3 November 1968. On 30 October 1969 a single bird was taken by a hunter just north of Ellinwood in Barton County and on 1 November 1969 a crippled bird was picked up at the Dodge City gun club in Kearny County. This bird later died and was given to taxidermist George Anderson. Check station information from the Neosho Waterfowl Management area near St. Paul lists two juvenile females taken in 1969, one on 31 October, the other on 1 November. On 23 February 1970 one bird was found dead at Cheyenne Bottoms. On 22 October 1972 one was taken at Quivira N.W.R., Stafford County. Kaul, Sink and Ziegler (1974, *Kansas Orn. Soc. Bull.*, 25:2) saw one on Wyandotte Co. Lake on 22 December 1973. On 27 October 1974 a single was taken by a hunter in Pool 4 at Cheyenne Bottoms. On 9 November 1975 three birds were taken in Pool 4 at Cheyenne Bottoms.

A sight record in the fall of 1975 at Geary Co. State Lake was reported by Bob LaShelle, and on 27 November 1975, Harold Hedges reported an adult male on Lake Quivira, Johnson County. One bird was taken at Milford Reservoir on 24 October 1976. This amounts to 19 additional records (involving about 25 individuals) of White-winged Scoters since 1956.

Additional Surf Scoter records include a sight record from Reading Lake in Lyon County on 19 April 1967 by Jean Schulenberg, which may not have been previously reported. Three were taken by hunters at Cheyenne Bottoms in 1968—one each on 2, 17 and 22 November. In 1969 one was taken by a hunter in Pool 4 on 30 October (specimen at Emporia State University). In 1970 five birds were taken by hunters on 17 October (specimens at Fort Hays State University) and I saw one on 22 October in Pool 3. In 1973 a single bird was taken on 27 November by Lucian Doll at Cheney Reservoir, Reno County. In 1974, a juvenile was taken 21 October by hunters in Pool 4, Cheyenne Bottoms; there were 8 to 19 birds in this flock. Roger Wells and Dennis Knuth observed two birds on Elk City Reservoir on 17 October

1975. Roger checked one that had been shot by a hunter the following day. One bird in juvenile plumage remained on fish rearing ponds at Fish and Game Commission headquarters, Pratt from 29-31 October 1976. This amounts to 11 additional records (22-25 individuals) of Surf Scoters since 1967.

Additional Common (Black) Scoter records include one bird taken in fall of 1963 by Charles Hulme near Quivira N.W.R., Stafford County. A female was taken on 14 November 1970 by hunter Orville Smock near Geuda Springs, Sumner County (wing from this bird provided for Central Flyway "Wing-bee" collection). An immature taken on 12 November 1971 by a hunter at Milford Reservoir, Clay County was brought to me by Jack McNally. In 1974 single birds were taken on 27 October and 26 October by hunters at Cheyenne Bottoms and at Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Management Area, respectively.

In 1975 a juvenile male was taken on 2 November by Lucian Doll at Cheney Reservoir, Reno County. A second bird landed in Mr. Doll's decoys and was allowed to swim away. He also observed four other birds that he thought were of this same species. On 9 November, Baldwin birders observed a single bird near Baldwin. An adult male remained on fish rearing ponds at the Fish and Game Commission headquarters near Pratt from 22 October to 5 November 1976. This amounts to 8 additional records (about 13 individuals) of Black Scoters since 1962.

Scoters may have always wandered through Kansas in low numbers during their fall movements from the northern interior and the addition of large water bodies in recent years has caused more to stop briefly. Even now these movements appear to be rapid with the birds remaining only a very short time. The vast majority of fall records are recorded within about a five week period October 17 through November 24.

Only two, both Surf Scoters, have been taken on the opening day of the waterfowl hunting season, suggesting that scoters are not usually present in the state prior to mid-October but are encountered by hunters as they make a rapid movement to the coastal wintering areas.

Prior to 1956 there were 18 acceptable scoter records (9 white-winged, 8 surf, 1 black). Since 1956 at least 38 have been added (19 white-winged, 11 surf, 8 black). Perhaps some reclassification as to their occurrence in Kansas should be considered. 115 W. Cleveland, Pratt 67124.

BLACK SKIMMER AT WILSON RESERVOIR

Thomas A. Cannon and Charles D. Hall

On 28 June 1977 at approximately 2015 hours we observed an adult Black Skimmer (*Rhynchops nigra*) at Wilson Reservoir, Russell County, Kansas. The location was approximately five miles north-northeast of Bunker Hill. The bird



Figure 1. Black Skimmer at Wilson Reservoir, Russell County, Kansas, 3 July 1977. Photo by Ed Schulenberg.

was first observed at approximately 200 yards, flying low over shallow water at the upper end of the lake. Closer observation revealed the unmistakable markings of the skimmer. The bird was black above and white below, with long wings. The trailing edge of the wings was bordered in white. The red bill, tipped with black, and the red legs were also noted.

The skimmer was observed at close range for approximately 30 minutes. It alternately flew back and forth over the shallow water and rested on a protruding mud bar. The bird occasionally fed in its characteristic skimming manner. It was loosely associated with Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*), Forster's Terns (*Sterna forsteri*) and Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*) while resting. The skimmer was observed and photographed the next morning in the same area by Charles Ely and Marvin Rolfs of Hays, and by us. Subsequent observations were made on 30 June, 1 and 2 July. It was last observed on 13 July after an absence from the area of 10 days.

This Kansas record, the second for the state, apparently represents the inland-most penetration to date. The first Kansas record was near Lawrence, Douglas County, on 24 May 1968 (Mengel, Kansas Orn. Soc. Bull., 21:15, 1970). For approximately two weeks prior to the present sighting, the Wilson Reservoir area experienced strong south to southeasterly winds. It is possible that the bird was carried inland by the strong winds and continued wandering, driven northwest by the winds. *Route 1, Sylvan Grove 67481 and Lucas 67648.*

PARASITIC JAEGER IN COFFEY COUNTY

Jean Schulenberg

On the morning of 18 November 1976, Lloyd Moore of Kansas City, Kansas, discovered three jaegers feeding with a flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) some distance from the dam on John Redmond Reservoir in Coffey County, Kansas. He reported his discovery to Nanette Johnson in Kansas City and she phoned me. That afternoon Dorothy Laird and I searched the area unsuccessfully. Strong (15 to 20 mph) winds were blowing from the southwest and none of the gulls observed was flying. A more thorough search, still hampered by gusty southwest winds, was made on 21 November by my husband, Ed Schulenberg, and me without success.

The morning of 23 November was calm and clear and I finally located the jaegers. Three birds, two dark and one somewhat lighter, with white patches at the base of the primaries and some white on the upper tail, were observed feeding with a flock of Ring-billed Gulls. They were 250 to 300 yards from the shore but easily discernible with binoculars.

The gulls had formed a milling flock around feeding Common Mergansers (*Mergus merganser*) and appeared to be harassing the ducks for food. In turn, each jaeger chased a gull, badgering it into dropping its morsel, which was subsequently swallowed by the jaeger. I watched this behavior through a zoom-scope but was unable to determine what was eaten. I further noted that the jaegers were approximately the same size as most of the gulls and did not (at this distance) exhibit the extended central rectrices characteristic of adult Stercorariids.

I telephoned Dr. David A. Easterla of the Biology Department at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri. He arrived the following day and we located one jaeger, a dark individual, in a feeding flock of gulls and ducks. As much of the John Redmond Reservoir area is in the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge and the western portion is closed to the public during the fall and winter to provide sanctuary for waterfowl, we visited the refuge office for permission to continue searching for the jaegers. We hoped to obtain photographs to document the record and hoped that closer inspection would be helpful in attempting to determine age and species.

Receiving permission for the project, we set out in a refuge boat with Joseph Plumer, the Assistant Refuge Manager. The water was unusually calm but even careful approaches by boat disturbed the waterfowl to the extent that we were



Figure 1. Immature Parasitic Jaeger at John Redmond Reservoir, Coffey County, Kansas, 24 November 1976. Photo by David A. Easterla.

several hours in locating a jaeger. When we finally located a jaeger we were able to drift close enough to photograph the bird as it rested on the water. At several points we were closer than the focal length of a 400 mm lens — less than 19 feet.

The jaeger was a softly-shaded dark brown in color, lighter on the face and breast, with darker brown remiges. The folded wings extended beyond the tail, which lacked extended and-or twisted central rectrices. When it flew, the bird showed prominent white patches at the base of the primaries and some mottled white on the upper tail. The underwing linings were clear but heavily barred in the axillary region (Fig. 1).

There was no dark cap often associated with light phase adults and no trace of yellow shading on the neck. The eye was black. The bill, which did not seem to us of overly heavy proportions, was bluish gray for the basal two-thirds, shading to almost black at the nail. We identified the bird as an immature Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

The photographs taken by Dr. Easterla and myself were sent to Dr. David F. Parmelee, James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota, for identification. Qualified by the fact that photographs can be misleading from the standpoint of precise measurements, Dr. Parmelee is of the opinion that it was indeed a Parasitic Jaeger (D. Parmelee, pers. com.).

On 26 November the temperature dropped sharply and the lake froze over. Only small areas in the Neosho River remained open. Although several parties sought jaegers during this period, none was seen. However, on 23 December, Dr. Edward Ryan, Helen, Philip and Christopher Ryan and Joseph Plumer observed from the John Redmond Dam a single dark phase jaeger with a small flock of Ringbilled Gulls. Field characteristics and behavior as previously noted were described. We do not know whether the same bird had remained in the area for over 30 days. *Route 1, Admire, 66830.*

Jaegers in Jefferson County, Kansas.—At least two, and perhaps three, immature jaegers were present at Perry Reservoir, Jefferson Co., Kansas, during the first two weeks of November 1976. Kelly Hobbs and Bob Fisher of Kansas City, Missouri, first found the birds on 6 November. The jaegers were harassing gulls at the extreme south end of the lake. On 7, 10 and 13 November, many observers from

the Jawhawk, (Lawrence, Kansas) and Burroughs (Kansas City, Missouri) Audubon Societies saw these birds. They were most often seen from the dam at the southernmost part of the lake, the place at which they were first found.

The birds were quickly identifiable as immature jaegers — very dark plumage, large flashy white wing patches, powerful direct flight, and of course, the constant habit of chasing gulls and forcing them to release or disgorge food. Since the jaegers were immatures, however, they lacked the elongated central tail feathers a key field mark in distinguishing species of adult jaegers. They were perhaps Parasitic Jaegers (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). This surmise is based upon size comparisons with nearby Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and on bill size. Certain specific determination must remain in doubt. The last confirmed sighting of the jaegers at Perry Reservoir was made on 20 November 1976 by Floyd Lawhon of Saint Joseph, Missouri. *Sebastian T. Patti, 6528 Wenonga Terrace, Shawnee Mission, 66208.*

Parasitic Jaeger in Finney County, Kansas. — We observed a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) on 1 November 1976 about 8 miles north of Garden City, Finney County. We were traveling north on U.S. 83 enroute to Tennis Lake when we flushed the jaeger from the east shoulder of the highway. The bird returned almost immediately to the road so we turned around and parked about 50 feet south of the spot. We were able to observe the jaeger at close range as it fed on a road-killed cottontail.

Sky conditions were clear with gale winds from the north, at about 09:00 hours. Highway traffic was a harassment permitting the bird to feed for only short periods until flushed by another passing vehicle. Twice the bird was nearly struck by oncoming trucks. When flushed, the bird would ride the wind to a height of 20-30 feet and again approach from downwind, numerous times sailing in over the top of our vehicle at distances of 3 to 10 feet. This continued for some 20 minutes and finally the bird left the kill and sat down in a bare wheatfield about 200 yards east of the road kill. We remained another 15 minutes but the bird never moved and appeared to be sleeping.

We proceeded to Tennis Lake, five miles north, and found several thousand waterfowl, gulls and waterbirds. We returned to the site 6 hours later but were unable to find the jaeger. *Marvin D. Schwilling and J. Allen White, Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, R.R. 2, Box 54A, Pratt 67124.*

Golden Eagles nesting in northwest Kansas. — On 22 March 1975 I sighted two Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) near a nest in Logan County. The nest was in a plains cottonwood (*Populus sargentii*) about 9 meters from the ground. The nest was constructed mainly of cottonwood twigs and branches but also contained stems and branches of Mexican fireweed (*Kochia scoparia*) and Russian Thistle (*Salsola kali*) and short strands of barbed wire. The lining consisted of soapweed (*Yucca glauca*) fibers and small cottonwood twigs. The nest appeared to be completed but was empty.

On 3 May both adults were present at the nest which now contained one newly-hatched eaglet and an unhatched egg. The adults returned to the nest 10 minutes after my visit. On 17 May the nest contained two downy eaglets and the remains of three Prairie Dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*). Neither adult was seen at this time. On 31 May one adult was present. I noted that one eaglet appeared larger than the other. Pinfeathers were protruding through the white down on the wings of the larger eaglet. There was a fresh lining of cottonwood leaves in the nest. When I last visited the nest on 20 August neither adults or eaglets were present.

This nest was visited on 24 April 1976 and two adults were flushed from the tree. The nest was observed from a nearby hill and a single eaglet about a week old could be seen. On the next visit, 16 July, the eaglet appeared to be fully feathered (Fig. 1) and both adults were in the vicinity. On 7 August the nest was empty with no sign of adults or young.

The following spring, 30 April 1977, two eaglets about a week old were in the nest



Figure 1. Golden Eaglelet, Logan County, Kansas, 16 July 1976. Photo by Mike Stearns.



Figure 2. Golden Eaglelet, Cheyenne County, Kansas, 27 May 1977. Photo by Mike Stearns.

together with the remains of a Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*). The pinfeathers on the back and wings were prominent. Only one adult was observed at the nest on this visit. The eaglets were observed flying with the adults on July 22.

A second active nest was discovered in Cheyenne County on 27 May 1977 when an adult Golden Eagle was flushed from a nest at the edge of a cliff. The nest contained a single eaglet, estimated to be six weeks old. The dark pinfeathers on the back and wings were well developed (Fig. 2). The nest was on a north-facing cliff about 21 meters above a large ravine and was constructed largely of soapweed stalks and blades. The lining was of soapweed fibers and grass. Nine meters away was an older nest constructed of similar materials and of similar size (1.5 m. in diameter). The remains of an unidentified snake was in the nest. On the next visit, 27 July, the nest held remains of a magpie (*Pica pica*) but neither eaglets nor adults were seen. An old, possible, eagle nest was found 3.5 km. from this site.

These are the first active eagle nests reported in Kansas since 1891 (Johnston, 1965, A directory to the birds of Kansas, Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist., Misc. Publ. 41:17). Stephens (1966, Kansas Ornith. Soc. Bull., 17:23-25) reported a number of eagle nests throughout the state and even observed the carrying of nesting material; however none of the nests was known to have been used. Although known primarily as a common winter visitor in the state, the Golden Eagle may be a more common breeder than is generally believed. *Mike Stearns, 1105 W. 3rd, McCook, Nebraska 69001.*

Chestnut-sided Warbler nesting record from Kansas.—In the egg collection of the Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, is a set of four eggs of a Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) that was taken at Enterprise, Dickinson County, Kansas, on 26 May 1895. The original collector was C. Miley and the set was part of the personal collection of Harry Harris of Kansas City, Missouri, prior to being deposited in the Museum of Natural History collection as KU 1194. Confirmation of the eggs' identity is given by an indication that the adult bird(s) were seen. A description of the nest is also listed in the accompanying notes on this set: "Nest made of a kind of wooly stuff, grass + paper; lined with horsehair. Placed in a clump of willows three ft. from the ground." The four eggs are white with few brownish spots mostly restricted to the larger end. They are identified with collection marks "5-26-1895 C. M." and their measurements (in mm) are 13.1 x 16.9, 13.1 x 16.8, 12.9 x 16.9, and 13.2 x 17.1.

Chestnut-sided Warblers are not known to nest in Kansas nor have they been previously reported as breeding. The A. O. U. Checklist of North American Birds (5th ed., 1957) indicates that the species formerly bred as far south as Iowa (in several counties) and Missouri (Mount Carmel). Present southern limits in the Great Plains are given as eastern Nebraska and in Minnesota. Johnston (A directory to the birds of Kansas, Misc. Publ. 41, Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Kansas, 1965) lists the Chestnut-sided Warbler only as an uncommon migrant during May and late September-early October.

I thank R. F. Johnston for his comments.

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INFORMATION REQUESTED

A comprehensive bibliography of the North and South American martins (*Progne* spp.) is currently in preparation. It will include all papers dealing solely or partly with martins, except local annotated checklists. Authors wishing to have material included should send an abstract or reprint to *Charles R. Brown, Box 1309, Austin College, Sherman, Texas 75090.*