

Kansas Ornithological Society

BULLETIN

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 45

June, 1994

No. 2

OBSERVATIONS OF A PARTIAL ALBINO RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

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In late May 1993, there was a female, partial albino, Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) feeding along the water-filled ditches at the Baker Wetlands, Lawrence, Douglas Co., KS. The female was on territory about 300 m south on a gravel road near the north entrance to the wetlands.

The female had a distinct white bar above her eyes, mottled brown and black patterns on her throat patch and head, white body except for a small black wing bar, a rusty brown breast spot, and a black tail. The bird did not have pink eyes (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Partial albino female Red-winged Blackbird. Photograph by Ken Highfill.

On 10 June 1993, I located the nest of the partial albino in a thicket, about 60 m from the gravel road. The nest was in a sapling American elm (*Ulmus americana*), 100 cm from shallow water. There were three young in the nest. Two of the young had developing white primary wing feathers and appeared to have the mottled brown and black patterns developing on the

feather of the head and throat patch (Figure 2). Each of the partially white young had white toenails. The third chick was normal coloration for a Red-winged Blackbird. While at the nest, I was challenged by both the female partial albino and a normal male. I assumed that the male was the mate.



FIGURE 2. Partial albino young Red-winged Blackbird. Photograph by Ken Highfill.

On 12 June, Cal Cink, biology professor at Baker University, banded the three young blackbirds and by 15 June, the young had fledged.

During my observations of the partial white female, I noticed the bird was under frequent attacks by both Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) and normal Red-winged Blackbirds. The female's first defense was to dive into the underbrush and grasses until the pursuer abandoned the assault. On several occasions when the female was caught in the open and under attack by another bird, she merely fluttered her wings and opened her beak—as would be expected from a fledgling, during feeding. The aggression actions against the female were then halted. I am definitely interested in sightings of partial albino Red-winged Blackbirds in the central midwest and can be contacted through electronic mail or by letter at the addresses given below.

Literature Cited

- Brown, G. 1990. Partial Albinos. *Nebraska Bird Rev.* 58(4):108.
Rintoul, David. 1994. *Bird Chat*. Listserv@arizwm1.ccit.arizona.edu
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FIGURE 1. Phainopepla photographed on 8 September 1993 at Garden City, KS. by Sara Shane.

First Verified Record of the Phainopepla from Kansas—The Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*), has not previously been verified as occurring in Kansas although there are previous sight records. At about 3:30 p.m. on 8 September 1993, a Phainopepla was observed in our yard in Garden City, Finney Co., Kansas. The bird was sitting in an elm (*Ulmus sp.*) and would fly down to some elderberries, apparently feeding on the berries. On 9 September, the bird was again observed at the same location, flycatching and feeding on the elderberries. It was last seen that evening.

Although out of its normal range, the desert southwest, the Phainopepla is a noted wanderer. It has been recorded in Colorado at least seven times (Andrews, Robert and Robert Righter. 1992. Colorado birds: a reference to their distribution and habitat. Denver Museum of Natural History). There are at least two Oklahoma records: one observed in Grant Co. on 4 February 1962 and one in Cimarron Co. on 18 August 1987 (Baumgartner, Frederick M. and A. Marguerite Baumgartner. 1992. Oklahoma Bird Life, University of Oklahoma Press).

Leonard and Betty Rich, 1107 East Johnson, Garden City, KS 67846.

Unusual Death of a Red-Bellied Woodpecker—A severe windstorm struck an area 3 miles west and 1.2 miles south of Udall, Sumner Co., Kansas, on 5 May 1993. The storm was of sufficient strength to knock down two hackberry trees (*Celtis occidentalis*) approximately four feet in diameter. These trees had been growing here for over 100 years. Although the wind speed was not clocked, it was of sufficient strength to take a Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinensis*) and drive it head first into a red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). The bird's neck was broken. The bill was driven approximately

one-quarter inch into the crevice of the tree (see figure 1). Although birds are frequently killed in thunderstorms by hail or lightning, I can find no record of a bird being driven by wind into a tree and killing it.

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**FIGURE 1. Red-bellied Woodpecker with bill impaled in red cedar.
Photograph by Max C. Thompson**