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BOBOLINKS (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) NESTING AT KONZA PRAIRIE BIOLOGICAL STATION, RILEY COUNTY, KANSAS

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The Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) is an uncommon migrant and very local breeder in Kansas. In central Kansas, confirmed breeding has been recorded for Barton (Johnsgard 1979, Thompson and Ely 1992, Busby and Zimmerman 2001) and Stafford counties (Johnsgard 1979, Zimmerman and Patti 1988, Thompson and Ely 1992), which include small breeding colonies at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Management Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, respectively (Johnsgard 1979, Zimmerman and Patti 1988). In northern Kansas, confirmed breeding has been recorded for Nemaha (Busby and Zimmerman 2001) and Cloud counties (Johnsgard 1979, Thompson and Ely 1992). Busby and Zimmerman (2001) reported possible/probable breeding in Riley County, and between Brown and Doniphan counties. There is one possible/probable breeding record from Atchison County (J. Schukman, pers. comm.). One recorded nesting attempt occurred in Leavenworth County (Janzen 2000), which is near Nebraska and Missouri where known Bobolink populations exist (Johnsgard 1979, Busby and Zimmerman 2001). One probable breeding record exists for eastern Kansas in Anderson County (Goss 1891).

Nesting usually occurs in tallgrass prairies, ungrazed to lightly grazed mixed-grass prairies, wet meadows, hayfields, retired croplands and sometimes small-grain croplands (Johnsgard 1979). Bobolinks almost always nest in dense, moist grasslands in Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1992).

In July 2007, we sighted two female Bobolinks and discovered their nests at Konza Prairie Biological Station (KPBS), Riley County, in northeastern Kansas (39°05'N, 96°35'W). The KPBS is located within the Flint Hills. The Flint Hills includes some of the largest tracts of unplowed tallgrass prairie in North America (Knapp and Seastedt 1998). Warm season grasses, such as big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), little bluestem (*Andropogon scoparius*), and switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*) dominate Konza Prairie. The Bobolinks were sighted on plots burned at one to two year intervals, ungrazed by ungulates, and consist mainly of grasses and forbs. Prior to our observations, Bobolinks have only been sighted at KPBS (Zimmerman 1993).

On 9 July 2007, J. Rivers and M. Blundell sighted a female Bobolink on plot 2D. The first Bobolink nest was found at the top of a hill on plot 2D the next day, 10 July. On 10 July, M. Blundell flushed the female off her nest. The female had two dark bold streaks on her crown, uniform breast color without streaks and slightly streaked flanks. We rejected possible identification as other species, Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) and Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*), because they lack the characteristic crown stripes and are

smaller in size. The nest, which contained four eggs, was on the ground and its height (measurement from ground to top outer rim of nest) was 3 cm. The nest was an open shallow cup that appeared to be constructed only with grasses and lined with finer grass. The eggs were sub elliptical and glossy on a pale slightly purplish/cream background. Brown to purple-brown blotched speckles and scrawls were mostly concentrated in the upper half of the egg (photographs available upon request from authors). Grasshopper Sparrow and Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) have similar eggs, but have cream white backgrounds, and Red-winged Blackbird have a pale blue-green to gray background. Within a 15 m radius of the nest, the tallest forb height was 96 cm, and the tallest grass height was 71 cm. We monitored the nest every day until it was depredated on 22 July. The average incubation period for Bobolinks is ca. 12 days, suggesting that the eggs were near hatching when the clutch was depredated (Martin and Gavin 1995, Martin 1971).

On 16 July 2007, B. Von Korff flushed a female from another nest with five eggs, in an adjacent plot, 1D, approximately 220 m northwest from the first nest and also nesting at the top of the hill. The nest was also a shallow cup on the ground constructed with grasses and lined with finer grasses. The height of the nest was 3.4 cm. Within 15 m of the nest the tallest grass height was 115 cm. The tallest grass height at the nest was 72 cm. The eggs resembled the eggs from the first nest. This nest was depredated within a day of 20 July. Eggshell fragments were found within 0.5 m of the nest. For three consecutive days, 16-18 July, both females were flushed off their nests. The females were flushed within 40 minutes of each other providing clear evidence that there were two females breeding concurrently.

On 1 August 2007, J. Rivers was out on 2D and sighted and heard a female Bobolink suggesting either the presence of another female or at least one female remained in the area. Bobolinks may re-nest following depredation (Martin and Gavin 1995), but we were unable to confirm a second nesting attempt by either female. We did not observe any male Bobolinks on KPBS. Confirmed cases of nesting Bobolinks in Kansas are rare, and prior to our observations there have been no documented cases of nesting at KPBS, or in Riley County.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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AN ATTEMPT TO RELOCATE PRE-FLEDGED LEAST TERN CHICKS ON THE KANSAS RIVER

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Individuals of the Interior population of the Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*), federally-listed as an endangered species (USFWS 1985), have been observed nesting on portions of the Kansas River since 1996 (Busby et al. 1997). Breeding sites used on the river have included islands and shorelines that contain a mix of sand and small gravel, and are sparsely vegetated. From 2003 through 2006, the average date of initiation of Least Tern nesting on the Kansas River was 20 May, with 17 June the average date of the peak of nesting within known colonies (Boyd and Sexson 2003, Boyd and Patty 2004, Boyd and Olsen 2005, 2006). In 2007, the breeding season was delayed by late spring precipitation which resulted in water levels that flooded most suitable habitats. River levels did not drop sufficiently to expose sandbars until late June.

On 6 July 2007, two small colonies of Least Terns were discovered in the initial stages of breeding. Six pairs of terns with eggs were observed at a site 1.5 km downstream from the bridge connecting the towns of Belvue and Paxico. This site, known as the Belvue Colony, has been the primary nesting colony for several years, and is on the south bank of the river in Wabaunsee County. The other site, known as the Wabaunsee Colony, is on an island located approximately 30 km upstream, just northwest of the town of Wabaunsee. Five pairs of terns were digging nest scrapes and engaged in courtship behavior at this site, but no active nests were observed. One week later, on 13 July, all five of these pairs were incubating eggs.

With an average incubation of three weeks (Hays 1980), initial hatching was expected at the Wabaunsee Colony on approximately 3 August. Average time to fledging is also three weeks (Thompson et al. 1997), so the first chicks to hatch from this colony would not be able to leave until approximately 24 August. Monitoring of both colonies continued for several weeks, with a survey on 6 August reporting five hatched chicks and four eggs still being incubated at the Wabaunsee Colony. One egg was missing from one nest, and it was presumed it had hatched and the chick was unobserved on this visit.

On 7 August, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that rainfall had caused significant inflows to three Kansas River tributary reservoirs, Tuttle Creek, Milford, and Kanopolis, necessitating increased water releases. Their calculations concluded the Wabaunsee colony would be completely inundated by the rising river levels. With more than two weeks before chicks would begin to fledge at this site, the Corps and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made a joint decision to attempt to relocate as many chicks as could be captured to an alternate site that would not be inundated. Although the small number of individuals was not biologically significant to the continental population, both agencies had a desire to lose as few individuals of this federally-listed species as possible.

The relocation site was selected due to its proximity, approximately 100 m upstream of the colony, as well as its elevation which would allow it to remain above the increasing water level. Although no measurements were taken, we estimate the Wabaunsee Colony island was approximately 150 m x 100 m in size. The relocation site, although similar in size, was estimated to be 80 percent vegetated, whereas the active colony site was nearly unvegetated.

Upon our arrival at the Wabaunsee Colony on 8 August, we discovered that only a single egg remained unhatched. Several chicks were observed being tended by adults,

although it was difficult to get an accurate count of the well-camouflaged young, some of which were only a couple of days old and no larger than 6 cm in length. We first captured the two largest chicks in the colony, which we deduced were siblings no more than 7-10 days old. We placed them inside a plastic laundry basket (27 cm x 41 cm x 55 cm). The open top and slotted sides of the basket allowed air flow to reach the chicks and also provided visibility into the basket. We placed the basket on the sand near the spot where both chicks were captured, and within ten minutes one or both adults were consistently landing and approaching the basket. We continued to move the basket in 50 m increments further up the shoreline in the direction of the relocation site, giving the adult's time to follow and locate their chicks.

We left the basket at the upstream edge of the island for approximately 30 minutes in hopes the adults would visually imprint on it. One person then held the basket while sitting on the bow of an airboat while it was slowly driven upstream to the relocation site. During the transport across the water, no adult terns were observed following. The basket containing the two chicks was placed in an open area at the downstream edge of the new site. One person remained behind to observe from a distance while the others returned to the colony to begin the process of identifying other family groups. Although several adult terns flew upstream to forage in the shallows near the relocation site, where they could easily see the basket, none made any attempt to land or approach as they had done at the colony site. So we returned the two chicks and released them, planning to wait until much of the island went underwater and collect all the chicks for simultaneous relocation.

We also intended to collect the remaining unhatched egg for deposition in a museum collection, but we observed that the shell was starred and the chick could be heard cheeping from within. We left the egg in the nest, planning to reassess its status later as water levels rose higher. No adults appeared to be tending this egg, and we presumed the adults were caring for two hatchlings from what was originally a three-egg clutch.

After a two-hour absence to monitor the downstream Belvue Colony, we returned to Wabaunsee and discovered the egg had pipped and the chick's beak was protruding from a 1-cm opening. The rising river levels were going to reach this nest within an hour, so we removed the chick from the remainder of the shell. With an average hatching time of two days for Least Terns (Wolk 1974), we were not encouraged by this individual's prospects for surviving this hurried emergence. The chick was moved farther from the water level and placed in the shade of a piece of driftwood. A single adult tern once approached the spot where it was lying. However, we could not observe what, if any, interaction may have occurred between the adult and the chick.

As the river levels rose throughout the afternoon, the island was divided into numerous smaller islands, each of which we thoroughly searched for chicks that may have become stranded from the main colony. Isolated chicks were moved from shrinking patches of sand to the main island. Whether due to the rapidly disappearing habitat, our presence and activity, or both, adult terns appeared very agitated and aggressive toward us and each other, at times even towards some of the chicks which were actively moving around the rapidly changing landscape. It was also very hot, with temperatures approaching 35° C. The only shade was provided by small pieces of driftwood, which the chicks readily used.

At approximately 1830 hrs (CDT) we captured all visible chicks and placed them in the basket on the highest portion of the island. We were able to locate and capture eight out of a total of ten chicks that we presumed were on the island, including the one that we helped hatch earlier in the day. The other two were never observed, and may have either perished prior to our arrival that day or were simply lost to the rising water without being detected. The basket of chicks attracted the attention of all five pairs of adults. Several landed and approached the basket with small fish, but none were observed attempting to feed chicks through the side of the basket. At no time did any adult attempt to land on or enter the basket from above.

At approximately 1930 hrs (CDT) we determined that the chicks should be moved up to the relocation site, in order to allow the parents sufficient daylight in which to find them.

There were still three small sub-islands that remained of the original colony, none larger than 20 m in either length or width. The rising water levels and reduced island habitat had increased the distance between the two locations to approximately 250 m. Similar to the morning's experience, no adults were observed to follow us to the relocation site.

We again placed the basket, now containing all eight chicks, on exposed sand near the downstream edge of the relocation island. Although several adults foraged near this location, none showed any interest in the basket of chicks. At 2015 hrs (CDT) we released all chicks on a higher portion of the island, left the basket in plain view as a visual cue for the adult terns, and departed the area.

The next morning, 9 August, the Wabaunsee colony was completely inundated. We observed two pairs of adult Least Terns fishing around the relocation island, and witnessed them landing with small fish near weedy vegetation. We were able to confirm that one pair was actively caring for at least two chicks, and the other was caring for at least one chick. We believed both sets of chicks were part of previously identified sibling groups, increasing the possibility that even more chicks were receiving adult care. In addition to open sand, the relocation island was heavily vegetated, including willows and herbaceous annual plants, making it very difficult to observe chicks until they emerged from hiding to accept food.

The site was visited again 17 August, and we saw no tern activity during two separate periods of observation totaling nearly two hours. We observed coyote (*Canis latrans*) tracks in the sand in the vicinity where the chicks had been released and saw evidence of digging under a shaded spot where we had left the newly-hatched chick. We revisited the site on 24 August and again observed no Least Terns. Our conclusion is that all chicks were lost to coyote predation or abandonment by adults.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We were unable to locate literature describing the moving of pre-fledged tern chicks from one site to another, as we attempted here. A breeding colony of adult Caspian Terns (*Sternula caspia*) was successfully relocated along the Columbia River in Oregon (Roby et al. 2002). The researchers used social attraction techniques to encourage pre-breeding adult birds to move to the desired location and away from their original colony site in order to reduce tern predation on juvenile salmonids in the river and estuary. Caspian Tern breeding habitat has also been enhanced by providing artificial colony sites on floating barges (Collis et al. 2002), thereby influencing where a colony will locate.

Based on the fact that two of five pairs of adult Least Terns found their chicks and resumed caring for them the day after they were moved, it appears that relocation from one site to another may be possible. The habitat to which we moved the birds was marginally suitable due to the significant vegetative cover. More dense vegetation provides cover for mammalian nest predators. Though there were no visible tracks the day of the relocation it was obviously used by at least one coyote. To have selected a more unvegetated site which would also remain above water would have required moving the chicks a much greater distance, possibly more than twice as far.

These results indicate that it may be possible to successfully move pre-fledged Least Terns and induce the parents to move to the new site and resume care of their young. Our recommendation, however, is that it be attempted only if there is no other opportunity for the birds to survive to fledging age at the original colony site. If attempted, the relocation site should be as close as physically possible to the original site, be surrounded on all sides by relatively deep water to deter mammalian predators, and consist of primarily open area with some vegetation or driftwood to provide shade and shelter from weather and predators.

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2007 REPORT OF THE KANSAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

This report summarizes the activities of the Kansas Bird Records Committee (KBRC) for the calendar year 2007. The Committee received 36 reports in 2007, of which 23 records were evaluated. All reports received, are archived in the Ornithology Division of the University of Kansas Natural History Museum, Lawrence.

Submissions are assigned a sequential number in the order in which they are received, with the year of receipt as a prefix. Birds are listed in phylogenetic order under each of two categories: Records Accepted and Records Not Accepted. Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the *Checklist of North American Birds*, 7th edition, American Ornithologists Union, 1998, updated through the 48th Supplement, 2007, [*Auk* 124(3):1109-1115].

After the English and scientific name follows the KBRC record number; the number of individuals seen, with age or plumage notes; date(s) of observation; locality, including county; observer(s), with those documenting the record listed first; supporting physical evidence, if any, received by the Committee; and finally, comments and notes on changes in the species' status on the KOS checklist. Number of records indicates records accepted by the Kansas Bird Records Committee. Records that were not accepted by the Committee have a brief explanation of the reasoning behind that decision, and the observers' names are omitted.

Authors, when citing KBRC records from this report, are encouraged to give credit to the observer(s) of the record that submitted the report along with the citation of this report.

Records accepted

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), 2007-24, one adult, 13 July-14 July 2007, Island Park ,Winfield, Cowley County, photographed by Linda Woolf. **Thirteenth state record**.

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), 2007-21, one adult, 26 June 2007, Quivira NWR, Stafford County, reported by Matt Gearheart, also seen by Aaron Mitchell and Terry Swope. Documented with four photographs. **This is the first confirmed record of this species in the state in over 20 years**. *A bird banding crew working with Brett Sandercock, Kansas State University, at Quivira NWR in the summer of 2007 reported that on July 3rd they noted one whistling-duck (unknown species) in flight near dusk from the eastern part of the wildlife drive. On July 4th, three Fulvous Whistling-Ducks were observed in a pool near the spillway on the Big Salt Marsh. On July 12th, one Fulvous Whistling-Duck was observed in a pool near the eastern part of the wildlife drive. Fide David Hodkinson and Samantha Franks.*

Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*), 2007-05, one adult male, 11 November-26 November 2006, at a county park lake near the Sedgwick County Zoo, Wichita, reported by Paul Griffin, seen by many observers. Documented with five photographs from three observers. **Seventeenth state record**.

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*), 2007-32, one unknown age, 20 September 2007, at Lakin Draw, near Ulysses, Grant County, reported by Kellye Hart and Sam Guy. **Eighteenth state record**.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), 2007-29, one adult male, 9 September 2007, at the outlet tubes of Tuttle Creek Dam, Riley County, reported by Brian Monser, also seen by Bill Monser. **Fifth state record**. *Note – While this report was accepted, the KBRC emphasizes that there were no details given to separate this bird from a Great Frigatebird. Historically, any frigatebird in Kansas was expected to be a Magnificent. Confirmed sightings and specimens in the past several decades of Lesser Frigatebird (Wyoming and Michigan) and Great Frigatebird (Oklahoma) should encourage Kansas birders to pay close attention to any frigatebird in Kansas to provide details that will confirm identification to species.*

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), 2007-17, one adult, 20 May 2007, in a wet field north of Colwich, Sedgwick County, reported by Kevin Groeneweg, also seen by Pete Janzen, Dan Kilby, Jay Newton, Curt VanBoeing and Cliff Miller. **Twentieth state record**.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*), 2007-26, one adult, 31 July 2007, Quivira NWR, Stafford County, reported by Mark Rogers, also seen by Mart Pat Haddican. **Third state record**.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*), 2007-34, one adult, 12 November 2007, Lake Wabaunsee, Wabaunsee County, reported by Dan LaShelle. **Ninth state record**.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), 2007-04, one adult, 7 January 2007, Kanopolis Lake, Ellsworth County, reported by Dan Gish, also seen by Dan Larson, Richard Field, Richard Martin and Jim Malcom. **Twelfth state record**.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), 2007-31, one adult, 18 September 2007, Kanopolis Lake, Ellsworth County, reported by Kat Farres, also seen by Dennis Farres. Documented with three photographs. **Thirteenth state record**.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), 2007-02, one adult male, 18 August 2006, Oak Park, Wichita, Sedgwick County, reported by Paul Griffin. Documented with numerous photographs. **Seventh state record**.

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*), 2007-19, one adult female, 9 June 2007, Cimarron National Grasslands, Morton County, reported by Kevin Groeneweg, also seen by Sharon Bolin. Documented with two photographs.

Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*), 2007-11, one adult, 9 March 2007, Stockdale area of Tuttle Creek Reservoir, Riley County, reported by Lowell Johnson and Cory Gregory. **Twenty-second state record**.

Records not accepted

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), 2007-25, one adult, 29 July 2007 at a Reno county playa lake. Insufficient details to separate from other teal or to rule out a hybrid.

Great Blue Heron, white morph (*Ardea herodias*), 2007-13, one adult, 14 April 2007 at a farm pond in Johnson County. Insufficient details to separate from Great Egret.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), 2007-07, one adult, 5 February 2007, near Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Management Area, Barton County. Insufficient details to confirm that this wasn't another Buteo species.

"Alcid", 2007-35, one unknown age, 23 November 2007, Lake Wabaunsee, Wabaunsee County. While most committee members were intrigued by the description given for this bird, all felt it was insufficient to differentiate which species it might be or if it was in fact an alcid.

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), 2007-03, one immature female, 18 August 2006, Oak Park, Wichita, Sedgwick County. Insufficient details to separate from closely related Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), 2007-06, one immature female, 1 September-3 September 2006, Wichita, Sedgwick County. Insufficient details to separate from a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Photographs not conclusive.

Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*), 2007-09, one adult, 16 February 2007, at a feeder near Oskaloosa, Jefferson County. Insufficient details to separate from other species that may have a crest. The observation was very short in duration and the time of year is not when this species would be expected to be seen in Kansas. Additionally, this bird was seen at a feeder which is atypical for this species.

Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*), 2007-14, one adult, 7 May 2007, Monument Rocks, Gove County. Description given was insufficient to adequately confirm that the bird seen was this species.

Blue Bunting (*Cyanocompsa parellina*), 2007-30, one adult female, 12 September 2007, in riparian woods near Kansas River, Johnson County. Insufficient details to separate from female or immature Indigo Bunting.

Members of the committee voting on these records:

Doris Burnett (Alternate)
Matt Gearheart
Kevin Groeneweg
Mark Land
Jackie Nooker (Alternate)
Chuck Otte (Secretary)
Mark Robbins
John Schukman
Max Thompson (Chair)

Submitted by Chuck Otte, KBRC secretary

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