Kansas Ornithological Society
BULLETIN
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 74 DECEMBER 2023 No. 4

# BREEDING DISTRIBUTION OF YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (*Setophaga dominica*) IN KANSAS EXTENDS WESTWARD TO DOUGLAS COUNTY

Jon C. King

*21 W Starr Ave, Columbus, OH, 43201; king.3068@buckeyemail.osu.edu.*

The Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga dominica*) is an uncommon migrant and local breeder in the easternmost counties of Kansas (Thompson et al. 2011). In eastern Kansas, this species inhabits mature bottomland forests, especially where Sycamore trees (*Platanus occidentalis*) are present and forest cover is extensive (Schukman et al. 2006). Yellow-throated Warbler sightings have become more frequent in eastern Kansas in recent decades (Thompson et al. 2011), coinciding with reports of northward range expansion elsewhere in New England, the Great Lakes states, and Nebraska (McKay and Hall 2020; Silcock and Jorgensen 2023). More specifically, recent observations indicate westward range extension along the Kansas River drainage from Kansas City – where historically present (Harris 1919) – towards Lawrence, Topeka, and potentially further westward (eBird 2023). In Douglas County – which is frequently birded – a Yellow-throated Warbler breeding population was discovered during the late 2010s. This range extension into Douglas County is reviewed using records compiled from Kansas Ornithological Society publications (http://www.ksbirds.org), eBird (2023), specimen records (http://vertnet.org), and queries of long-time Douglas County observers.

In reviewing records of Yellow-throated Warbler from Douglas County, no late 1800s and early 1900s records were discovered. During that time period, the Yellow-throated Warbler was an uncommon migrant and potential summer resident approximately 50 miles eastward at Kansas City (Harris 1919). The earliest known Douglas County record is a sighting from the Baker University campus (Baldwin City) on 14 April 1964, made by Ivan Boyd. At the time, this species was apparently rare enough that Ivan Boyd retrieved his son (Roger Boyd) from high school so that he too could see the bird (R. Boyd pers. comm.). Even at Kansas City, it was seen only “a few times each year in the area” (Rising et al. 1978). Subsequent Douglas

County records came during the late 1980s, early 1990s and early 2000s (n = 11 or 12, Table 1). Notably, most of these early reports occurred during spring migration (14 April to 16 May), when southern-breeding warblers (e.g., Blue-winged Warbler [*Vermivora cyanoptera*], Worm-eating Warbler [*Helmitheros vermivorum*], Hooded Warbler [*Setophaga citrina*]) are most likely to "overshoot" their breeding distribution and appear as vagrants in northeast Kansas (eBird 2023). The two late summer reports from the 29th and 31st of August coincide with the fall migration period (McKay and Hall 2020).

**Table 1. Records of Yellow-throated Warbler in Douglas County prior to late 2010s. A report (not listed in table) from Baker Wetlands on 9 May 2008 (Corder 2008) is erroneous based upon cross-reference with eBird (2023) and KSBIRD-L (https://listserv.ksu.edu/cgi-bin?A2=ind0805&L=KSBIRD-L&P=R8383). Thompson et al. (2011) mention an October record without a year, which is not listed in table.**

| Year | Date | Location | Observ.** | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1964 | 14-Apr | Baker University | IB, RB | R. Boyd pers. comm. |
| 1988 or 1989 | April | Burcham Park | RR | B. Antonio pers. comm. |
| early 1990s | April | Burcham Park | BA | B. Antonio pers. comm. |
| late 1990s or early 2000s | unknown | south of Lone Star | AP | A. Powell, pers. comm.* |
| 1995 | April | Baker Wetlands | RP | A. Powell, pers. comm. |
| 2000 | 19-Apr | Lawrence (Tennessee St.) | KM | eBird 2023 |
| 2002 | 6-May | Burcham Park | BA, SF | Moore 2002 |
| 2002 | 31-Aug | KU field station (Jefferson Co.) | GP | eBird 2023 |
| 2003 | 5-May | Lone Star (south of) | AP | Moore 2003 |
| 2009 | 15-May | Fitch Reservation (near) | MR | eBird 2023 |
| 2009 | 16-May | Baldwin Woods | JK | eBird 2023 |
| 2009 | 29-Aug | Clinton Wildlife Area | MA , JK | eBird 2023 |

***Alexis Powell recalls either one or two encounters from woodland south of Lone Star for which dates are unavailable.**

****Observers: Bob Antionio (BA), Michael Andersen (MA), Ivan Boyd (IB), Roger Boyd (RB), Steve Fretwell (SF), Jon King (JK), Kathy McDowell (KM), Galen Pittman (GP), Alexis Powell (AP), Rick Prum (RP), Mark Robbins (MR), and Richard Rucker (RR).**

During the late 2010s, Douglas County reports of Yellow-throated Warbler increased markedly (Table 2). In 2018, singing individuals were observed by many at Burcham Park (summer) and "Chicken Creek Woods" (spring and summer) with breeding confirmed at both locations. At Chicken Creek Woods – a prominent mature woodland along Chicken Creek and E 850 Rd located 2-3 km south of the town of Lone Star – Roger Boyd observed two adults and two recently fledged young on July 11th (eBird checklist: S47139869). At Burcham Park, Phil Wedge, and others, located a singing male during late June and early July. Approximately one month later on the 13th or 14th of August, the author encountered an adult feeding two recently fledged young in the same location. This date is late for dependent young, although Yellow-throated Warblers are known to attempt multiple broods in the southern portion of their breeding distribution, possibly because of an unsuccessful first attempt (McKay and Hall 2020).

**Table 2. Location of recent (2017-2023) Yellow-throated Warbler sightings in Douglas County.**

| Location | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fitch Reservation | | SP | | SP | SP | SU | SP |
| Burcham Park | SP | SU | SP | SP,SU | SP,SU | SP,SU | SP,SU |
| Baker Wetlands | | | SU | SP | | SP | SP |
| Baldwin Woods | | | SP | SP | | SP | SP |
| Chicken Creek | | SP,SU | SP | SP | SP | | SP |
| Clinton Wildlife Area | | | | | | SU | SU |
| Other location | | | SP(2),SU | SP | SP(5) | SP(2) | SP |
| Earliest date | 14 May | 5 May | 19 Apr | 30 Mar | 11 Apr | 19 Apr | 12 Apr |
| Latest date | 28 May | 11 Jul | 6 Aug | 14 Jun | 16 Jul | 20 Jul | 18 Jun |

***Sightings and the season(s) in which they occurred: spring (SP) represents April through May, and summer (SU) represents June through 20 August. In the "Other location" row, the number of additional locations with sightings during a given season is enclosed in parentheses.**

After breeding was documented in 2018, the Yellow-throated Warbler became an uncommon/local migrant and summer resident in Douglas County. It is now reported at several locations annually, mainly during spring migration (Table 2). Most spring reports come from well-developed riparian woodlands (e.g., Burcham Park or Chicken Creek) and involve only one to two individuals, detected mainly by song. Occasionally, presumed spring migrants are detected in unexpected locations too (e.g., suburban neighborhoods). The main period of observation is from mid-April to mid-May when (1) migration is occurring, (2) males sing frequently, and (3) birders are more active. In early summer, reports are fewer with most in mature riparian woodland along the Kansas River at Burcham Park, or in bottomland woods along Chicken Creek. Additional recent summer reports (i.e., 2022 and 2023) along the Wakarusa River west of Clinton Lake are intriguing and suggest growth of the breeding population (eBird 2023). By late summer, Yellow-throated Warblers are scarcely reported in Douglas County and their timing of departure remains unclear.

In summary, the Yellow-throated Warbler was historically a rare spring migrant in Douglas County until the late 2010s. It should now be considered an uncommon/local spring migrant and breeder. Sightings of this species are likely to increase in Douglas County and adjacent areas. Exploration of less frequented stretches of small and medium-sized drainages in the area may show that it breeds more extensively than is currently documented.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following individuals for reviewing this manuscript and consulting about specific records: Bob Antonio, Roger Boyd, Sebastian Patti, Alexis Powell, Mark Robbins, Max Thompson, and Molly Zahn. I also thank Chuck Otte and two anonymous reviewers for peer-review.

## LITERATURE CITED

Corder, M. 2008. Kansas spring season roundup; March 1 – May 31, 2008. Horned Lark 35(3):13.

eBird. 2023. eBird: An Online Database of Bird Distribution and Abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: http://www.ebird.org. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Harris, H. 1919. Birds of the Kansas City Region. Transactions Academy of Science St. Louis 23(8):213-371.

McKay, B. and G. A. Hall. 2020. Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga dominica*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.yetwar.01.

Moore, L. 2002. Kansas spring season roundup; March 1, 2002 through May 31, 2002. Horned Lark 29(3):14.

Moore, L. 2003. Kansas spring season roundup; March 1, 2003 through May 31, 2003. Horned Lark 30(3):9.

Rising, J.D., T. Pucci, N. Johnson, and R. Dawson. 1978. Birds of the Kansas City Area. Burroughs Audubon Society and Shawnee Mission High School. Kansas City, Kansas.

Schukman J., P. Janzen, and B. Busby. 2006. Distribution of Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) in Kansas. Horned Lark 33(4):6.

Silcock, W. R. and J. G. Jorgensen. 2023. Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*). In Birds of Nebraska -- Online. www.BirdsofNebraska.org.

Thompson M. C., C. A. Ely, B. Gress, C. Otte, S. T. Patti, D. Seibel, and E. A. Young. 2011. Birds of Kansas. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence.

# SCIENCE, SECRECY, AND THE SMITHSONIAN: THE STRANGE HISTORY OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN BIOLOGICAL SURVEY PROGRAM (BOOK REVIEW)

*Science, Secrecy, and the Smithsonian: The Strange History of the Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program* by Ed Regis (2022, 180 pages, $34.95 paperback, ISBN 978-0-19-752033-8, Oxford University Press, New York).

The title, at first, might make you wonder what does this book have to do with birds, especially in Kansas? While the book is about science and ethical standards, and biological warfare during the cold war era; it does a thorough job of introducing readers into one of the greatest ornithological endeavors, if not the most significant single undertaking in modern times by the US government. Specifically, the book outlines the process between the US Army and the Smithsonian Institution to conduct a biological survey of a large portion of the Pacific Ocean. Perhaps most interesting to Kansas bird watchers and ornithologists, is the role that Kansas experts had in the program. Ever hear of Charles A. Ely, Philip S. Humphrey, or Max C. Thompson?

The author, Ed Regis, has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from New York University and is the author of at least 10 books and numerous articles on topics ranging from biological warfare and nanotechnology, transhumanism, to science ethics. He was also a college professor.

The book contains a six page preface followed by 11 chapters, an epilogue, two appendices, acknowledgments, bibliography sections, and an index. Photographs are minimal, and in black-and-white due to their historical nature. Though not in color, their use enhances the details provided in the text especially since they relate to places most of us will never see.

The preface and subsequent chapters provide a history of the Smithsonian Institution's Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program, or "Pacific Project" as it became commonly known, from the concept and rationale for the study through its history spanning from 1962 to 1969. Considering aspects related to the project are still "classified" and remain unavailable to the public, the author provides a thorough documentation of events related to the scientific accomplishments, the dilemma for the Smithsonian from an ethical perspective, but also the history of overlapping science and its role, or potential, in warfare and the conflicts from an individual to national perspective.

The project was vast, covering mostly uninhabited tropical islands in the Pacific Ocean and the open ocean, totaling approximately 4.33 million square miles. The initial focus was on both sides of the equator from the Hawaiian Islands. Eventually, it expanded to include the Aleutian and Pribilof islands of Alaska. Biologically, the survey provided the most comprehensive insight on bird migration as a result of banding 1.8 million seabirds. The flora and fauna was documented thoroughly for

the first time on many of the 48 islands, atolls, and pinnacles. However, the major plot of the book deals with the rationale for the study, unfortunately not for the simple sake of the Smithsonian seeking knowledge and biological understanding. Rather it was a request by the US Army command, focused on testing and evaluating biological and chemical weapon systems (and programs), which ultimately turned into Smithsonian scientists conducting studies that would eventually allow for the development of "secret biological weapons trials." This, is what critics dwelled on, and ethicists, like the author examined in this book.

The first few chapters discuss the development of the project, from both a military and Smithsonian perspective, but also provides an insightful history of the how the Smithsonian Institution was formed and its purpose (pg. 8-13). The book transitions into the personnel of the project, how they were recruited, their need for security clearances, and essentially becoming lab rats (getting unknown vaccines). The middle chapters discuss the biological accomplishments, followed by the ethical dilemmas. Eventually, the author describes the current state of the islands, and what the take-aways might be.

The Kansas connection started early on in the project, with Remington Kellogg, a University of Kansas undergraduate who completed a Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkley, on whales, and became the Smithsonian's assistant secretary and director of the US National Museum. At the time he was considered a foremost expert on whales and marine mammals. He met with military personnel who asked if it would be possible to undertake surveys of migrating mammals and birds under the auspices of bird and aircraft strikes at several US military installations based in the Pacific (pg. 2-3). The initial meetings ultimately resulted in Kellogg offering the Smithsonian as the best source to conduct the research and publish its findings. Subsequently, Philip S. Humphrey, Curator of the Smithsonian's Bird Division, was tasked with procuring a contract with the military, resulting in a six-page draft proposal that set the foundation of the first two-years of study (October 1962 through October 1964) for the Pacific Project (pg. 4), which resulted in a 52-page contract between the Smithsonian and the US Army Biological Laboratories, Fort Detrick (pg. 7). Eventually, he became the principal investigator. Humphrey went on to become the zoology department chair, and museum director at the University of Kansas (1967-1995, Shane 2012).

Charles A. Ely was hired early on and became field director and head of the Honolulu Office. Ely is cited throughout the early chapters (2-4), and produced one of the most significant publications as a result of the project: *The Natural History of Laysan Island, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* (Ely and Clapp 1973). Ely at the time was a zoology professor at Fort Hays State University, and became President of KOS and editor of the KOS Bulletin. Max C. Thompson was hired on as field team member, and provided insights into various components of the project. He's cited several times in chapter 2, and is given credit for pioneering "the use of cannon-projected and rocket-propelled nets to capture and band shorebirds" on St. George Island in the Pribilof's, not the Aleutians as stated in the book, between 1965 and 1966 (pg. 126). That research (Thompson and DeLong 1967) resulted in the discovery that

Ruddy Turnstones migrated from Alaska to Hawaii and the south Pacific Islands returning north along the Asiatic coast to nest in Siberia. Thompson at the time was a biology professor at Southwestern College, and has since served many roles within KOS, including serving as the current Treasurer.

Another connection to Kansas existed with A. Binion Amerson Jr., who completed his undergraduate degree at Mercer University (Georgia), and then entered the graduate program at the University of Kansas. Amerson ultimately received his M.A. degree under the mentorship of Humphrey (Shane 2012). Interestingly, in 1962, the University of Kansas received funding from the US Army Medical and Research Development Command, specifically, J. Knox Jones Jr. (mammologist), to conduct ecological studies in Mexico (pg. 19-20). The research was connected to worries that Cuba might try to invade North America through the Yucatan. Thus, the project was a "classified military operation." This experience by Amerson caused the military to recruit him directly for the Pacific Project (pg. 20).

The book is generally, well written, though Thompson is misspelled after being correct just a few lines above (pg. 15), and the aforementioned erroneous depiction of St. George Island being in the Aleutians. The author provides insight into one of the more interesting and historic accounts of the interactions between science, ornithology, a national treasure (the Smithsonian), and for me, my mentors (Thompson and Ely) involvement. While I knew of the Thompson and Ely connection intimately, I didn't realize the extent of the Kansas connection, especially KU, thus this was of great interest. Having heard first hand stories concerning the project, and reading some of the aforementioned papers, I was familiar with much of the avian aspects of the Pacific Project. But, I still found myself learning something new in each chapter. Therefore, I think this book will be of great interest to the general reader. I found the historical context provided for the area making me want to know more about the Pacific. I've long been interested in WWII, and know a little about biological and chemical warfare because of previous work with the military and general knowledge based on biology education. Thus, I found the details pertaining to the process fascinating. The US military is often considered as a "destructor" of all things biological, but in reality, they have been instrumental in providing important scientific discovery and advancement, though it may not have always been the intent. Lastly, in a day with so much misinformation and disinformation, the mistrust of science, and lack of ethical and moral values, this book provides the reader the opportunity to ascertain your own ideological thoughts and principles. Overall, I think the majority of KOS members will enjoy this book. The book could be very beneficial for high-school and college-aged students in social science, environmental science, and ethics or philosophy courses, as it provides insights to complex issues. For the professional ornithologist, the greatest value is the "history" and the common dilemma of ethics in relation to funding sources.

## LITERATURE CITED

Ely, C.A., and R.B. Clapp. 1973. The Natural History of Laysan Island Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Atoll Research Bulletin, No. 171 (3 December): 1-361.

Shane, T.S. 2012. A Two-Hundred Year History of Ornithology, Avian Biology, Bird Watching, and Birding in Kansas (1810–2010). Zea E-Books. 12. Web page: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/zeabook/12. Accessed 20 July 2023.

Thompson, M.C., and R.L. DeLong. 1967. The Use of Cannon and Rocket-Projected Nets for Trapping Shorebirds. Bird-Banding 38:214-218.

EUGENE A. YOUNG, *Agriculture and Biological Sciences, Northern Oklahoma College, 1220 E. Grand, PO Box 310, Tonkawa, OK 74653-0310, eugene.young@noc.edu*.

## ERRATA'S for Volume 74

Volume 74, Issue 2, page 31-32, the correct genus for Connecticut Warbler is Oporornis, to replace Oporonis.

Volume 74, Issue 3, pages 33-37 the correct genus for Orange-crowned Warbler is Leiothlypis, replacing Leothlypis throughout.

## KANSAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS 2023-2024



ISSN-0022-8729 8/13/2024