

Kansas Ornithological Society

713 W. 8th
Junction City, Kansas 66441



November 1974
Newsletter
Vol. 2, No. 6

The Summer of the Cassin's Sparrow

Sondra Williamson

Drawing By
Art Nonhof

In 1964 Richard F. Johnston reported that the Cassin's Sparrow in Kansas was a common summer resident in open scrub and grassland edge, to the south and west of Wallace and Comanche counties.

In 1971 Charles Ely reported the status uncertain for Ellis County. The bird had been encountered only twice in ten years, both times during migration. The comment by J. A. Allen in 1872 that the bird was rather common along the streams in Ellis County in 1871 possibly reflects a year like 1974.

James Rising in 1974 reported that the Cassin's Sparrow was common in the sagebrush-grassland of western Kansas. In the northern tier of counties it has only been recorded in Cheyenne County.

A number of KOS members observed Cassin's Sparrows farther east than what is accepted as their usual range during the summer of 1974. During the St. John Breeding Bird Survey (Stafford County) Marvin Schilling counted fifteen Cassin's Sparrows on nine stops. He has been running that particular route since 1967 and had never previously recorded the sparrow. Marvin also reported a single male Cassin's Sparrow a quarter mile north of the WMA headquarters at Cheyenne Bottoms, Barton County. That particular bird remained for three days skylarking in a wheatfield edge after it was first seen on May 21, 1974. Another bird was heard singing on June 1, 1974 one half mile west of the WMA headquarters at 2 a.m. by Steve Fretwell and again at 4:30 a.m. by Tom Shane. Tom Shane says he got up to go out on the marsh to call rails but has no explanation for Fretwell. The same bird was heard several times again that day.

On returning from Quivira June 16, 1974 Tom Shane, Doris Marx and Susannah Block located five singing Cassin's Sparrows two and a half miles west of Raymond, Rice County. This is Sandhill area containing a fair stand of Chickasaw Plum.

Charles Ely reported Cassin's Sparrows stayed in Ellis County well into the breeding season.

Sebastian Patti reports, "I made two trips to southwest Kansas this past summer, June 7-9 and in the third week of



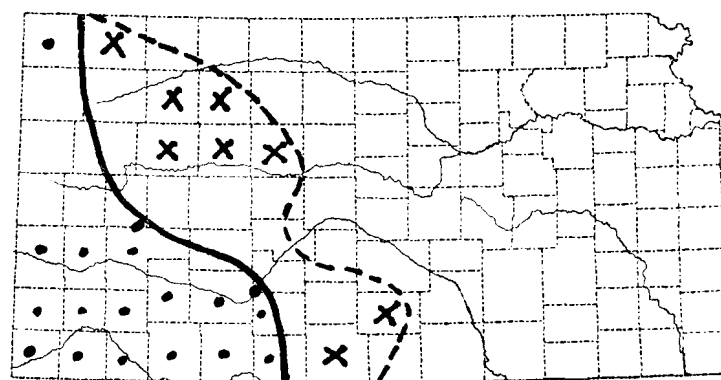
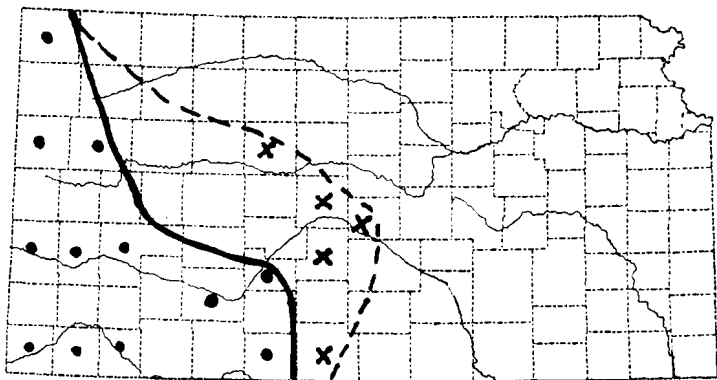
July. Driving south and west from Wichita to Medicine Lodge I stopped at every conceivable place Cassin's Sparrows might have been (Sedgwick, Sumner, and Harper counties). Both trips, I first located the birds in Barber County, west of Hardtner. The habitat is very good there for the species. The birds were rather common in southwest Barber County (along the Salt Fork of the Cimarron). From this point on to Marion County it was an easily found common summer resident. A nest found in Morton County on June 7, 1974, contained four fresh eggs. Traveling Route 56 in previous summers I usually first encountered the species in western Edwards County and Ford County."

Joan Challans and her birding associates found a Cassin's Sparrow nest in the Dodge City region on May 12, only the second one they had ever found.

Ed Martinez also found Cassin's Sparrows while conducting his June census in Barber County. He writes, "I saw a total of five Cassin's Sparrows in Barber County, three at one stop and two more seven stops later. At the first location the birds were quite territorial. After I completed my survey I returned to the first location and looked for a nest, which I found in a grassy area adjacent to a wheat field. The nest contained three eggs and was located in a forb. I returned to the same location six days later to find the bird gone, nest destroyed by recent harvest activities. While netting shorebirds I located a Cassin's Sparrow singing just east of the Cheyenne Bottoms Headquarters building. I also located another Cassin's nest this summer four miles south of Coats, Kansas."

The Wallace County Breeding Birds Survey showed an increased density of Cassin's Sparrows for the past summer. Tom Shane recorded twenty-four birds in seventeen stops for 1969 and five birds in five stops in 1970. Marvin Schwilling recorded 28 Cassin's Sparrows in twelve stops in the 1972 census and in 1974 eighty-seven birds in twenty-one stops.

The following maps show the usual breeding range of the Cassin's Sparrow and the extended 1974 range. The maps also outline the areas of major stands of Sandhill Sage as shown by A. W. Kuchler's 1974 map, "The Potential Natural Vegetation of Kansas." The additional vegetation line shows the counties as listed by H. A. Stevens, 1969, where Sandhill Sage has been collected.



• Previously reported locations of sparrows in the breeding season.

X Additional sparrow locations for the breeding season of 1974.

• Eastern limit of the major stands of sage.

X Additional areas where sage has been collected east of the above line.

FALL REPORT FROM CAMP TOWANYAK 1974 (August, September, October, November)

by Mary Louise Myers

On the morning of Aug. 4, the temperature was a cool 45 degrees, and it seemed an unusually early date for the Osprey we spotted in a tree across the road. It had been just two years ago that we had one eleven days later in the same location. A sudden burst of song from the Kentucky Warbler alerted us to the fact that he was still around. He had been so quiet over the past month we had forgotten about him. Welcome rains on Aug. 6 and 7 broke the long dry spell. The House Wrens were still feeding young in the nest and a Parula Warbler, in a single brief appearance, sat in the sycamore and sang his buzzy song twice over. We heard the Blue Grosbeak on Aug. 12. Lots of Purple Martins soared over the swimming pool. Heat and humidity had returned by the 21st. While confined to the hospital for six days, I watched hundreds of Purple Martins from my sixth floor window on Aug. 28. They were in the air from noon til dusk. Many swifts were with them. It was the exact same date that Hugh Moler had reported 200 plus at Shawnee Mission Lake just one year ago. The next evening I watched many nighthawks flying through the sunset from the same vantage point. Heavy rain on Aug. 31 and continuing through Sept. 2, brought a record low of 38 degrees for that date. Barn Swallows were flying low, even dipping to the pavement in their search for insects, over a busy intersection in Shawnee. That evening the nighthawks took their place, repeating the performance. One came close to hitting our windshield. It is a wonder many of them were not killed. Our first flock of 12 Cedar Waxwings arrived on Sept. 11 and five days later Harry Gregory reported a couple at the zoo. The first frost --an early one -- came on Sept. 14. Our first warbler, a Blackburnian, appeared on Sept. 15 and that evening we counted 180 crows headed for their river roost about 6p.m. On the morning of Sept. 20, while packing the car to head out to Cheyenne Bottoms and the KOS meeting, I heard a few "lisps" and "tssps" in the walnut tree. I took time before leaving to enjoy the wave of birds that went through the yard --a Black-throated Green Warbler, a Pine, two Black and White, a Nashville, a Goldenwing, two Solitary Vireos, a Philadelphia Vireo and several Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Our only Olive-sided Flycatcher of the fall migration was on Sept. 23. We set up the mist nets for several days but had very little luck. Birds were scarce, it was very windy, and although there were a few little waves, they stayed high in the trees, far above the nets. Hundreds of grackles were feeding on acorns throughout the wooded area. Last date for Summer Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak was Sept. 25. The first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker appeared on Sept. 27. We had another sapsucker on Oct. 17 and an immature bird on Nov. 22. Jananne McNitt reported one at her peanut feeder on Nov. 16 and 17 and another (immature) on Nov. 27. The 28th brought another wave of migrants, including two Mourning Warblers, 3 Nashville, 3 Black-throated Green, plus a single Yellow, Tennessee, Blackpoll and Orange-crowned, a Solitary Vireo and half a dozen Ruby-crowned Kinglets. The next day a dozen or more Ruby-crowned Kinglets were flitting around the pines, putting on quite a show, raising and lowering their brilliant crowns in typical display behavior. The first Golden-crowned Kinglets arrived on Oct. 3. A good wave of more than a dozen on the 6th, and just an hour later Rob Mills at Sherwood Forest (5 or 6 miles southeast) reported a wave about the same size. It has been years since we have seen or heard flying squirrels. They used to come to the feeders at night. On the evening of Oct. 6 we were pleased to hear them as we sat around the council fire with a group of campers. On Oct. 7, we drove to Atchison, crossed the river and drove by the Iataan Marsh area, and by Bean and Sugar Lakes. The maples were in full glory along the river bluffs. We saw many swallows (400 plus) near the entrance of Lewis and Clark State Park. They were flying over the fields and also perched on highwires. There were many Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows, Rough-winged and Cliff Swallows but the prize was three Violet-green Swallows, observed not only in flight, but perched on the highline as well. A Barred Owl sang from our hill the night of Oct. 7. We had an immature Goshawk on the 9th. A call from Josephine Isenberger on Oct. 11 reported a good migration in her yard in K.C. She had both kinglets, a Blackburnian, Nashville and Palm warbler. The next day brought rain, our first Juncos and a wave of warblers around 4 P.M. These were mostly myrtles, but also included one Blackburnian, one Nashville,

several unidentified plus half a dozen Golden-crowned Kinglets. The rain continued into the next forenoon and another wave of birds went through our yard. Three Black-throated Green Warblers were singing and chasing titmice and chickadees and even a startled Downy Woodpecker. Also a dozen or more Ruby-crowned Kinglets, many of them singing their tiny "whisper" song. On the 14th, six bluebirds circled and dropped into the walnut tree. We had not seen them since the middle of August. I immediately filled the current cup, but they did not return. We saw the first Brown Creeper this same day. The 17th brought a towhee, the first white-throats and a Harlan's Hawk. A pair of Kingfishers have been observed several times, always together. Elizabeth Cole reported that she and Bob Fisher had seen 40 Bonaparte's Gulls along with some Ring-billed and Franklin's at Lake Perry in Jefferson County, Kansas on the 26th of Oct. Our first Goldfinch came to the feeder on the 28th and on the 30th we saw our only Winter Wren. We got a Rough-legged Hawk Nov. 1, and also flushed 18 quail from a brush pile in the meadow. Jim found an old elm that had blown over in the woods, and hauled the top of it to the yard where we propped it up against a tree. It had at least a dozen woodpecker holes in it and we filled them with suet. Now it is the favorite suet feeder for all our birds. Nov. 4 was cold and raw, the first day that hinted of winter after a long and glorious Indian Summer. That evening a chorus of White-throated Sparrows announced the arrival of a large wave, as they bedded down in the multi-flora along with numerous just-arrived juncos. Julie Halford called on Nov. 5 to ecstatically report a red-breasted nuthatch at a feeder --a lifer for her. That's the way to get them --right in your own back yard. Jananne McNitt reported one on Nov. 21 and as November ends both nuthatches seem to have settled down for a long winters stay. After a hard freeze on Nov. 6, two mockers appeared, feeding on bittersweet I had put out for the bluebirds. Oh well, first come, first served. I had about given up on the bluebirds ever returning again, but just two days later, there they were back at the feeder. My cup runneth over. We discovered that our "cross-eyed" Screech Owl, who roosts in a hollow tree by one of the cabins, has a buddy who shares his apartment. Quite a surprise the day we found them both looking out at us. A rather late Brown Thrasher put in a one-day appearance on Nov. 11. By the 13th we had seven bluebirds, plus 15 or more Goldfinch at the feeder. It was cold and windy and the birds fed heavily all that day. Five Cedar Waxwings sat in the sycamore, but I guess they were only window-shopping. The first very light snow on the 14th brought three Purple Finch --the first we had seen since April. In the early hours of Nov. 20 we heard several flocks of geese singing their way through the gray dawn. Midmorning the same day, we spotted a beautiful buck, antlers and all, in our lower meadow. We have seen does on several occasions, but never before a buck. Had a single Harris' Sparrow on Nov. 22 and a beautiful Red-shouldered Hawk near Holiday, Kansas on the 24th. McNitt and Patti found 200 plus Lapland Longspurs in Johnson County near the junction of highway #10 and #7 on the 27th. They also reported two Black Ducks at Wyandotte Lake. The morning of the 29th we awoke to a white world and many bird visitors clamouring for table service. A female Red-shafted Flicker joined our three Yellow-shafts on the suet for a nice side-by-side comparison.

As the month draws to a close, we stepped outside for the final moments of a November sunset...and the dim glow of a sun already slipped below the horizon. Deep orange-red, blending to subtler shades of pink, in wave after wave of color against a blue-gray sky which formed a subdued and lovely backdrop. Black skeletons of trees silhouetted against the sky in the fast-fading light. Not a breath of air stirred on this stillest of all evenings, not a leaf nor a branch in motion. Then in the hush of dusk came the wild chorus of coyotes from the hill, a serenade in rising crescendo that stopped as suddenly as it had begun. It brought to mind a favorite quote from Thoreau, "Every day a new picture is painted and framed, held up for half an hour, in such lights as the Great Artist chooses, and then withdrawn, and the curtain falls. And then the sun goes down, and long the afterglow gives light. And then the damask curtains glow along the western window, and now the first star is lit, and I go home."

WESTERN KANSAS REPORTS

Dodge City-- Summer brought little unusual: On May 11 we found a male Evening Grosbeak unable to fly so it was brought in and fed and after several days was able to fly. It was last seen on May 23. On May 12 we had Yellow and Myrtle Warblers, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows, Rough-winged Swallows, several Scissortails and large flocks of Lark Buntings. Hawks were scarce all summer, we had a few marsh and Swainsons, and also several Sparrow Hawks. A pair of Blue Grosbeaks nested along the Arkansas River along with a pair of Indigo Buntings. House Wrens were common along the river but for some reason fewer than usual nested in the residential district. A Bewicks Wren nested in the cemetery near the middle of May. Mississippi Kites nested in town and in the surrounding territory in larger numbers than usual. Red-headed Woodpeckers were unusually abundant. Baltimore Orioles were common but Orchard Orioles were very few. Western Kingbirds were common also quite a few Eastern, but few Scissortails stayed to nest. Kingfishers nested along the river. Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Little Blues were seen on several occasions along the river, also Spotted Sandpipers. We had fewer Lark Buntings than in past years and very few Lark Sparrows. Dickcissels were seen only occasionally. One Yellowthroat was heard and seen all through the summer. Purple Martins arrived the middle of April and by the first of May were nesting, and at least one pair of Cliff Swallows nested. We had more Mockers nesting than usual but Brown Thrashers were rare. warbling Vireos were rare as were Goldfinch. We had several Bullocks Oriol Grackles were here in large numbers all summer.

The fall migration seemed slow coming in probably due to the dry weather. After we had several inches of rain we saw more. Franklin and King-billed Gulls were seen in large flocks. Great Blue Herons, Avocets and Long-billed Dowitchers in late Aug. and through the fall months, also Solitary Sandpipers, Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalarope. Red-tailed Hawks were unusually numerous in migration as were Sparrow Hawks. Redwing and Brewer's Blackbirds came through in large flocks. Pied-billed Grebes were here for some time. Warblers were late arriving. On Sept. 25 we saw Yellow warblers, Wilson's, Orange-crowned and one Black-throated Blue was seen clearly. Myrtle or Yellow-rumped Warblers and Orange-crowned were seen as late as Oct. 20. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were seen on several occasions. Vesper, Clay-colored and Chipping Sparrows came through in large numbers. We saw our first Juncos both Slate-colored and Oregon on Sept. 29 also one White-winged Junco. We saw our first Tree Sparrows Oct. 15, and the first Harris' Sparrows on Oct. 20. I had a Rufous-sided Towhee Oct. 15, also a Solitaire in the yard. On Oct. 9 we had a flock on Mountain Bluebirds seven in all, and Oct. 20 we had a flock of ten. They were seen again throughout the week in the same region. Mountain Bluebirds were also seen in Hodgeman and Commanche Counties during October. Robins came through in large numbers in October and stayed till middle November. White-breasted Nuthatches arrived early in November. On Nov. 17 we had a small flock of young Bohemian Waxwings that stayed for about a week. November 25 we had a Red-bellied Woodpecker, the first one seen here for many years. Lapland Longspurs are here in large numbers, they were first seen on Oct. 22. On Oct. 5 there was one Pelican on the sandpit near town.

Joan Challans

Colby and Great Bend--I observed the first returning Rough-legged Hawk in the area of NW Kansas (10 miles north of Colby) on October 1st. I expect others to follow shortly.

I sighted an Osprey on the Arkansas River at the south edge of Great Bend, Kansas on Sept. 24th. I observed the bird on 7 or 8 occasions as it was working the river area and flying back and forth. At two different times on this date, I observed the bird as it was carrying a fish. I once again observed the bird in the same immediate area on the 25th.

William C. Piper

Mt. Sunflower--The last Swainson's Hawk on Oct. 16, the first Rough-legged Hawk Oct. 12, last Mourning Dove Oct. 10, last Common Nighthawk Oct. 8, last Brown Thrasher Oct. 7, the last robin Nov. 19, last Loggerhead Shrike Oct 27, the last Lark Bunting was seen Oct. 13th, and the first Junco was seen on Oct. 26.

Russell Harold

From the President's Desk

Christmas Bird Count: Christmas Bird Count forms have been mailed to compilers of 1973 counts. Anyone else needing forms can obtain them from me. Count reports should be returned to:

Max C. Thompson
1330 Presidential Dr. Apt. 204
Columbus, Ohio 43212

as he will be compiling the report and editing the March Bulletin.

Marked eagles: While out birding this winter, look for immature Bald Eagles with colored wings. This last summer, red, green, and yellow vinyl wing markers were put on nestling Bald Eagles in northern Saskatchewan. If you see any immature Bald Eagles with such wing markers, information should be reported to: Jon Gerrard, 954 15th Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414 or Doug Whitfield, Botany Dept., University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta or call collect to Jon Gerrard at 1-612-331-6736. When reporting sightings, please include the date, time of day, location, and the sequence of markers on the wings (use right or left wings referring to the eagle's right or left).

Conservation issues: Stan Roth is serving as Chairman of the Conservation Committee of the KOS again this year. If you wish to call conservation issues to his attention, contact him at: Stanley D. Roth Jr., 532 Oklahoma, Lawrence, Kansas 66044.

Membership Committee: We are attempting a new organization for the Membership Committee this year. The committee will consist of six members, each responsible for giving leadership in membership recruitment in one region of the state. Therefore it will be a working committee, not a "meeting committee," and they may call upon you for help. I hope you will be able to help them. I have challenged the committee to get 100 additional KOS members, less than 20 per region, before the KOS Spring Meeting. With your help, they can do it. So far, four members have been appointed to the committee:

Katharine Kelley -- Northeast region & Chairman
Baldwin City 66006

Steve Burr -- Northcentral region
Rt. 2, Box 25A, Salina 67401

Jean Schulenberg -- Southeast region
RFD 1, Admire 66830

Wallace Champeny -- Southcentral region
Oxford 67119

The other members of the committee will be announced in the near future. Please contact the committee member in your region if you have ideas for membership recruitment.

Member services: KOS is not an organization that can provide you a large beautiful magazine or a discount on books or recordings. KOS doesn't have a paid staff who can lead workshops, go on lecture tours or research Conservation issues. KOS is not a large nor a rich organization, but we do have one important resource -- KOS members. I think KOS serves a real need in promoting bird study and bird conservation in Kansas. But in addition to these general statewide purposes, can KOS provide better services for its individual members? Only if individual KOS members are willing to help.

I am initiating in this issue of the Newsletter a Member Services department for ideas that would help KOS provide services desired by its members. I hope the sharing of these ideas may make it possible to find KOS members who will help provide some of these services.

Let me suggest the first idea. There are many new members of KOS (and probably some older ones as well) who could really profit from a few hours in the field with someone skilled in the identification of a particular group of birds who could give them instruction and help in bird identification. I think there are probably a number of

"experts" is KOS who would be willing to give two or three half-days a year for field trips to their favorite birding areas with a limited number of neophyte KOS members. I think we could announce and coordinate these instructional field trips through the KOS Newsletter. Maybe we could even give priority on these trips to persons from areas where there are no organized local birding groups. Does this idea have any merit? Only if it would be an appreciated service for some KOS members and if there are other KOS members who would be willing to be field trip leaders. If you are interested in such an instructional field trip program, either as a leader or learner, drop me a note and indicate your interest and give me suggestions for implementation. I only want an indication of interest now, no commitment. If there is enough interest, maybe it can be organized.

Do you have other ideas for member services? Send them to me and we'll print them in the next Newsletter and see if there are other KOS members who would be interested in your ideas.

Dwight Platt
RFD 2, Box 209
Newton, Kansas 67114

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of November 22, 149 members had paid their dues for 1975. Since 18 of these are new members, this means that 234 "old" members have not paid yet.

Membership dues are due January 1. So please look up the dues envelope that was mailed with the June Bulletin in September and send it in as soon as possible. If you cannot find it, just send \$1.00 student, \$3.00 regular, \$6.00 sustaining, or \$100.00 life to Eugene Lewis, K.O.S. Treasurer, 1285 MacVicar, Topeka, Kansas 66604.

Changes of address should be reported to the membership secretary as soon as possible. She in turn will notify the mailing department.

A little uncertainty occurs when members pay dues one year using a home address and a college address or business address the next -- or vice versa. Unless an address change is asked, the old address will be continued.

Amelia J. Betts -- Membership Secretary

NOTES AND NEWS

A tentative date of September 6 was set for the fall field trip at the December KOS Board Meeting. An additional 1975 KOS field trip to Morton County was also discussed.

Prices on back issues of the KOS Bulletin were set. Each volume will sell for two dollars, or a complete set of available volumes will sell for twenty-five dollars. There are only two numbers at present out of print. Contact Ruth Fahl, 1923 Ohio St., Lawrence, Kansas 66044 for any orders you wish to make.

TOTAL 1974 KANSAS BIRD LIST

I am requesting that each KOS member send me a list of all birds seen in Kansas during 1974. These will then be used to compile a complete 1974 list. The lists will also be used to determine the frequency each species is encountered. This will enable us to standardize and quantify the occurrence of each species seen in the state. What to do: 1) use a KOS check-list. 2) write the county or counties, if you live on a county line and regularly bird in two counties, in the location blank. 3) go down the list and "X" all the species seen in your home county. 4) then go down the list and put an "O" in the empty blanks for the species you saw on trips away from your home county. 5) count up all the species and put the figure in the total species blank. 6) put your name in the observer blank and mail it to me. If you have any questions please drop me a card.

Please send all late fall and early winter notes to me by mid-January. The January Newsletter will be mailed about one week later.

Tom Shane



BIRD POPULATIONS INSTITUTE
P.O. BOX 637
MANHATTAN, KANSAS 66502

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 660
MANHATTAN, KANSAS 66502