

# Kansas Ornithological Society

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## The Summer of the Cassin's Sparrow

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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



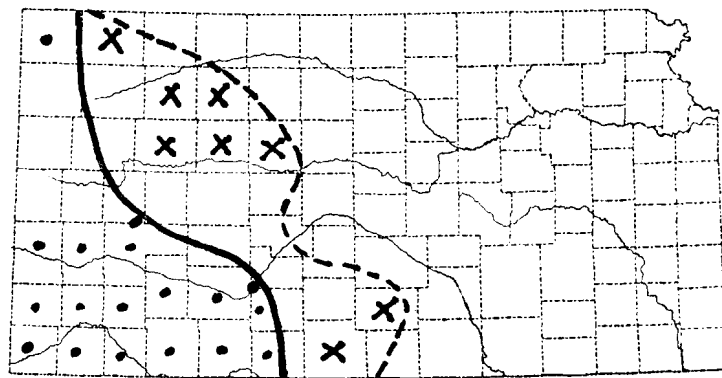
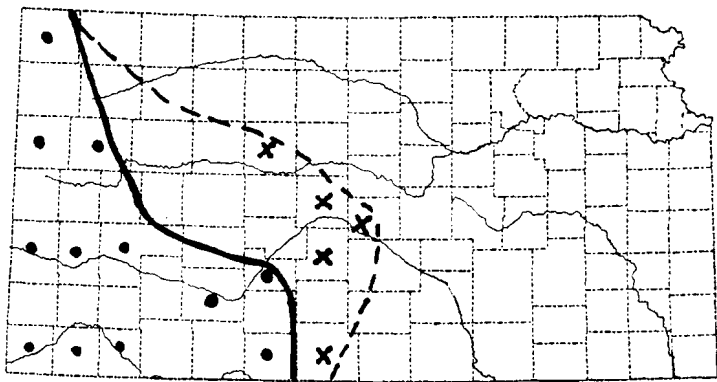
July. Driving south and west from Wichita to Medicine Lodge I stopped at every conceivable place Cassin's Sparrows might have been (Sedgwick, Sumner, and Harper counties). Both trips, I first located the birds in Barber County, west of Hardtner. The habitat is very good there for the species. The birds 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.











