

SOME FINDINGS OF THE SEMPLE OKLAHOMA EXPEDITION

BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

DURING the spring of 1937, Mr. John B. Semple generously sponsored a two-months' ornithological survey of Oklahoma. The party of four men (Mr. Semple, Leo A. Luttringer, Jr., Karl W. Haller, and the author) entered the southeastern corner of the State April 19, and established themselves on the Mountain Fork River in McCurtain County, seven miles east of Broken Bow. They spent a week in this well-wooded region, visiting the swamplands south of Eagletown, the Kiamichi Mountains in the northern part of the county, and the banks of the Red River, ten miles southwest of Idabel. Though they encountered fine cypress trees along the Mountain Fork, they did not find the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. On April 25, they motored westward to Murray County, and made their second base at the Cedarvale Tourist Camp. Here they studied the bird life of the forest-clad Arbuckle Mountains for seven days. Leaving Cedarvale May 2, they drove to Indianahoma, Comanche County, from whence they visited the Wichita Mountains, and the rocky hills of southern Kiowa County. They were at Indianahoma seven days. May 9, they established a new base at Cheyenne, Roger Mills County. This section was virtually unknown from the ornithological standpoint, and the four men spent seven busy days visiting the Antelope Hills (along the South Canadian River near Durham), the wooded flood-plain of the Washita River, and the sagebrush country near Strong City. On May 16, the party moved to Gate, Beaver County, at the extreme eastern end of the Panhandle. Here, under the guidance of Mr. Walter E. Lewis, the ornithologists worked the Red Hills, seven miles to the north; the shallow lakes near the Beaver River, three miles to the south; and cottonwood groves along Horse Creek. Three days later (May 19) a sixth base was made at Kenton, at the extreme western end of the Panhandle, a section visited by Semple and Sutton in 1932 and 1933, and again by Sutton in 1936. From May 21 to 24, Messrs. Thomas D. Burleigh and George H. Lowery also studied the bird life of the Black Mesa country, with their base at Kenton.

The author's party moved eastward on May 25 to the Lesser Prairie Chicken country in Ellis County, making headquarters at Arnett. This section Sutton had studied intensively the preceding year. Luttringer left for the East on May 28. On May 31, Semple, Haller and Sutton moved to Buffalo, Harper County, by way of Woodward and Woods Counties, stopping briefly at the spectacular salt plains near Edith. Semple left for the East on June 1.

From June 1 to 12, Haller and Sutton motored extensively through the northeastern corner of the State, collecting specimens principally at the following places: the Edith salt plains, in Woods County; Pond Creek, Grant County; Ceres and Red Rock, Noble County; Mulhall and Coyle, Logan County; the southwestern corner of Payne County, along the north bank of the Cimarron River; Ramona and Copan, Washington County; and Grove and Jay, Delaware County. They left Oklahoma June 12, following highway 66 northeastward through Ottawa County.

During the course of the several weeks of field work 219 species (not counting subspecies) were recorded. Of these the following appear to merit especial attention, either because they have not heretofore been recorded from Oklahoma, or because their status or the extent of their range has not been fully understood. In the author's opinion the expedition's most important work was done in Roger Mills County, where several species formerly thought to breed only in eastern and central Oklahoma, were found as far west as the Texas state-line. The author wishes to express his indebtedness to Mrs. Margaret Morse Nice, whose 'Birds of Oklahoma' (Publ. Univ. of Oklahoma Biol. Surv., 3: no. 1, 1931) has furnished an admirable basis for the present investigations.

TREGANZA'S GREAT BLUE HERON, *Ardea herodias treganzai*.—Ten pairs were found nesting in cottonwoods along the South Canadian River ten miles south of Arnett, Ellis County; clamorous young in the nest were noted May 26.

SNOWY EGRET, *Leucophoyx thula thula*.—Five were seen along the Red River, ten miles southwest of Idabel, McCurtain County, April 24.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON, *Nyctanassa violacea violacea*.—Mrs. Nice (1931, 57) calls this species a "summer resident in northeastern and central Oklahoma." We found a small colony along the Washita River near Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, and collected a male May 13 (Sutton). No eggs were found in the four nests examined on this date, though parent birds were standing among the branches close by. Isolated nesting pairs were observed along a small stream near Ceres, Noble County, June 2.

RUDDY DUCK, *Oxyura jamaicensis rubida*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 65) calls this species an "uncommon transient." We therefore wish to record a male and five females seen along the Washita River, three miles west of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 12; several males and females seen on the shallow lakes three miles south of Gate, Beaver County, May 18; and a pair noted on the South Canadian River, ten miles south of Arnett, Ellis County, May 26.

AMERICAN MERGANSER, *Mergus merganser americanus*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 65) calls this species an "uncommon transient and winter resident." We therefore wish to record two males and a female seen along the Beaver River three miles south of Gate, Beaver County, May 18.

COOPER'S HAWK, *Accipiter cooperi*.—According to Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 71), this species nests in "northern and central Oklahoma and the Wichitas." We found it common in the vicinity of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, from May 9 to 16, collecting a set of four somewhat incubated eggs on the 13th, and a mated pair and their

three fresh eggs the following day (Semple). In the southeastern part of the State we noted the Cooper's Hawk but once: a single bird along the Red River southwest of Idabel, McCurtain County, April 24.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK, *Buteo platypterus platypterus*.—A pair noted April 23 in the Kiamichi Mountains of northern McCurtain County, eight miles east of Bethel, must have been on their nesting territory, for the birds screamed at us repeatedly. Mrs. Nice (ibid., 74) calls the Broad-wing a "rare summer resident in northeastern Oklahoma."

KING RAIL, *Rallus elegans elegans*.—Haller took a female (laying eggs) near the Cimarron River, seven miles north of Gate, Beaver County, May 17. On the following day a nest with three fresh eggs was found along the edge of one of the shallow lakes three miles south of Gate (Sutton).

UPLAND PLOVER, *Bartramia longicauda*.—A nesting pair with young were noted by Haller and Sutton near Quapaw, Ottawa County, not far from the Kansas state-line, June 12. The species was abundant as a transient in Comanche County from May 3 to 7.

WESTERN WILLET, *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus inornatus*.—A male was taken along the Cimarron River, seven miles north of Gate, Beaver County, May 16 (Haller). The gonads were not enlarged.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER, *Pisobia fuscicollis*.—Noted almost daily from May 3 to June 1 at the following points: Indianahoma, Comanche County; Gate, Beaver County; South Canadian River, south of Arnett, Ellis County; salt plains near Edith, Woods County; along the Cimarron River, east of Buffalo, Harper County. A female was taken fifteen miles east of Buffalo, Harper County, May 31 (Sutton).

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER, *Erolia bairdi*.—Noted almost daily from May 3 to June 1 at exactly the same places listed under the White-rumped Sandpiper. A female was collected May 4, three miles south of Indianahoma, Comanche County (Sutton).

DOWITCHER, *Limnodromus griseus*.—This species was noted on three occasions: a single bird, at a cattle-pond two miles northwest of Indianahoma, Comanche County, May 3; two birds (one a female, collected by Sutton), at a shallow lake three miles south of Gate, Beaver County, May 16; and a single female (also collected by Sutton), at a shallow lake south of Gate, May 18. These two female specimens are strikingly dissimilar. The bill of the former measures 73 mm., that of the latter only 60. The chest of the former is heavily marked with roundish spots; that of the latter is almost immaculate. The former is noticeably dark above, the dark bars of the rectrices being much wider than the light ones, whereas in the latter specimen the dark and light bars on the tail are of about equal width. The long-billed bird is clearly *L. g. scolopaceus* (Say), the subspecies listed by Mrs. Nice (ibid., 93) as a "rare transient." The short-billed bird's wing measurement (146 mm.), light appearance, and relatively unspotted chest declare it *L. g. hendersoni* Rowan, the so-called Interior Dowitcher. This name is regarded by some authors, including J. L. Peters ('Check-list of Birds of the World,' 2: 272, 1934) as a synonym of *griseus*. In any event the short-billed bird apparently has not been recorded from Oklahoma.

STILT SANDPIPER, *Micropalama himantopus*.—Noted only in the vicinity of Gate, Beaver County, but common there on May 18 (three specimens taken) and May 25, especially about the shallow lakes near the Beaver River, three miles south of town.

WESTERN SANDPIPER, *Ereunetes maurii*.—A flock of about forty was seen near Indianahoma, Comanche County, May 3. The following day but one was seen in the

same region. One noted May 12 along the Washita River, three miles west of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County. Several noted in the vicinity of Gate, Beaver County, May 16 to 18, and at a small cattle-pond near Arnett, Ellis County, May 27.

AMERICAN AVOCET, *Recurvirostra americana*.—Two observed about lakes three miles south of Gate, Beaver County, May 18. One of these, a male with much enlarged gonads, was collected by Haller.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE, *Steganopus tricolor*.—Mrs. Nice (ibid., 95) considers this an "uncommon transient." We noted it daily while in the Indian Territory (Comanche County), daily while we were at Gate, Beaver County, and last in the vicinity of Arnett, Ellis County, when a male and a female were observed at a small cattle-pond, May 27.

CHIMNEY SWIFT, *Chaetura pelagica*.—Watching carefully for this species on our way eastward across the State, we noted it first at Cherokee, Alfalfa County, then, more commonly, at Pond Creek, Grant County, June 1. Mrs. Nice (ibid., 109) tells us that the species ranges west as far as Oklahoma and Cleveland Counties.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, *Centurus carolinus*.—According to Mrs. Nice (ibid., 112) this species is "resident as far west as Kay, Major, Blaine, Grady and Comanche Counties." We noted it several times in the vicinity of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 10 to 13, collecting a male on the 10th (Haller); at Indian Territory, Comanche County, where a male was taken May 6 (Semple); and in Ellis County, along the north bank of the South Canadian River south of Arnett, May 26. It is our belief that the Red-bellied Woodpecker occurs throughout southwestern Oklahoma wherever there is sufficient tree growth.

DOWNY WOODPECKER, *Dryobates pubescens*.—Some form of Downy Woodpecker nests rather commonly westward to the Texas state-line in Roger Mills and Ellis Counties. In an attempt to determine the identification of these birds a series of six specimens was collected, four of them males. These birds are all much too small for *medianus* (Swainson), the wing of the male averaging 89.5 mm., but are strikingly too white-breasted for *pubescens*. In view of the fact that one female specimen from McCurtain County (GMS 7261), where typical *pubescens* is said to occur, also is very white-breasted, it seems best to refer all Downy Woodpeckers of the southwestern quarter of the State to *pubescens*, at least until it has been determined to what extent soiling is responsible for the dark coloration of *pubescens* from the southeastern United States.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD, *Tyrannus vociferans*.—This species, which is not listed by Mrs. Nice, we saw repeatedly in the Kenton region May 21 and 22, collecting three females on the latter date; it has, however, been recorded from Oklahoma previously (Sutton, Auk, 53: 431, 1936).

WESTERN ALDER FLYCATCHER, *Empidonax traillii brewsteri*.—Two males taken near Kenton, Cimarron County, respectively on May 20 and 24, have been identified by Mr. Pierce Brodtkorb as *brewsteri*. The gonads were enlarged, but we have no further proof of its breeding. *E. traillii* certainly breeds in the vicinity of Arnett, Ellis County, but we have not yet collected material upon which to base subspecific identification.

EASTERN CROW, *Corvus brachyrhynchos brachyrhynchos*.—The Crow breeds westward to the Texas state-line in parts of Roger Mills and Ellis Counties. Two males were taken; the wing in these measures respectively 325 and 320 mm. A nest containing five small young was found along the Washita River near Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 12.

PINYON JAY, *Cyanocephalus cyanocephalus*.—A nest found twelve feet from the ground in a pinyon growing on a mesa top seven miles southeast of Kenton, May 23, held three *quite naked*, dark-colored young. On the preceding day a pair with young just out of the nest was noted in the same region.

TUFTED TITMOUSE, *Baeolophus bicolor*.—This species evidently ranges westward to the Texas state-line at least in the latitude of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, for we found it fairly common along the Washita River in that region, May 9 to 16.

GRAY TITMOUSE, *Baeolophus inornatus griseus*.—A breeding male was collected seven miles southeast of Kenton, Cimarron County, May 22 (Sutton).

CAROLINA WREN, *Thryothorus ludovicianus ludovicianus*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 136) tells us that this species ranges as far west as Kay, Payne, Cleveland, Caddo and Comanche Counties. We found it fairly common in the vicinity of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, and therefore believe that it occurs as far west as the Texas state-line in that latitude. Several specimens were collected.

ROCK WREN, *Salpinctes obsoletus obsoletus*.—A common bird in the Antelope Hills district of northern Roger Mills County and in the Red Hills north of Gate, Beaver County. At the former place a nest with five somewhat-incubated eggs was found May 11 (Sutton).

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER, *Toxostoma curvirostre curvirostre*.—Recorded several times near Kenton, Cimarron County: a male taken May 21 (Semple); a male taken May 22 (Sutton); a nest with four well-developed young found in a cholla cactus May 23 (Haller). This species is regular, but not common, in the Black Mesa country.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER, *Polioptila caerulea caerulea*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 145) tells us that this bird summers as far west as Kay, Payne, Canadian, Grady and Comanche Counties. We found it also, and somewhat commonly, in Roger Mills and Ellis Counties, during May.

WHITE-EYED VIREO, *Vireo griseus griseus*.—Noted daily in McCurtain County from April 19 to 24, and also in the Arbuckle Mountain region, though not in the higher parts, from April 28 to May 1.

BELL'S VIREO, *Vireo belli belli*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 151) considers this species a "summer resident in northeastern and central Oklahoma." We took a breeding male along the Red River, ten miles southwest of Idabel, McCurtain County, on April 24; found it fairly common locally in the vicinity of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 10; and noted a few pairs along the South Canadian River south of Arnett, Ellis County, collecting a male, May 28 (Sutton).

GRAY VIREO, *Vireo vicinior*.—Finding a nesting pair of these birds in a little canyon among the mesas eight miles southeast of Kenton was a great surprise. When first encountered, the male was singing while the female was gathering nesting material. The male was collected May 22 (Sutton). This species has not heretofore been recorded in the State.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO, *Vireo solitarius solitarius*.—A female *solitarius* taken by Sutton two miles south of Indianahoma, Comanche County, May 8, proves to be of the eastern race, the wing measuring 73 mm., the tail 54; the general coloration is too bright for *cassini* Xantus. According to Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 153) this bird has not heretofore actually been collected in the State.

RED-EYED VIREO, *Vireo olivaceus*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 153) tells us that this species nests as far west as Kay, Caddo, and Comanche Counties. We found it also in Roger Mills County, and collected a breeding male near Cheyenne May 14 (Haller).

WORM-EATING WARBLER, *Helmitheros vermivorus*.—Mrs. Nice (ibid., 155) calls this species a "rare transient in eastern Oklahoma," stating that there is no record of a specimen taken in the State. We found at least one nesting pair in rather open woodland seven miles south of Jay, Delaware County, and collected a male June 11 (Haller). The common tree in this district was a species of oak, and the characteristic birds were the Yellow-breasted Chat, Wood Pewee, Chipping Sparrow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers.

NASHVILLE WARBLER, *Vermivora ruficapilla ruficapilla*.—Mrs. Nice (ibid., 156) is correct in calling this species an "uncommon" transient. We did, however, record it almost every day from April 19 to the end of the month in McCurtain and Murray Counties; from May 6 to 8 in Comanche County; and once (May 14) near Cheyenne, Roger Mills County. Three males were taken.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, *Dendroica virens virens*.—Noted twice: April 19, a male seen along the Mountain Fork River, seven miles east of Broken Bow; and April 23, a male collected in the Kiamichi Mountains, eight miles east of Bethel (Sutton). According to Mrs. Nice (ibid., 160) this well-known species has not heretofore been collected in the State.

SYCAMORE WARBLER, *Dendroica dominica albilora*.—A series of six males taken in McCurtain, Washington and Delaware Counties, is uniform in being big-billed. One specimen (KWH 442) has a hint of yellow in the forepart of the superciliary line, however. Washington County is not listed among the counties in which this species is known to summer (Nice, ibid., 159).

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, *Dendroica pensylvanica*.—A female taken by Haller on a mesa top near Kenton, Cimarron County, May 21, is apparently the first specimen of this species for the State. Mrs. Nice does not mention it in her list.

OVEN-BIRD, *Seiurus aurocapillus*.—Noted in two localities: in northern McCurtain County, where three birds were seen and a breeding female collected, April 23 (Sutton); and in Delaware County, where several pairs were noted and a breeding male was taken June 12, eight miles southeast of Jay (Sutton).

GRINNELL'S WATER-THRUSH, *Seiurus noveboracensis notabilis*.—A male taken two miles north of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 15 (Sutton), is characteristically big-billed, the culmen measuring 13.5 mm.

CONNECTICUT WARBLER, *Oporornis agilis*.—A male taken along Horse Creek, two miles north of Gate, Beaver County, May 18 (Sutton), is apparently the first specimen of this species for the State. Mrs. Nice does not mention it in her list.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER, *Oporornis tolmiei*.—Recorded at Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, on May 13 and 15; again, May 20, when a male and a female were collected near Kenton, Cimarron County (Sutton); again, May 24, when a female was taken on the Brookhart Ranch, seventeen miles northeast of Kenton (Semple).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD, *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*.—Noted irregularly between May 2 and 18 at various points. A few breeding pairs were observed with Red-wings at a marsh along the main highway, three miles southwest of Optima, Texas County, May 25.

SCARLET Tanager, *Piranga erythromelas*.—To the counties in which this species is known to breed (Nice, ibid., 172) we wish to add Delaware. In the oak woods south of Jay we found it fairly common, June 11 and 12.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK, *Hedymeles melanocephalus melanocephalus*.—Recorded three times: a male, five miles southwest of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, May 10;

a male, four miles west of Cheyenne, May 13; and a male (gonads somewhat enlarged) taken near Kenton, Cimarron County, May 24 (Sutton). The measurements of this specimen are: wing, 98 mm., tail, 79, and culmen, 17.5.

BLUE GROSBKAK, *Gairaca caerulea*.—Noted repeatedly in the following counties: McCurtain, Murray, Comanche, Roger Mills, Ellis, Cimarron, Noble, Logan, Payne and Delaware; several specimens were collected.

INDIGO BUNTING, *Passerina cyanea*.—Ranges westward to the Texas state-line in Roger Mills and Ellis Counties, being locally common near Cheyenne, and fairly common along the South Canadian River south of Arnett.

LAZULI BUNTING, *Passerina amoena*.—Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 175) calls this species a "rare summer resident in Cimarron County." We found it common along the Washita River near Cheyenne, Roger Mills County, and along a stretch of the north bank of the South Canadian River, in southern Ellis County. In the former locality *P. cyanea*, *P. amoena*, and *P. ciris* nested side by side. A breeding pair of *amoena* taken in southern Ellis County, May 26, had a nest with two eggs (Sutton).

PAINTED BUNTING, *Passerina ciris ciris*.—We found this species breeding abundantly in the vicinity of Cheyenne, Roger Mills County; somewhat commonly on the South Canadian River along the southern border of Ellis County; sparingly in the 'red' hills, seventeen miles south of Freedom, in Woodward County. The several specimens taken are somewhat large for the eastern race, but the blue of the head in the male is too purple for *P. c. pallidior* Mearns.

GOLDFINCH, *Spinus tristis*.—Noted here and there throughout the State, but no nests found. The only specimen collected, a very bright male taken near Kenton, Cimarron County, May 20 (Sutton), is referable to the subspecies *pallidus* Mearns, a race not heretofore recorded from the State. The wing of this specimen measures 76 mm., the tail 49.

LARK BUNTING, *Calamospiza melanocorys*.—Noted almost daily from May 10 to 25. Breeding birds were collected near Cheyenne and about the Antelope Hills, in Roger Mills County; and an astonishingly large and compact colony was found May 19 in treeless country seventeen miles southeast of Kenton, in Cimarron County. Apparently this species is irregularly and locally abundant as a nesting bird in western Oklahoma.

WESTERN GRASSHOPPER SPARROW, *Ammodramus savannarum perpallidus*.—The Grasshopper Sparrow was recorded at every point visited save Kenton, Cimarron County; seven specimens were collected. Measurements indicate that all these birds are too large for the eastern race, the wings of the five males ranging from 61 to 64 mm., and averaging 61.8; the tails ranging from 46 to 49, averaging 47.4.

LECONTE'S SPARROW, *Passerherbulus caudacutus*.—A molting male was taken at edge of a grassy field three miles south of Eagletown, McCurtain County, April 20 (Semple).

ROCK SPARROW, *Aimophila ruficeps eremoeca*.—Noted in the Arbuckle Mountains, Murray County; the Washitas in Comanche County; the Black Mesa country of Cimarron County; and the red-colored hills seventeen miles south of Freedom, in Woodward County. Not noted, strangely enough, in the Antelope Hills of northern Roger Mills County, nor in the Red Hills along the Cimarron River north of Gate, Beaver County.

OAK-WOODS SPARROW, *Aimophila aestivalis illinoensis*.—On April 23, Semple and Sutton discovered a breeding colony of these sparrows in northern McCurtain County,

about a mile and a quarter east of Bethel. They succeeded in collecting four specimens, three males and a female that was laying eggs. In all four of these specimens the brown of the upper parts is much too *yellow* in tone for *A. a. aestivalis*, or for *A. a. bachmani*, and while we have not seen Ridgway's type of *Peucaea illinoensis*, his definition of that bird appears to fit the present series perfectly.

Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 185) lists the Bachman's Sparrow, naming a single specimen taken at Alva, Woods County. We have not seen this specimen but suspect that it may be similar to our four birds from McCurtain County.

DESERT SPARROW, *Amphispiza bilineata desertycola*.—A breeding pair was collected along the Tesquesquite (Texakeet), near Kenton, Cimarron County, May 27 (Sutton).

WESTERN FIELD SPARROW, *Spizella pusilla arenacea*.—The Field Sparrow nests westward to the Texas state-line in Roger Mills and Ellis Counties. We did not encounter it at Gate, Beaver County, nor anywhere in the Panhandle. Mrs. Nice (*ibid.*, 189) tells us that eastern *S. p. pusilla* (Wilson) is a "summer resident in eastern and central Oklahoma," but the wing and tail measurements of specimens taken by us in Logan and McCurtain Counties are noticeably larger than those given by Ridgway for *pusilla*; and several breeding specimens collected by us in Ellis, Murray and Roger Mills Counties are so very large that we are forced to the conclusion that *arenacea* is the breeding race of this region. The tail (in four breeding males taken by us in Roger Mills and Ellis Counties) ranges from 67 to 73 mm., averaging 69.6. The extremes given by Ridgway for the tail of *arenacea* are 66 and 71.8, with the average at 68.8 ('Birds of North and Middle America,' 1: 320, 1901).

GAMBEL'S SPARROW, *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambeli*.—Recorded several times in Comanche and Roger Mills Counties. A female was taken near Indianahoma, May 8; another female, near Cheyenne, May 13.

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