

THE CAROLINA PARAKEET IN THE UPPER MISSOURI AND MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEYS

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THE Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) is credited with ranging in primeval times at least sparingly along the great rivers into the states of Nebraska, South and North Dakota, Iowa, and Wisconsin. The present account critically summarizes records from these states.

T. S. Robinson (1958) has pointed out that an allusion to the Parakeet at Fort Union, on the Missouri River on the eastern border of Montana (journal of R. F. Kurz, *U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bull.* 115, 1937), is incorrect due to faulty translation. However, Maximilian, Prince of Wied (1857: 104), did note that he observed some skins of this species decorating the heads of the wild hunters among the Assiniboin Indians whom he saw at Fort Union in 1833. Maximilian apparently had no evidence of the skins' point of origin. (Although George Catlin [1857: 105] characterized, while at or near Fort Union about 1832, the Upper Missouri as a region "where the magpie and chattering parroquettes supply the place of the red-breast and the blue-bird," he signally failed to mention parakeets in extensive journeys within the bird's range, and his statement was probably a journalistic liberty; no doubt he had seen parakeets on lower reaches of the Missouri River.)

There are no reports of the parakeet in Minnesota (T. S. Roberts, 1936, 2: 755) although there are records for extreme northwestern Iowa.

In a survey based upon a questionnaire mailed to anthropology museums in the United States, I have learned of a few instances of parakeet remains used in connection with Indian life. Since the point of origin of such material sometimes cannot even be guessed at, certain northwestern records are considered here. The Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Museum has a pipe stem (their No. 30532A/7322) decorated in part with the flattened right wing, some scapular skin and a right foot of a parakeet (J. L. Diedrich, letter of 24 April 1962; R. Ritzenthaler, letter of 1 May 1963). Although the pipe originated with Iowa Indians, a tribe identified mainly with the state of Iowa, the tribe wandered widely over the eastern Plains states within historical time (Swanton, 1952: 266); the pipe was collected in Oklahoma in 1922.

Through the courtesy of Preston Holder, University of Nebraska, I have learned of a sacred pipe stem, belonging to the Awahu group of the Arickara Indians, decorated with the plumage of a parakeet. This discovery was first made by W. D. Strong of Columbia University; due to an early interest in ornithology, he recognized the rarity of his find in a region so far

to the northwest. Dr. Holder himself saw the pipe, considered by Strong as an ancient heirloom, but its present whereabouts cannot be established. According to Swanton (1952: 273–274), the Arickara were historically mainly identified with the Upper Missouri region, from Cheyenne River, South Dakota, to Fort Berthold, North Dakota.

NORTH DAKOTA

The Arickara sacred pipe just described as well as the headgear mentioned by Maximilian may have been decorated with parakeets killed in North Dakota, although there is no proof of this. The fifth edition of the A.O.U. Check-list (1957: 267) notes that the parakeet formerly ranged northward in the Missouri Valley of North Dakota as far as Oliver County. In this, credit has been given to Prince Maximilian (1906, 23: 250) who mentioned the species in connection with the winter of 1833–1834 when he stayed at Fort Clark. Prince Max arrived there for the winter on 9 November 1833 and left in time to be in Leavenworth by 18 May 1834. He emphasized the bitter cold. No precise date was given, but his account is: "There are, likewise, many interesting species of birds, among which are the turkey-buzzard, the stone falcon, the owl (a very hardy bird, which remains here throughout the whole of the rigorous winter), the Carolina parrot, the humming-bird (*Trochilus colubris*), wild pigeon, woodpecker, magpie, and many others." Except for the owl, it is not clear which species remained during the winter, at a time when Prince Max could have seen them; the list is probably a secondhand one and the inclusion of the hummingbird indicates it to be uncritical. Perhaps of more significance is that Prince Max (1857: 104) himself later wrote of parakeets that "On the upper Missouri river they occur no more and they do not occur further west, as far as we know, than to l'Eau qui court [Niobrara River, northern Nebraska] and to Ponka Creek [just to the north of the Niobrara]." Although Wood (1923: 46) and Swenk (1934: 56) accepted Maximilian's general travel account (1906) (neither making reference to his 1857 publication), I suspect the validity of the record. In this connection, however, Ralph Velich, a taxidermist living in Omaha, Nebraska, points out to me that remains of a parakeet are shown on a shield illustrated in the "Interior of a Mandan Lodge" that was painted by Maximilian's artist Carl Bodmer near Fort Clark during the winter of 1833–1834 (see Tab. 19, Wied-Neuwied, 1839–1841 and Pl. 52, Wied-Neuwied, 1906). Bodmer was a meticulous and faithful recorder, although Maximilian seems not to have commented upon this particular artifact. Mr. Velich has worked with parakeet skins and describes Bodmer's original water color (now displayed in the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, and examined through the courtesy of the Museum's director, Eugene Kingman), as depicting an

apparently stuffed Carolina Parakeet skin, somewhat modified by a strip of quill work down the middle tail feather. The skin is displayed as if it were some sort of talisman; its origin cannot be known and it may have been valued by its owner precisely because parakeets were rare or absent locally.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Duke Paul Wilhelm (1938: 414) merely remarked that in 1823 the Carolina Parakeet but rarely passed the mouth of the Sioux River, extreme southeastern South Dakota. However, Prince Maximilian (1839–1841, 2: 345; 1857: 104) reported parakeets at the mouth of the Niobrara, opposite South Dakota's Bon Homme County, on the authority of his pilot Gardner, who saw them 5 May 1834. That was Prince Max's nearest approach to a record for South Dakota.

A decade after the travels of the Prince of Wied, J. J. Audubon's party, ascending the Missouri River by steamboat in 1843, completely traversed South Dakota and apparently did not see parakeets as they traveled upriver in May (Audubon and Coues, 1897, 1: 507). On the return trip in late summer, however, Audubon's companion J. G. Bell "heard Parrakeets" on 16 September as the party passed "Ebbett's new island" (*op. cit.*, 2: 165). I cannot locate this island precisely. It was below Fort George, was presumably so named to honor one of the Fort George fur trade partners, and may have been one of the variously named, cedar-covered islands below the mouth of Chapelle Creek at the extreme eastern end of Stanley County (W. G. Robinson, South Dakota State Historical Society, letter of 9 July 1963). This precariously documented record seems to be the basis of the inclusion of the parakeet on the South Dakota list (Wood, 1923: 46; A.O.U., 1957: 267).

NEBRASKA: GENERAL

In a scholarly and important account of the Carolina Parakeet in Nebraska, M. H. Swenk (1934: 55) wrote that the birds were "not migratory, but were of a roving disposition and often wandered in flocks for a considerable distance from their breeding and sleeping haunts, sometimes appearing in the trees in and about the early settlements along the river. By the time Nebraska had become a state (1867) they had completely disappeared from this region, never to return . . ."

By his phrase "along the river," Swenk restricted the bird to the Missouri Valley; in this, he was preceded by Taylor and Van Vleet (1888–1889: 165, "Old settlers report it as quite common along the Missouri river, in the early settlement of the state"), Taylor (1889: 114, "Formerly abundant"), and Bruner (1896: 103; 1901: 53, 60). Except for Taylor and

Van Vleet's allusion to pioneer days, these records stem ultimately from Baird *et al.* (1858) and Hayden (1862).

In the present century Bruner, Wolcott, and Swenk (1904: 56) wrote that the parakeet probably did not extend its range "north of the mouth of the Platte," and led the way in a series of state lists, not cited here, that were short, repetitive, and patchy.

NEBRASKA: FIRST HAND ACCOUNTS

The first historical reference to the parakeet in what is now Nebraska appears in the journals of William Clark: "*Parotqueet* is seen as high as the Mahar Village" (Lewis and Clark, 1904, 6: 122, Codex N., pp. 154–155). The Omaha Indian village was located near the present town of Homer, Dakota County, nearly as far north as Sioux City, Iowa (Swenk, 1934: 55). It is not clear whether this observation was made during the ascent of the Missouri in the summer of 1804 or on the return journey in September 1806.

When Major Stephen Long was preparing for his journey to the Rocky Mountains, his party wintered 1819–1820 at a place called Engineer Cantonment, southeastern Washington County. The official report by Edwin James (1905, 15: 322, 327) merely listed the parakeet among the birds seen by Thomas Say during that winter, the only comment on its status being that it was seen "several times." It is worth recalling that George Ord added to his edition of Wilson's *American ornithology* information from Titian Peale, a naturalist on the Long expedition, to the effect that "during the time the party wintered at Engineer Cantonment, nearly eight hundred miles up the Missouri, they observed this species, at various periods, from the beginning of December, until the middle of February, although the thermometer (Fahrenheit) once sunk as low as 22° below zero. Mr. Peale is of the opinion that the Paroquet migrates rather in quest of food, than in consequence of the cold" (Wilson, 1828, 1: 163, footnote). James also (1905, 14: 264) recorded that the Dakota Indian warriors who visited the Long camp were often decked in finest attire; among other things, they suspended in the headdress "an entire skin of the paroquet."

In the summer of 1823, Duke Paul Wilhelm, an important naturalist among early travelers, went the entire north-south distance of Nebraska, inland from the Missouri River. His river wanderings are full of careful notes on parakeets, but he saw none on this inland sojourn. Unfortunately, he kept no continuous notes on his hurried downriver trip in early autumn. He did record (1938: 414)—whether upon personal information is not known—that parakeets seemed but rarely to pass the mouth of the Sioux River, at the point where Nebraska, South Dakota, and Iowa meet, "al-

though they appear in great flocks further down the stream" (see McKinley, 1960: 278).

Approximately a decade later, another royal naturalist, Prince Maximilian of Wied, passed along the eastern border of Nebraska on his way to the upper Missouri. There is no direct evidence that his party encountered the parakeet at all on the upriver voyage in the spring of 1833. His scientific report of the expedition (1857: 104) indicated that the species occurred no farther up the Missouri than "l'Eau qui court"—that is, the Niobrara, which enters the Missouri in Knox County, and to Ponca Creek, in the same county. Just what observations the Ponca Creek statement is based upon is not known, but his pilot, Mr. Gardner, was the source of the Niobrara report (Wied, 1839–1841, 2: 345). The Niobrara is incorrectly called Weeping-water River in the English edition of Prince Max's travels (1906, 24: 109), but that stream is far to the south, paralleling the Platte River in Cass County. Maximilian (*loc. cit.*) himself saw parakeets a little below the mouth of Weeping-water River on 14 May 1834; just where they were observed that day is not clear, but the party lay to for the night a short distance below Little Nemaha Creek, Nemaha County, opposite Atchison County, Missouri.

While Prince Max was on the Upper Missouri, J. T. Irving visited Indians in Kansas and Nebraska. One of his most significant observations was in early October, 1833, near the Pawnee village on the Platte River, west of the mouth of Loup River: "Large flocks of gaily plumed parroquets, whirled screaming past us, with a surprising velocity" (Irving, 1955: 212). This area, in the region bounded by Platte, Butler, and Polk counties, is the westernmost record for Platte River, unless one accepts Berthoud's much later reports for northeastern Colorado (McKinley, 1964).

One hears no more of parakeets in Nebraska until Audubon and his party ascended the Missouri in May, 1843, making many forays for birds and mammals from every stopping place. They saw "Parakeets and many small birds, but nothing new or very rare" on 8 May (Audubon and Coues, 1897, 1: 476) at the level of Otoe County. On the afternoon of 9 May, just above the mouth of the Platte, they again saw parakeets although other birds tended to take their eyes (*op. cit.*, 1: 477); and the next day, when probably barely within the limits of Washington County, Audubon reported: "Robins are very scarce, Parakeets and Wild Turkeys plentiful" (*op. cit.*, 1: 481).

Audubon's 10 May record is his most northerly for the May journey, as far as the journal goes at least. Probably they did not see parakeets any farther upriver, for Audubon mentioned (*op. cit.*, 1: 507) 22 May, when beyond the mouth of the Niobrara, that they had not seen parakeets or squirrels for several days.

It is noteworthy that Audubon did not record parakeets in Nebraska on his trip downriver in very early October, although Bell thought he heard them in South Dakota (see above) and they were encountered near St. Joseph, Missouri (*op. cit.*, 2: 173).

The next report of the parakeet in the Missouri Valley of Nebraska is the very substantial one of Hayden and Warren for 24 and 25 April 1856, when 12 specimens were taken on or very near "Bald Island" and sent to the U.S. National Museum (Baird *et al.*, 1858: 68; Hayden, 1862: 154; Warren, 1875: 95). Swenk (1934: 55-56, 59) has treated these records fully and has established the identity of "Bald Island" as McKissock "Island," a piece of Nebraska, not now an island, that lies east of the Missouri at the Nemaha-Otoe county line, a few miles north of the city of Peru. Hayden (1862: 154) indicated that parakeets were abundant as high up the Missouri as the mouth of Platte River but were not seen above that point at the time of his explorations. (In contrast to records cited above and indicative possibly of a certain nomadism in the species, Elliott Coues (1874: 296) claimed that, despite his own explorations in the Northwest, he had no knowledge of parakeets in any part of the Missouri River until Hayden and Warren's reports.)

It is unfortunate that of the original Hayden-Warren specimens in the National Museum, only one, a male bearing the original number (listed in Baird *et al.*, 1858) of 4614 is still there. One (no. 4612) was given to Lt. W. P. Trowbridge and was for a while lodged in the collection of the University of Michigan (Anon., 1861: 3); its present location is unknown. Another (no. 4610) was sent to Verreaux of Paris in 1858 and it cannot now be traced. Note that one specimen each was given to the University of Michigan and Verreaux (P. S. Humphrey, letter of 14 May 1963), not two and four respectively as J. H. Riley wrote to Swenk (1934: 59).

A fourth Hayden-Warren specimen, no. 4613, is in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, having come there in the Hoopes and Turnbull collection given by E. D. Cope in 1898 (R. M. DeSchauensee, letter of 22 May 1963); there is no record of when it left the National Museum.

The final specimen for which a fate is established is the female, no. 4609, that was sent to Henry Bryant in 1859 (it was taken on 24 April according to Baird *et al.*, 1858: 68, and Bangs, 1913: 94; but Bangs subsequently relabeled the specimen with the date of 25 April—Bangs, 1930: 202, and R. A. Paynter, Jr., letter of 22 May 1963). This specimen was used as the type of *Conuropsis carolinensis interior* (Bangs, 1913: 94), a name that by Bangs's own admission (1930: 202) was best synonymized under Gmelin's name for the Louisiana form of the species (Ridgway, 1916: 150, footnote).

With the Hayden and Warren records, the story of the parakeet in Nebraska neared its end. Stephens and Youngworth (1957: 13), expanding upon Anderson (1907: 271), wrote that J. C. C. Hoskins who came to Sioux City (Iowa) in 1857 reported to Dr. G. C. Rich that parakeets were found in Dakota County, Nebraska, at that time. The testimony of R. W. Furnas (1902: 107) tended to substantiate Hoskins's report. Furnas recalled that in the period of 1856 to about 1866 there was an abundance of parakeets near Brownville, Nemaha County. The birds nested "in the hollows of old trees" on an island north of Brownville that Swenk (1934: 56) identified as possibly "Bald Island." Furnas knew of no reports of parakeets after about 1866, and this indefinite date is the latest so far established for Nebraska.

IOWA

Inasmuch as Iowa is bounded on the west by the Missouri River, almost all that I have written in connection with Nebraska applies to Iowa and I shall not repeat it. Wherever riverbank forest conditions allowed, there can be no doubt that both sides of the river were equally inhabited by parakeets. For Iowa itself, Anderson (1907: 269-271) gave a good account gathered from many sources.

Working entirely from secondary evidence, Paul Bartsch (1895: 2) wrote that in former times the parakeet, "always gathered in flocks, would range as far north as Spirit Lake [Dickinson County] where it would frequently remain until the cold snows and stormy blizzards from the north would drive it southward." He implied that there was an Iowa specimen at the State University of Iowa, but this appears not to have been true, those there being in Talbot's collection from Oklahoma.

Notes of the late T. C. Stephens indicate that he knew of sight records of the parakeet in five Iowa counties (J. H. Ennis, letter of 23 November 1962). Of these, Fremont and Woodbury are on the Missouri River and my Nebraska account applies to them. Decatur County is included because of Trippe's (1873: 233) secondhand report of the species appearing in flocks there as late, perhaps, as the early 1870's. I am not sure of the origin of the Sac County record, but it may stem from J. A. Spurrell's rather negative statement (1919: 117) that he had found "only rumors" of the parakeet among the pioneers, nothing tangible. It appears that Stephens did not credit Bartsch's record for Dickinson County, mentioned above; reminiscences of F. W. Calkins of the period of 1865-1880 (Stephens, 1943) indicate that the parakeet was never seen in Clay County, just south of Dickinson County.

The fifth county mentioned in Stephens's notes is Scott, and I have no definite data to validate the claim. It is possible that the somewhat recon-

dite account of T. H. Macbride (1928: 100–101), vaguely referable to the period of 1846–1860, may be the basis of the record. Macbride's fictional but basically true story seems to refer to southeastern Iowa; there is little doubt that he actually saw "lone trees," usually cottonwoods, on the prairies that were visited by flocks of parakeets. At any rate, it is the nearest that I can come to a Mississippi Valley record for Iowa.

Although J. A. Allen (1868) did not find any reports of the parakeet in central and western Iowa in 1867, this may mean merely that parakeets were already forgotten. I. N. Gabrielson reported to me (conversation 13 June 1959) that his grandfather had described the species convincingly as having been seen in Webster County in the late 1850's or early 1860's.

Little new information on the parakeet has been added in the many lists of Iowa birds that have appeared over three-quarters of a century. Keyes and Williams (1889: 131) noted that although it was gone, it once occurred in the southern part of the state; Osborn (1891: 7) listed it, even though no specimen was present in the collection that he was describing, and he later (1905: 568–569) mentioned the species rather perfunctorily. Ridgway (1916: 148, 149) cited the reports of Maximilian, Audubon, and Trippe only. W. W. Bennett (1931: 9), in a list of the birds of Sioux City, referred to Audubon's trip of 1843 (but see above: Audubon did not specifically report parakeets from the Sioux City area) and referred to specimens that *are not* of Iowa origin.

The last careful treatments of the parakeet in Iowa were those of DuMont (1933: 81; 1935: 206). Bent (1940: 10) summarized the affair: "casually Iowa (Spirit Lake and Decatur County)."

WISCONSIN

Both Cory (1909: 501) and Ridgway (1916: 148) listed the parakeet as having been found in "southern Wisconsin" at a former date but offered no authority for their statements. The A.O.U. Check-list (1957: 267) is somewhat more specific in citing Lake Koshkonong, Jefferson County, thereby crediting the "considerable flock" that Thure Kumlien saw in 1844 or 1845 (Kumlien and Hollister, 1903: 73); a specimen, present whereabouts unknown, is reported to have been collected by Kumlien "at an early date" and sent to Audubon's New York taxidermist friend J. G. Bell (*loc. cit.*). The A.O.U. Check-list does not mention what is apparently the only extant Wisconsin specimen, a supposed female in the Milwaukee Public Museum; this is said to have been killed in or about 1844 by T. Kumlien in Waukesha County (*loc. cit.*, and pers. comm.). A. W. Schorger (1946: 54) points out that Waukesha County was not established until 1846 but he is probably correct in supposing that the location was added

subsequent to collection of the bird. A. J. Cook (1893: 84) incorrectly wrote that the Jefferson County specimen was collected by Ludwig Kumlien (Kumlien and Hollister, 1903: 73); this misinformation is still current in that the Milwaukee specimen is labeled as having been collected by L. Kumlien.

The only other report of the parakeet in Wisconsin is far more uncertain than Kumlien's. P. R. Hoy (1853: 357) early claimed that parakeets had been formerly common within the state along the Mississippi, even though they were seldom met with in later years. Several years afterwards, Hoy was still claiming the parakeet as a Wisconsin bird, citing as proof that Father Joliet had seen "plenty" of parrots on the Wisconsin River (Hoy, 1882: 256). As Schorger comments (Kumlien, Hollister, and Schorger, 1951: 61; Schorger, 1944: 57) there is "nothing . . . to substantiate Hoy's statement that the Paroquet was formerly common in the state" and Hoy appears to have entirely misread Joliet or some of his copiers, for the reference to parrots does not apply to the Wisconsin River at all (A. W. Schorger, letter of 6 June 1963).

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SUMMARY

This account summarizes information upon the Carolina Parakeet in the northwestern part of its range. There are no widely accepted reports of the species farther up the Missouri River than North and South Dakota and it appears that both these reports are based upon shaky or even contradictory evidence. Iowa has records, both centrally and along the two great rivers that border it east and west, although its Mississippi Valley reports are very indefinite. On the Missouri River side, Iowa shares with Nebraska a great many early records (down to about 1866) northward to the Sioux City area. For southeastern Nebraska, there are satisfactory records for both summer breeding and winter residence. There is one Nebraska record (Platte River) from west of the Missouri River. Minnesota has no record of the parakeet and the status of the species in Wisconsin, aside from an early secondhand and perhaps mistaken rumor, is based upon one probably reliable report and a couple of specimens (all from the 1840's) from southeastern Wisconsin, one specimen being still extant. The only other specimens from the region are the 3 that survive from the 12 shot on or near "Bald Island" in southeastern Nebraska in April, 1856. Some instances of use of parakeets by Indians are cited.

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