

southern great plains region



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The generally good news of the past few years for bird populations continues in the Region. Water, though spotty at times, has generally come: more wetland and marshland—more nesting herons, waterfowl, shorebirds, and rails. Populations begin to fill the fringes of their ranges. Although the stochastic dynamics of multiple bad years may provide limitations on recovery, multiple good years provide a burgeoning where density dependence will play a more and more important role in population dynamics. We may not be in a utopia, but for the Plains, home of continental extremes and risks, things have been relatively good.

Among the current winners are Western Grebes, which have seen exponential growth at Lake McConaughy in Nebraska. American Bitterns, King Rails, and Black Rails were reported in larger numbers and from more localities. A number of waterfowl species continue to appear south of normal breeding ranges. Vagrant herons may not have given a fair showing this season, but they may reflect symptoms of an

other region, and we still have August to go.

Some landbirds also benefit from better rain, making for better habitat and more food. Though reporting is still limited, and conclusions come with a caveat, Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls had at least some local boosts in central Kansas. Black-capped Vireos were looking good in the Wichita Mountains, where the double-bad years are hopefully tempered with a cowbird control program, and the multi-good years can be enhanced, like a high interest certificate of deposit.

Overflows from events in other seasons continued for a few corvids and Red Crossbills. And the status of mid-summer extralimital warblers will always draw comments like “late” or “early” migrant, when they may simply be displaced vagrants looking to set up shop where they were found, and thus observed randomly through the season—candidates for long-distance dispersal, or simply lost.

Abbreviations: Crescent Lake (Crescent Lake N.W.R., Garden Co., NE); Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton County, KS); GMSARC (George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith Co., NE); North Platte (North Platte N.W.R., Scotts Bluff Co., NE); Ogallala (L. Ogallala, Keith Co., NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford Co., KS).

LOONS TO WATERFOWL

For the 2nd consecutive summer, a Pacific Loon was documented in Nebraska, this year in *Sarpy* July 1 & 4 (BP, LP). Common Loons were noted at North Platte June 15 (WRS, JS); in *Shawnee*, KS, June 15 (DG); in *Russell*, KS, July 9 (DK, NR); at Ogallala

July 19 (WRS, JGJ); and in *Noble*, OK, July 26 (JWA). Eared Grebes breeding in e. Nebraska are rare; three were in *Phelps* July 6 (LR, RH). Even more unusual was an observation of an Eared Grebe in *Kingfisher*, OK, June 28 (JWA). Western Grebes are apparently riding a population high with large numbers at McConaughy (fide WRS). One was noted at Cheyenne Bottoms June 13 (LM, CH, EP). Clark's Grebes were found away from McConaughy in *Lancaster*, NE, July 29 (JS) and North Platte June 15 (WRS, JS). A Brown Pelican is always big news in the Region; one was noted July 3 (BM, GN) & 9 (DK, NRI) in *Russell*, KS.

Nineteen Am. Bitterns were counted at Crescent Lake June 8 (MF), indicating a healthy population. Although a species of concern, and not widely reported, its numbers in the current wetter climatic cycle may be more encouraging than not. More unexpected to the west was a Least Bittern at Crescent Lake June 13 (WRS, JS), and two July 24 in *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH). Post-season herons seemed less numerous than in recent years. Great Egrets appeared in s.e. Nebraska during late July, with one w. to *Phelps* July 20 (BP, LP). Only two Little Blue Herons were spotted in Nebraska this summer, in *Otoe* July 15 (LF, CF) and *Phelps* July 24 (LR, RH). Among the rarer ciconiid vagrants were an ad. Tricolored Heron and two imm. White Ibises located in *Bryan*, OK, July 31 (JWA).

Tracking Trumpeter Swans proved meager this season, though much ground is inaccessible. Two were present at Crescent Lake (MF), a pair in *Grant*, NE (WM), and a pair with two cygnets in *Cherry*, NE, July 5 (JGJ). A few lingering tundra geese are normally reported during summer, normally injured birds. However, 42 Snow Geese at *Filmore-Polk*, NE, June 1 (JGJ, GJ), and nine in *Clay*, NE, July 5–13 (JGJ, LR, RH) represented a better-than-usual show. Two Greater White-fronted Geese were found at *Clay*, NE, July 5–13 (JGJ, LR, RH), with two others July 6 at *Phelps* (LR, RH).

Cinnamon Teal were reported from Crescent Lake June 8 (JH, EH) and *Scotts Bluff*, NE, June 12 & 14 (AK, WRS, JS).

Extralimital were two Am. Wigeon and a Ruddy Duck July 26 in *Kingfisher*, OK (JWA); a Canvasback July 6 in *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH); a Ring-necked Duck June 21 & 27 in *Okmulgee*, OK (JWA); a Lesser Scaup June 28 in *Noble*, OK (JWA); a Bufflehead June 25 at North Platte (LK); and two Ruddy Ducks in *McClain*, OK, June 23 (JSt). Common Mergansers were found during June and July at North Platte (up to three; LK); up to 11 were noted at McConaughy (JH, EH), and four were at *Lincoln*, NE (WRS, JGJ).

RAPTORS TO RAILS

Only two Mississippi Kites were noted at Ogallala June 1 (JS) & 13 (WRS, JS). Not noted for several years but observed July 31 was a White-tailed Kite in *Atoka*, OK (JWA). The Bald Eagle hacking program has been an obvious intensive management effort over the past decade. This has provided a growing number of nesting Bald Eagles across the Region. Eagles fledged from nests at North Platte and Crescent Lake (*vide* SAK). Twenty-four active nests were followed in Oklahoma this year, producing 16 young (*vide* GMSARC); not great success, but infinitesimally better than 20 years ago.

Northern Harriers nested in unprecedented numbers in *Pawnee* and *Rush*, KS (SS). An vagrant Osprey appeared in Mitchell, KS, July 8 (DK, NRi). Suspicious were a number of Sharp-shinned Hawk reports, including June 1 in *Sheridan*, NE (WM), and June 12 at *Hamilton*, NE (LF, CF); there are almost no breeding records for the Region. Interesting was the report of a Peregrine Falcon July 14 in *Wyandotte*, KS (LM).

King Rails were located in *Comanche* and *Kiowa*, KS, June 13 (PJ, m.ob.), and in *Kingfisher*, OK, July 26 (JWA). Birds were also noted in *Grady* and *Jackson*, OK. Black Rails maintained their outpost at Quivira, but others were located in *Comanche* and *Meade*, KS (PJ, m.ob.). The only Sandhill Crane report was of a single bird found July 13 at *Clay*, NE (LR, RH).

SHOREBIRDS TO TERNS

An Am. Golden-Plover June 13 at Crescent Lake (WRS, JS) provided only the 2nd June record for Nebraska; two in *Blaine*, OK, July 11 (JAG) provided the first July record in that state. Piping Plovers away from breeding areas were observed July 19–20 in *Phelps*, NE (1–2; WRS et al.), July 20 in *Douglas*, KS (MM), and July 29 in *Tulsa* (JL), with six July 20 in *Jefferson*, KS (MM).

Nesting Mt. Plovers were noted in *Kimball*, NE, June 12 (BP, LP) & 15 (WRS, JS); perhaps 5 broods were reared in *Morton*, KS (THi, SS et al.). Along with the current wetter trends go increasing numbers of Black-necked Stilts. This season brought reports of three at Crescent Lake July 8 (MF), one in *Phelps* June 5 & 10 (*vide* LR, RH), and a verbal report for *Jackson*, OK.

Migrating Am. Avocets were noted as early as June 19–20 in *Phelps* (LR, RH). For whatever reason, Solitary Sandpipers were found at a number of locations in the Region by July 5; these included singles at *Clay*, NE (JGJ); *McClain*, OK (NK); and *Comanche*, OK (JAG), with a number of counts of 5–10 by July 15. A Greater Yellowlegs June 28 in *Pawnee*, OK (JWA), two Semipalmated Sandpipers in *Washita*, OK, June 30 (JAG), two Red Knots July 22 at Quivira (DV, PJ), and three Sanderlings July 29 in *Tulsa* (JL) were ahead of the pattern. Buff-breasted Sandpipers were seen July 26 at *Lancaster-Saunders*, NE (JGJ), and July 29 in *Tulsa* (JL); although the 2nd-earliest fall record for Nebraska (*vide* WRS), and typical of fall firsts in Oklahoma, the latest specimen of an adult for Oklahoma was collected Aug. 8. This appears as a very narrow window for adult migration, or signs of yet-to-be-discovered phenomenon for fall migration. An injured Buff-breasted Sandpiper was located in *Seward*, KS, June 14 (SP, SS, BB).

Among late advancing shorebirds were three Sanderlings June 4, a Semipalmated Sandpiper June 18 (exceptional), and 13 White-rumped Sandpipers June 18 in *Lancaster*, NE (LE). Also moving slowly north was a Pectoral Sandpiper June 12 at *Hamilton*, NE (LF, CF).

At last, or so it seems, was the first recorded **Curlew Sandpiper** for Nebraska July 19–21 at *Phelps* (JGJ et al.). A Com. Snipe at *Scotts Bluff*, NE, June 12 (AK) and two in *Rock*, NE, June 10 (NR) were suggestive of breeding. An impressive 1321 Wilson's Phalaropes at Crescent Lake July 8 (MF) was an encouraging indication of a good nesting season. Earlier than most was a Red-necked Phalarope July 12–13 at Quivira (*vide* LM).

Among perhaps the last Franklin's Gulls to clear the Region was one June 12 at *Hamilton*, NE (LF, CF); 25 at *Lincoln*, NE, July 19 (WRS, JGJ) and one July 20 in *Phelps*, NE (BP, LP) may have been summer vagrants. Scant this season were Laughing Gulls; an immature was present in *Jefferson*, KS, June 8 (DLS), and an adult was at Quivira July 22 (PJ, DV). Two ad. Califor-

nia Gulls July 19 at *Lincoln*, NE (*vide* WRS), were the only ones away from McConaughy. The 16 Caspian Terns in *Lancaster*, NE, June 4 (LE) were likely tardy; it was difficult to classify the Caspian Tern June 28 in *Pawnee*, OK (JWA). Rare in the west, but becoming more regular, were two Caspian Terns at *Keith*, NE, June 20 (JS). Unusual were the six ad. Com. Terns documented at Crescent Lake June 13 (WRS, JS); one was seen July 22, a more normal time, in *Reno*, KS (PJ, DV).

DOVES TO SHRIKES

The single Eur. Collared-Dove in Tulsa continued its presence (R&NL et al.), and at least one was still present in *Alfalfa*, OK, June 22 (JW et al.). The four noted in *Sherman*, KS, June 1 were reproductively active (JP). Adding to a growing list of occurrences in recent seasons was a White-winged Dove June 12 in the Wichita Mts. N.W.R., OK (JAG).

The most westerly report for Black-billed Cuckoos was of one at Crescent Lake June 15 (MF); others were noted in e. Nebraska (*vide* WRS), with at least 12 reported at 5 locations in Kansas (LM). A Burrowing Owl July 24 & 27 in *Phelps* was the most easterly (LR, RH). Good numbers of Short-eared Owls nested in *Pawnee* and *Rush*, KS (SS). The three Short-eared Owls flushed from a Conservation Reserve Program plot in *Texas*, OK, July 12–24 (GS, JMo) and July 17 in *Morton*, KS (DF), were among very few summer records for Oklahoma and s.w. Kansas. A report from 1996 for a N. Saw-whet Owl June 23 in *Chase*, NE (MB), may indicate breeding. Chuck-will's-widows were noted w. in the Platte Valley to *Buffalo*, NE (*vide* WRS, JGJ). Male Rufous Hummingbirds visiting feeders in *Finney*, KS, July 24 (BC) and *Jefferson*, KS, July 28–29 (RR) were among the surprisingly few rarer hummingbirds reported. Black-chinned Hummingbirds were noted for the 2nd consecutive year in *Blaine*, OK (JAG).

Expected to some extent, but still a trailing spring occurrence, was an Olive-sided Flycatcher June 12 at Ogallala (LF, CF). Continuing the invasion of last winter were 42 Clark's Nutcrackers in Monroe Canyon, *Sioux*, NE, June 1 (JS, *vide* WRS). A Black-billed Magpie in *Johnson*, KS, July 15 (DS) was very unusual in being e. of normal occurrences.

A Rock Wren was confirmed breeding in *Comanche*, KS, June 12, pushing the e range limit (PJ, SP). More than usual were 15–17 Sedge Wrens reported during June and July in Nebraska (*vide* WRS),

westernmost were one-two near *Buffalo*, NE, June 21 (LR, RH). Silcock and Jorgensen now separate Marsh Wren songs; two at *Dakota*, NE, were of the eastern song-type (BFH), and 75 were counted in w. Nebraska at Crescent Lake June 13 (WRS). Breeding Bird Atlas work in Oklahoma produced confirmed breeding of Cedar Waxwings in *Ottawa*, OK, June 6 (LH). About 30 waxwings were noted in *Tulsa* June 10 (TM).

VIREOS TO WARBLERS

About 190 territorial male Black-capped Vireos were located in the Wichita Mts., OK (JAG, RW), implicating an approximate 25% increase over last season. The refuge and adjacent Ft. Sill have been intent at cowbird trapping, which has undoubtedly benefitted the vireos, although such things as a higher survivorship cycle may accent the return. The group in *Blaine*, OK, held steady, but with a meager 11 females (JAG).

Possibly late vagrants, late migrants, or hopeful dispersers were Chestnut-sided Warblers June 12 in *Kiowa*, KS (PJ et al.), and June 16 near *Buffalo*, NE (LR, RH). Also tardy, certainly displaced, was a Magnolia Warbler June 19 in *Sarpy*, NE (BP, LP). A Yellow-rumped Warbler June 6 at Crescent Lake (MF) was of unspecified form, but likely "Audubon's." Other more northern warblers found included a Black-poll Warbler June 1 in *Sarpy*, NE (BP, LP), and N. Waterthrush June 13 in *Dundy*, NE (WRS, JS). A Prairie Warbler in *Thomas*, NE, July 5 (JGJ) was quite a surprise for having wandered west (*vide* WRS), as was one June 1-16 in Cowley, KS (THi et al.). Two Ovenbirds were netted in *Sequoyah*, OK, July 1 (*vide* JM); another was located in *Geary*, KS (CO), on the w. frontiers of their existence. A Worm-eating Warbler June 1 in *Cherokee*, KS (AS), and a Hooded Warbler in *Jefferson*, KS, June 20 and Aug. 9 appeared to be breeding hopefuls (MM). Yellow-breasted Chats have a patchy distribution in the Region, being expected in e. Oklahoma and w. Nebraska. Among those in the cracks were singles in *Cass*, NE (*vide* WRS), and *Comanche*, OK (JAG), both in early June.

Scarlet Tanagers graced the w. edge of their range in *Brown*, NE (LR, RH), as did N. Cardinals in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (AK). Four Rose-breasted Grosbeaks summered in *Buffalo*, NE (LR, RH). A first-year male Painted Bunting explored new turf in *Kingman*, KS, June 28 (PJ, JN). Three Dickcissels were noted at Crescent Lake June 18, and

one was noted in *Sioux*, NE, June 14 (WRS, JS), also on the edges. Eastern Towhees were noted singing in *Thurston*, NE, July 12 (BFH), and *Saunders*, NE, June 6 (TH). A phenotypic Spotted sang an Eastern song, also in *Thurston*, NE (BFH), where most appear to be hybrids. Spotteds were noted e. to *Buffalo* (LR, RH) and *Saunders*, NE (TH), and s. exceptionally to *Seward*, KS, June 14 (SP, SS, BB).

TANAGERS TO FINCHES

After the good spring showing, Henslow's Sparrows might be expected at a few more breeding locations this summer. Between 16-18 were located at 4 sites in e. Kansas (*vide* LM), but only one was found singing at traditional areas at *Pawnee*, NE, June 27 (JS); three were discovered w. to *Seward*, NE, July 14 (*vide* WRS). Surveys by Carter for Bachman's Sparrows in s.e. Oklahoma located a scattering of individuals, including one in *Atoka*, OK, July 31 (JWA). Out of range were two Rufous-crowned Sparrows in *Comanche*, KS, July 3 (BB).

Bobolinks nest in most of Nebraska, but become rare in s. portions. Up to 45 were noted at *Buffalo*, NE, July 5 (LR, RH), with another ten in *Lancaster* July 1 (LE). Eastern Meadowlarks appear to be maintaining numbers as far west as Crescent Lake, where 26 were counted June 18 (MF). Nebraska's first confirmed breeding of **Great-tailed Grackle** occurred in *Boone*, where three young were observed June 1 (WM).

Red Crossbills continued their sparse but insistent presence from a dispersal or population spurt of last summer. Two visited a feeder in *Scotts Bluff*, NE, through the period (AK). Between 6-17 were feeder-fed in *Tulsa* June 2-3 (J&GE, RWy). Two were noted flying across the canyons in *Blaine*, OK, June 6 (JAG), and there were two in *Comanche*, KS, June 13 (SP et al.), one in *McCurtain*, OK, June 14 (BH), and several in *Morton*, KS, June 21 (L&RS). An apparent fledged young appeared among the 15-20 coming to feeders in *Finney*, KS (T&SS).

Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):
 KANSAS: Bill Busby, Barbara Campbell, Dennis Forsythe, David Gish, Tyler Hicks (THi), Chris Hobbs, Pete Janzen, Dan Kluz, Dan LaShelle, Brad McCord, Mick McHugh, **Lloyd Moore**, Greg Nichols, John Northrup, Chuck Otte, John Palmquist, Sebastian Patti, Eric Preston, Nate Rice (NRi), Richard Rucker, David Seibel, Scott Seltman, Tom & Sara Shane, Art Smallwell, Lawrence & Ruth Smith, Don

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