

## AN AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER IN IDAHO

DANIEL A. STEPHENS, Department of Biological Sciences, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho 83209

JAMES E. STEPHENS, 634 Railroad Ave., Ontario, Oregon 97914

The American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) breeds along the American Atlantic coast from Massachusetts south to Argentina and along the Pacific coast from central Baja California south to Chile (A.O.U. 1983). Although generally a sedentary coastal species, it wanders occasionally (Hayman et al. 1986). Vagrants have been recorded as far north as Labrador on the Atlantic coast and San Luis Obispo Co., California, on the Pacific coast (two records from northern California are unsubstantiated, Roberson 1986). In the west, inland records exist for California, three individuals together, Salton Sea, 14-30 August 1977 (Luther 1980); New Mexico, one individual, Hidalgo Co., 10 August 1976 (Huntington and Huntington 1983, John P. Hubbard pers. comm.); and Idaho, one individual, Payette Co., 19 April 1981 (Rogers 1981). This note presents detailed documentation of the Idaho record and discusses this unusual occurrence.

We observed a black and white oystercatcher with a brown back 3.3 miles south of Fruitland (along Whitley Drive), Payette Co., Idaho, between the hours of 1910 and 1945 on 19 April 1981. Rogers (1981) stated "north of Fruitland" and "18 April," both of which are mistakes. The American Oystercatcher is the only black and white oystercatcher recorded in North America (A.O.U. 1983), and all other black and white oystercatchers are black rather than brown above (Hayman et al. 1986). The oystercatcher was in the south section of a several-hundred-acre pond/marsh area about 1 mile east of the Snake River. It was wading along the edge of a small island in a shallow 8- to 10-acre alkali pond. The banks of the pond were covered with grasses, predominantly salt grass (*Distichlis stricta*). We studied the oystercatcher through a 32 × spotting scope at a distance of about 35 meters and drew a sketch and took careful notes while observing it. The sky was overcast.

The following detailed description of the bird's plumage and soft parts may shed light on its age and subspecies (words in quotes are directly from field notes; all others are from the field sketch): (1) legs "pinkish-gray"; (2) proximal half of bill "pale orange" and distal half "dark"; (3) "iris pale brown"; (4) scapulars and lesser/median wing coverts "brown" with some pale fringes; (5) upper tail coverts barred with black; (6) border between black breast and white belly not clearly defined, but black spots not noted near the border or on the belly. We did not hear any vocalizations or see the bird fly, but it momentarily extended its wings, allowing a view of its upper tail coverts.

Retention of some pale-fringed scapulars and lesser/median wing coverts from its juvenile plumage, dark-tipped bill, and pale brown iris establish the bird as one year old (Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986). Only two subspecies of American Oystercatcher have flecking or barring on their upper tail coverts: *frazari* and *galapagensis* (Hayman et al. 1986). The subspecies *frazari* breeds along the west coast of Mexico and is therefore the subspecies occurring closest to Idaho; *galapagensis* is endemic to the Galapagos Islands.

The oystercatcher we observed was closely associated with four Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*). It appeared nervous and followed the stilts as they fed but showed little interest in feeding, although it probed into the shallow water four or five times. After nearly 30 minutes it followed two stilts onto the small island and lay down. We returned the next day to attempt to photograph the oystercatcher but it was not there, although the Black-necked Stilts were still in the same area. Neither species was present at this location during the mid-afternoon on 18 April.

It does not seem likely that this was a weather-induced vagrancy since storm systems in west-central Idaho usually come from the west and American Oystercatchers occur along the Gulf of California, far south of Idaho. Mid-April weather charts obtained from the National Climatic Data Center show a low-pressure area over the central part of the Gulf of

## NOTES

California on 17 April 1981. The charts show no fronts moving between the Gulf of California and Idaho in mid-April.

No clear pattern of seasonal occurrence exists for the American Oystercatcher in the western U.S. In addition to the inland records for the west mentioned above (one spring, two summer), five records exist for the California coast, including up to three individuals present year-round for at least 18 years in Santa Barbara Co. (Roberson 1986). West Mexican populations are apparently nonmigratory, and immature Eurasian Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) remain on their wintering grounds all year (Hayman et al. 1986), making this extralimital record difficult to explain.

We thank Dennis Paulson for his valuable comments on several drafts of this note. We also thank Jon Dunn, Robert Humphrey, Tim Reynolds, John Pitcher, and Chris Chappell for their comments.

## LITERATURE CITED

- American Ornithologists' Union. 1983. Checklist of North American Birds, 6th edition. Am. Ornithol. Union, [Washington D.C.]
- Hayman, P., Marchant, J., and Prater, T. 1986. Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Huntington, D., and Huntington, S. 1983. Rare and unusual birds of New Mexico. N.M. Ornithol. Soc. Publ. 7.
- Luther, J. 1980. Fourth report of the California bird records committee. W. Birds 11: 161-173.
- Prater, A.J., Marchant, J.H., and Vuorinen, J. 1977. Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders. BTO Guide 17, British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, England.
- Roberson, D. 1986. Ninth report of the California bird records committee. W. Birds 17: 49-77.
- Rogers, T.H. 1981. The spring migration. Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region. Am. Birds 35: 843-846.

*Accepted 26 December 1987*