

**Bluebird** (*Sialia sialis sialis*).

A rare migrant and breeder in the vicinity of Wall Lake. I have noted it offener of late years than formerly. Along the Raccoon river it is much more common. First seen dates are from March 5 to April 26, with May 12 and 30 as extra late dates.

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**NOTES ON THE DISTRIBUTION AND MIGRATION  
OF NEBRASKA BIRDS****I. TYRANT FLYCATCHERS (*Tyrannidae*)**

BY MYRON H. SWENK AND RALPH W. DAWSON

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** *Muscivora forficata* (Gmelin).

Although this striking bird is a common summer resident and breeder from southern Kansas southward, it has always been considered as of purely accidental occurrence in Nebraska. In fact, prior to the present year, there are but two known instances of its having been seen in the state. The first of these was in the fall of 1872, when L. Bruner observed a single specimen of this species south of Lincoln. The bird was very clearly seen, and, as the observer was familiar with the species, no doubt has ever attached to this record. (*Bruner, Some Notes on Nebraska Birds*, 1896, p. 114.)

The second record of this species for the state was made by Mr. Charles Armstrong in the spring of 1913. Mr. Armstrong was at the time a student in the Nebraska School of Agriculture, and during April of that year, while he was disking in the field on a farm near Greenwood, Nebraska, he saw and carefully observed one of these birds, which he had never before seen or even heard of. On returning to school he gave a very accurate description of the bird to R. W. Dawson, including the scissor-like tail and scarlet sides, and when shown the plate of this species which appeared in *Bird-Lore*, ix, No. 6, he at once recognized it as representing the bird he had seen. This second record, heretofore unpublished, has likewise been fully accepted by Nebraska ornithologists. However, in both the above cases the birds noted were apparently stragglers.

On May 30, 1921, while Dr. D. C. Hilton of Lincoln, was waiting outside the main entrance gate to Capital Beach he noted a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, from the plumage evidently a female, and discovered it had a nest in the last tree of a row of small elms bordering the driveway after passing through the entrance gate. He observed the bird long and carefully, and later on in the same day both Dr. Hilton and M. H. Swenk visited the place again, this time flushing the flycatcher from her nest, which was

located about fifteen feet up in the elm tree, and observing her snapping her insect prey from the air.

Word of the find was discreetly passed around, and the bird was noted during the week by R. W. Dawson, R. H. Wolcott, H. B. Lowry and other ornithologists of Lincoln. Only the female was observed, which remained in the vicinity of the nest when not on it, and found diversion in chasing English sparrows away and quarreling in a good natured way with a Western Kingbird. On June 7, R. W. Dawson noted that the bird was paying but little attention to her nest, though remaining in the general vicinity. On June 12 he noted that she had begun the construction of a new nest, in an elm tree in the same row, the seventh tree to the north from the one in which the original nest was located. The original nest had at this time been occupied by English sparrows. The new nest was barely started on June 12. By July 3 the new nest had been completed and it, too, was occupied by English sparrows, while nothing was to be seen of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, nor has the bird been observed by anyone since.

The writers are indebted to Dr. D. C. Hilton for the privilege of placing his remarkable find on record, for this establishes the species as a breeder, occasionally at least, some hundreds of miles to the northeast of its previously recorded breeding range.

#### Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus* (Linnaeus).

The Kingbird is an abundant summer resident and breeder over the entire state, and in every locality where there are any trees whatever to furnish it with nesting sites. It was first recorded from Nebraska by Thomas Say, who noted its arrival at Engineer Cantonment on May 7, 1820. Maximilian also noted it along the Burt County bank of the Missouri River on May 6, 1833. In 1877 Aughey stated that it was abundant west to the middle of the state, but from thence on to the western line of Nebraska occurred but sparingly. By 1900, however, the Kingbird was almost if not quite as common in suitable places in western Nebraska as it was farther east, except possibly along the more heavily wooded eastern Nebraska streams.

In eastern Nebraska it arrives in late April or early May, nests during late May and June, and departs in late August and September. At Lincoln it has been noted as early as April 25, and is usually common after April 29. It frequently remains until September 12, and sometimes lingers as late as September 22. At Omaha it has been recorded from April 20 to September 15, thus apparently arriving there a little earlier than at Lincoln. At Neligh it arrives later and departs earlier than at Lincoln or Omaha, the dates being May 1 to 10 and September 1 to 10. (*Cary, Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25).

**Western Kingbird** *Tyrannus verticalis* Say.

Over the semi-arid plains and sandhill regions of western and central Nebraska, from about the 100th meridian westward, and in the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska, the Western or "Arkansas" Kingbird is a very common to abundant summer resident and breeder. Eastwardly over the prairie region it occurs in rapidly declining numbers to the Missouri River, commonly as a migrant but uncommonly as a breeder.

Prior to about 1903 this Kingbird was a rather rare migrant east of the 98th meridian. In fact, a few records from Omaha, Lincoln and West Point, all of migrating birds, constituted the total information at hand concerning its occurrence in the eastern portion of Nebraska. Then in 1904 there were four records of its having been seen in the more eastern counties, these occasioning considerable interest. In 1905 it migrated through eastern Nebraska quite commonly in May, eastward even to the Missouri River, and this unusual influx was recorded by Swenk (*Auk*, xxii, p. 320) with the observation that probably the species was extending its line of migration to the eastward. Apparently such was the case, for the Kingbird has since continued to be a common migrant through eastern Nebraska each May and September.

This Kingbird arrives somewhat later than the common Kingbird. During the decade 1911-1920 the earliest date recorded at Lincoln was May 4. At Neligh Cary found it arriving May 5 to 20 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25). In Sioux County it is common by May 18 (*Crawford, Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, p. 77). In Nebraska nesting takes place in June and July. Departure takes place in Sioux County by about September 11 (*Mickel and Dawson, Antea*, xxxii, p. 75). At Neligh the birds linger until September 10 to 20 (*Cary, Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25). They are rarely seen at Lincoln after the first few days in September.

At about the same time that the Western Kingbird began to be noted commonly during migrations in eastern Nebraska occasional instances of its nesting in that part of the state began coming to notice. As early as 1899 Cary had found it a rare summer resident at Neligh, on the 99th meridian (*Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25). Then on July 15, 1904, I. S. Trostler found a nest of this species in the town of Niobrara, also on the 99th meridian, and later found three other pairs in that town which were also with little doubt nesting. Four years later, on July 26, 1908, R. H. Wolcott found a nest in a planted grove on the south side of Capital Beach, near Lincoln, and the next season, 1909, found two nesting pairs at the same place. Other instances of the nesting of this Kingbird in eastern Nebraska have come to notice with increasing frequency in subsequent seasons, and at the

present time the species is an uncommon, but not rare, breeder east to the Missouri River.

In central and western Nebraska the Western Kingbird has, of course, long been a common and characteristic breeder, along all the wooded streams, both in trees and in brush, and in hackberry pockets in the sandhills. In the western village and town parks it is very common everywhere.

The first record for the state is that of Aughey, who in 1877 reported it as abundant in southwestern Nebraska, especially along the Republican River, a status that has not changed during the subsequent years.

**Cassin Kingbird** *Tyrannus vociferans* Swainson.

Spreading eastward during the fall migration from its breeding locations in the more elevated mountain valleys of southern Wyoming, the Cassin Kingbird proved to be a rather common migrant in the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska during September, 1919. In 1919 Mickel and Dawson collected this species near Glen on September 6, at the mouth of Monroe Canyon on September 12, and at Fort Robinson on September 20, the last specimen from a flock of 8 or 9 birds. (*Antea*, xxxii, p. 75).

**Crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus crinitus crinitus* (Linnaeus).

This flycatcher is a common, or locally rather abundant, summer resident and breeder along the Missouri River and in the larger timber of its principal tributaries in eastern, and especially southeastern, Nebraska, ranging up the Elkhorn to West Point, up the Big Blue to Milford, up the Little Blue to Hastings, up Salt Creek to Lincoln, etc. At Lincoln it is common from May 3 to August 22 and sometimes lingers until September 8. Nesting records are in June. It was first recorded for the state by Thomas Say, who found it at Engineer Cantonment in 1820.

(*Myiarchus cinerascens cinerascens* (Lawrence), the Ash-throated Flycatcher, occurs commonly in Colorado and has been taken at Cheyenne, Wyoming, hence may straggle into western Nebraska.)

**Phoebe** *Sayornis phoebe* (Latham).

An abundant summer resident and breeder over eastern Nebraska, west to about the 99th meridian, except in the Niobrara valley, where it extends to the 100th meridian or a little beyond.

The first state record is that of Thomas Say, who noted its arrival at Engineer Cantonment on March 22, 1820. Aughey in 1877 recorded this species from Richardson, Lancaster and Dakota Counties, and indicated that it was confined rather closely to the eastern counties. It now extends west commonly at least to Hastings, Kearney, Neligh, Long Pine and Valentine.

The Phoebe has been recorded at Lincoln as early as March

12, and is usually common after March 18. It nests in late April and May and again in July, rearing two broods, and usually departs by October 21, though once recorded on November 2.

**Say Phoebe** *Sayornis sayus* (Bonaparte).

This shy phoebe of the dryer portions of Nebraska is a very common summer resident and breeder east to about the 100th meridian, and an increasingly uncommon or rare migrant east to about the 97th meridian.

In the Pine Ridge it is very common, and nests in the heads of the canyons, on rocky ledges in the bad lands, and around buttes on the table lands, as well as in out buildings (*Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, p. 77; iii. p. 73). In Scottsbluff County it is equally common and often nests in the structures along the irrigation ditches. At Alliance, Box Butte County, it was noted by Swenk nesting in the cornice of a building on the main street of the town, and at Haigler, Dundy County, nesting under the eaves of a railroad water tank. It nests commonly east to Cherry, Rock and Lincoln Counties. There are two broods a year, one in early May and the other in late June and early July. As a migrant it has been noted at Halsey (Chapman), Comstock (Zimmer), Kearney (Aughey), Ravenna (Swenk) and Holt County (Bruner) and once even at Lincoln (Bruner).

Aughey first recorded the Say Phoebe from the state in 1877, stating that he had observed it only in central and western Nebraska, and mostly at Kearney, Buffalo County. It arrives in early April (Comstock, April 5, 1913), completes nest building in middle May (Chadron, May 18, 1900) and departs in late September.

**Eastern Olive-sided Flycatcher** *Nuttallornis borealis borealis* (Swainson).

An uncommon or rare migrant over the eastern portion of the state. Aughey stated that he had "only occasionally met it in Nebraska." It has been noted several times near Lincoln; by L. Bruner, by H. B. Lowry on May 9, 1903, by Swenk and Zimmer at Roca, September 4, 1909 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, v, p. 35), by Dawson September 12, 1915, and by Dawson and Mickel May 19, 1920. Bruner has recorded it from West Point and Dickinson from Gresham.

The specimen from Roca, September 4, 1909, is a female and measures: Length 178, wing 102, tail 68, culmen 15, and tarsus 14. It is, therefore, somewhat intermediate between typical *borealis* and *majorinus*, but is nearer the former.

**Rocky Mountain Olive-sided Flycatcher** *Nuttallornis borealis majorinus* Bangs & Penard.

This recently differentiated form occurs in the extreme west-

ern part of the state during early June, but it is not known to breed there, though it may rarely do so. Cary collected a specimen west of Warbonnet Canyon, Sioux County, June 14, 1901 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, iii, p. 72) and Mickel one at Kimball, Kimball County, June 8, 1919 (*Antea*, xxxii, p. 75). Both specimens are females, and measure, respectively: Length, 177 and 178; wing, 106.5 and 105; tail, 71.5 and 67; culmen, 17 and 16.5; tarsus, 15.

**Wood Pewee** *Myiochanes virens* (Linnaeus).

A common summer resident and breeder east of the 97th meridian. At Lincoln it arrives about May 19 and remains until September 8. A record from Ashland on May 15, and two from Omaha, on May 8 and 14, would seem to indicate that the Wood Pewee appears first along the more heavily wooded streams of eastern Nebraska, and then works westwardly to the limits of its range in the state. At Omaha, Lincoln, Beatrice, Peru, Weeping Water, Nebraska City and other eastern points it is a common breeder, nesting in June.

The first state record is that of Aughey, who stated in 1877 that there were "a very few of these birds in the timber belts of eastern Nebraska along the Missouri" and recorded a specimen from Dakota City in June, 1869. Evidently since that time the species has pushed westward along the wooded streams and increased in abundance so that where it was then rare or absent it is now common. Occasionally its "pec-a-wee" may now be heard within the city limits of Lincoln and other cities and towns of eastern Nebraska.

**Western Wood Pewee** *Myiochanes richardsonii richardsonii* (Swainson).

West of the 100th meridian in Nebraska this species replaces the eastern *M. virens*, but the ranges of the two species do not anywhere meet. In the Pine Ridge Region it is a common summer resident, having been reported by every bird student working in that region. In 1900 it arrived at Monroe Canyon in the Pine Ridge May 24 (*Crawford, Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, p. 77), and in 1908 Zimmer collected it at the same place on August 19 and 22, thus indicating migration dates very similar to those of *M. virens* in eastern Nebraska. In July, 1910, he found it common at Glen, Sioux County, and collected specimens. In Scottsbluff County it is common everywhere in cottonwood groves and was found almost abundantly in the timber along the North Platte River near Henry, June 18, 1916, where several pairs were found with nearly or quite completed nests (*Swenk, Antea*, xxx, p. 115). Aughey who first recorded the species from the state, stated in 1877 that it was "frequently seen wherever there is a woodland or timber-skirted streams in western Nebraska," and recorded it from Sidney and from "Wood River," meaning probably the head-waters of that

stream in Custer or Dawson Counties, in June, 1875. Bruner noted it along the Dismal River in Thomas County, and in 1911 Zimmer found it in the shrubbery along the Loup River in the same county, August 21 to 28, collecting a male on the first date (*Proc. N. O. U.*, v, p. 81). The eastern limits of its normal breeding range are not well fixed.

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** *Empidonax flaviventris* (W. M. & S. F. Baird).

This retiring and self-effacing inhabitant of heavily shaded and excessively moist woods occurs in Nebraska only as a rare migrant east of the 97th meridian. In 1877 Aughey stated that this species occurred "sparingly in eastern Nebraska," and that he had known it "to breed on the skirts of timber belts along the Missouri River." He also mentions taking a specimen at Dakota City, Nebraska, in July, 1870. But, as *E. flaviventris* is rather strictly a Canadian zone species, and breeds in situations quite different from the habitat in which Aughey thought he found it nesting, he was probably in error in his identification of the bird. Very likely he found *E. virescens* instead, especially as he does not mention that species in his list. One might also fairly assume that his July specimen from Dakota City was likewise *E. virescens*.

L. Bruner has noted *E. flaviventris* as a migrant once each at both Lincoln and West Point, and Zimmer has recorded a specimen that was thoroughly identified by himself and R. H. Wolcott at Roca May 21, 1910 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, v, p. 35), but no specimens taken in Nebraska have been examined.

(*Empidonax difficilis difficilis* Baird, the Western Flycatcher, which represents *E. flaviventris* in the West, and breeds in Wyoming and Colorado from 10,000 feet elevation to the plains, as well as in the Black Hills region of South Dakota, will very likely be found to occur in northwestern Nebraska during migration.)

**Acadian Flycatcher** *Empidonax virescens* (Vieillot).

Confined during the breeding season to deep and shady woodlands, this flycatcher is to be found nesting only along the Missouri River and the more heavily wooded portions of the lower Platte. The record from West Point by Bruner is probably based on a highly colored male of *E. traillii*. At Omaha it is a fairly common summer resident and breeder, arriving in May, breeding in June and departing in September (I. S. Trostler, L. Skow, etc.).

West of the Missouri River Region there are no records of the occurrence of this flycatcher, even as a migrant, except that of Cary who states that he "took an adult male on Pine Ridge, Sioux County, Nebraska, about fifteen miles from the northwestern corner of the state, on May 26, 1900" (*Auk*, xviii, p. 235), which record was repeated by Crawford (*Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, p. 27). Ridgway accepts this as a probably casual record (*Bull. 50, U. S. N. M.*, iv,

pp. 553 and 555), and it may be valid, but a specimen taken in the same locality two days later by J. S. Hunter, and said to be the same as Cary's specimen (which we have not seen), is *E. traillii brewsteri*, as determined by Dr. H. C. Oberholser. It is therefore altogether probable that Cary's record is based on a misidentification.

**Traill Flycatcher** *Empidonax traillii traillii* (Audubon).

By far our most abundant and widespread species of *Empidonax*, the Traill Flycatcher, or "Alder Flycatcher" of much of the literature, occurs commonly as a summer resident and breeder and abundantly as a migrant over the state west to about the 100th meridian.

The first record of the species for Nebraska is that of Aughey who in 1877 wrote that he did not distinguish between *E. pusillus* (= *brewsteri*) and *E. traillii*, having only occasionally met either one. Although not definitely saying so, subsequent Nebraska observers have also largely not discriminated between the two subspecies of *E. traillii*.

A series of seven representative specimens taken at Lincoln May 21 to August 15, including three breeding June birds, have been examined by Dr. H. C. Oberholser and all pronounced *E. traillii traillii* (= *alnorum*). Nine additional specimens are identical with this series, and the total series of eleven males and five females proves that this is both the migratory and breeding form at Lincoln. At this point the species is common from May 3 until the end of August and has been noted as late as September 12.

At Omaha, Nebraska City, Union, Peru and other points along the Missouri River this bird has been found to be a common summer resident and breeder. M. A. Carriker, Jr., has given a good account of its habits in that region (*Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, pp. 44-46). Specimens examined from Peru, Union and South Bend are indistinguishable from the series of Lincoln specimens, though Zimmer has recorded an unusually brightly colored male specimen from Lincoln (May 20, 1909) and a large-billed female specimen from Union (July 23, 1910) as *E. t. alnorum*, under the impression that the western form previously known as *E. t. traillii* (now *E. t. brewsteri*) was the prevailing form in these localities (*Proc. N. O. U.*, v, p. 35).

West of the 97th meridian this flycatcher is found in plum thickets and other brush, especially along the rivers and creeks, to at least the 98th meridian. At Neligh Cary found it a common migrant and probably a summer resident, arriving May 5 to 20 and departing August 10 to September 1 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25). From west of the 98th meridian there are no records, and west of the 100th meridian it is apparently replaced by the following subspecies.



There are many nesting records of the Traill Flycatcher in eastern Nebraska, practically all of them in June.

**Western Traill Flycatcher** *Empidonax trailli brewsteri* Oberholser.

This is the prevailing form of *E. trailli* in the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska where it is a common summer resident, and it also occurs as a migrant and occasional breeder over western Nebraska, probably from about the 100th meridian westward.

A University collecting party, working in Sioux County from May 18 to June 1, 1900, noted this bird repeatedly during that period (*Crawford, Proc. N. O. U.*, ii, p. 77), and a specimen collected in Monroe Canyon on May 28 has been pronounced *brewsteri* by Dr. H. C. Oberholser. During the summer of 1901 the "Alder Flycatcher" was observed all through the summer by Cary and Carriker, who, though they found no nests, regarded it as probably breeding (*Cary, Proc. N. O. U.*, iii, p. 73). L. M. Gates collected a specimen of *brewsteri* (Det. Oberholser) on May 21, 1914, at Haigler, Nebraska, in the extreme southeastern part of the state. Zimmer found the Traill Flycatcher in the brush along the Loup River at Halsey from May 15 to August 31, in 1911 and 1912 (*Proc. N. O. U.*, v, p. 81), and collected three specimens on August 21 and 31, 1911. Unfortunately, these specimens are juveniles, but they have the more brownish color of *brewsteri*.

**Least Flycatcher** *Empidonax minimus* (W. M. & S. F. Baird).

East of about the 98th meridian this, our smallest flycatcher, is a more or less common migrant, and in the northeastern part of the state, along the Missouri River, it is an uncommon summer resident and breeder. Possibly it may occur as a rare migrant farther west, but has not so been recorded as yet.

It arrives in early May. At Falls City in 1904 Swenk collected a male on May 2. At Lincoln in 1903 he collected a pair on May 9, a date considerably earlier than the other Lincoln dates, which are May 13 to 21. In the fall it is very uncommon at Lincoln, the only date being September 20, 1920 (C. E. Mickel). Apparently it usually migrates a little later than does *E. trailli* from which it is best distinguished in the field by its sharp, snappy "che-*bee*" note, very different from the shrill, jerky "wee-*zee-up*" of the Traill Flycatcher. Cary found it a rather common spring migrant at Neligh May 10 to 20, but did not note it in the fall (*Proc. N. O. U.*, i, p. 25). L. Bruner has found it migrating at West Point.

In 1877 Aughey first recorded this species from Nebraska, stating that it was rather common and occasionally bred in the northeastern portion of the state, and recording the taking of specimens at Dakota City in May, June and July of 1865 and 1866. Dr. T. C. Stephens informs us that it nests in that locality at the present time. It also occasionally summers and breeds as far south along

the Missouri River as Omaha, according to L. Skow, I. S. Trostler and others.

**Hammond Flycatcher** *Empidonax hammondii* (Xantus).

The only state record of this bird, previously unpublished, is that of a specimen collected at Crawford, Nebraska, September 17, 1911, by J. T. Zimmer, and now No. 531 of his collection. It is a male, and clearly shows the characters of the species—chest dark, throat grayish, outer primary slightly longer than fifth primary, emarginate tail with outer web of outer rectrix whitish, etc., while the bill is conspicuously shorter and narrower than in *traillii* or *minimus*. It is probable that this species occurs more or less regularly, though in small numbers, in northwestern Nebraska during migrations, as the species nests in the mountains of Wyoming and Colorado, from the plains up to 8,000 feet elevation.

(*Empidonax wrightii* Baird. Wright Flycatcher. In 1901 Merritt Cary recorded what he called the Traill Flycatcher (*E. traillii*) as frequently seen around the rim rock in the rocky heads of canyons among the "wait-a-bit" brush of the western slopes of the Elk Mountain region of South Dakota, southeast of Newcastle, Wyoming, uttering at short intervals its sharp "ke-wick, ke-wick" (*Auk*, xviii, p. 233). However, a male specimen collected by Cary at Elk Mountain, June 10, 1900, proves to be *E. wrightii* as determined by Dr. H. C. Oberholser and there is also a female *wrightii*, collected by Cary at the same place three days earlier, before us. His description of the note of the bird agrees with the note of *wrightii* and not of *traillii*. *E. wrightii* has also been taken at Cheyenne, Wyoming, and almost without question will eventually be found migrating through the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska.)