

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS

BY F. M. ALEXANDER

The birds considered in these notes are those which have been observed in the past few years on or near a farm located near Wellington, Kansas. This farm is not radically different from others in this locality, being level upland, and possibly having a few more trees than the average; the land not in pasture is given over to the growing of wheat, corn and sorghums, and hay. There are no streams within a quarter of a mile, so that water birds and shore birds are not commonly met with; but during periods of migration many flocks of ducks and geese are seen. Winters as a whole are open and mild with a few short periods of zero and snowy weather. During the summer there are often periods of extreme heat but there is always sufficient rainfall for the growth of crops.

Among diving birds the Pied-billed Grebe is the only common one. Horned Grebes are occasionally seen.

Gulls and terns are fairly common in the spring, especially during April and May when they follow the plows and listers in the corn fields. The same birds will often visit a field regularly for several days as in the case of what appeared to be an immature Franklin's Gull. Franklin's Gulls are the most common, sometimes coming in flocks of a hundred or more; however, on May 3, 1927, three Herring Gulls spent the afternoon in the field. Black Terns are common during this time but in smaller flocks than the gulls and rarely ever do they visit a field when the gulls are there. Some observers declare they have never seen the Black Terns except on the wing; however, the writer has observed them resting on the ground and on the fence posts.

Ducks and geese are seen generally only as migrants. Some of the ducks may nest around artificial lakes and in waste places but they are rare. Ducks flying north have been seen as early as February 7 and by February 23 the flight of both ducks and geese was general. In some cases the flocks were low enough to distinguish them as Canada, and Snow Geese, and Pintails. Blue, and Green-winged Teals, Mallards, Pintails, and Shovellers are the most common ducks, but Bluebills, Buffleheads, Goldeneyes, Redheads, Canvasbacks, and American, and Hooded Mergansers are shot on the larger lakes. Mallards, Teals, and Shovellers are most commonly found on our upland ponds. Single pairs of Shovellers are often seen in the spring. In a recent trip through the western part of the state in a single afternoon two pairs of Shovellers were seen in separate places and in another place a male and two females.

Along the larger streams Great Blue Herons are sometimes found Little Green Herons are common, Yellow, and Black-crowned Night Herons, rare. The Bittern is not at all uncommon.

In the spring of 1926 a pair of Sandhill Cranes flew over the farm every evening about five o'clock from the west, probably from the creek, and alighted on the stream east of the farm. They became a rather common sight until July of that year but since none have been seen until May of this year when one has again appeared on this same stream.

A small local museum contains specimens of Wilson's Phalarope, Avocets, Willets, and Curlews but these were all taken several years ago. The writer is not very familiar with shore birds but has noted Wilson's Snipe, Solitary Sandpipers, Spotted Sandpipers, and Yellow-legs. Killdeers are quite common from early in the spring as is also the Upland Plover.

The common Quail, or Bob-white, is our only representative of that order here; however, farther west in this state Prairie Chickens are found in large numbers. Early this spring Mexican Quail were distributed over the county, four in a place where there were flocks of the common quail, with the hope of improving the vitality of the local species. Efforts at introducing pheasants have met with only moderate success. A flock of fourteen quail spent the past winter along an osage orange hedge near the buildings. Shocked cane and other feed around the barns no doubt had considerable attraction for them; on one occasion the writer found them just outside the hen house. On June 5 a nest and pair of old birds were found along this same hedge. The nest was made of dry grass, slightly depressed in the ground, covered with grass above with an opening to the south and contained two eggs.

Mourning Doves arrive in March and are common until late fall. Their nests are often made on the ground in wheat fields, and during harvest the bird flies off in apparent great distress at the approach of the binder. It uses the ruse of being injured to lead any intruder away from its nest more than any other of our local birds.

Although eagles have been killed here in years past, it was not until November 20, 1927, that the writer ever found a wild one here. While rounding a bend in the road through rough pasture land, I came onto a large Golden Eagle feeding on a jack rabbit and not more than thirty feet away. The approach and stopping of the car did not seem to interest him, but after several minutes the continued attacks of three crows finally made him rise and after circling several times alighted

on a fence post about 300 yards across the pasture.

Marsh Hawks are perhaps most often seen here while Swainson's, Cooper's, and Rough-legged Hawks are not at all rare. A pair of Marsh Hawks were seen almost daily at the farm during the winter. Sharp-shinned, and Sparrow Hawks are also fairly common; it may not always hold true but I see the former only in winter months and the latter during the summer. The Prairie Falcon is rare.

On March 31 of this year, nine days later than last year, the first Burrowing Owls of the season appeared. Four years ago these owls took up residence in abandoned prairie dog holes and now there are several colonies through the pasture. In the fall as many as seventeen owls have been counted sitting about the entrance to one hole. The young drop into the holes on the slightest pretense but the older ones allow a person to approach quite closely before flying or entering the holes and show little fear of horses or cattle. Short-eared Owls, Screech Owls, and Barn Owls are relatively common but Horned Owls are rare.

The Belted Kingfisher is not often seen here. Two were seen in March of this year. Hairy, Downy, and Red-headed Woodpeckers are common, the former being seen during much of the year. The Red-headed Woodpecker does not become common until late in April or early May. By March Flickers have arrived in considerable numbers and are common all summer.

Although Chimney Swifts occur here I have not seen a great many. While going to school at Manhattan the writer had opportunity a number of times to observe the Ruby-throated Hummingbird as it was flying among the flower beds on the campus, but the bird seems to be rare in this section. Nighthawks are very common during the summer. I have found their "nests" in June in wheat fields and in corn fields. Two years ago while cutting wheat two young ones were found. These were about the size and shape of the domestic chick, a light gray in color and while they were not large enough to fly were active and proficient at concealing themselves in the wheat stubble.

The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is frequently seen here during the summer, generally arriving late in April. The common Kingbird and Arkansas Kingbird are here in large numbers by May. They do most of their hunting on the wing returning generally to the same perch after making a short flight.

Both the Prairie Horned Lark and the Meadowlark are present the year round, if anything more generally seen in winter. Many small flocks of around a dozen can be found near farm buildings and feed

yards during the winter. Even during snow storms I have seen them searching for food on ground swept clean by the wind.

The Blue Jay generally arrives by the middle of April. Apparently the bird prefers the town to the country as it is more often seen there. There is rarely a time that a few Crows cannot be found. Early this spring the Crows and Blackbirds were doing an unknown amount of good by eating grubs and cutworms which were causing damage to wheat. A bounty of five cents a head is given on Crows by the county and there is some agitation to have this law repealed. The Red-winged Blackbird is the first to arrive here, followed closely by the Yellow-headed Blackbird which remains until early May. Bronzed Grackles arrive early and are sometimes seen in the winter as are Cowbirds. Small flocks stay for days during the winter in the feed lots and on January 10, 1927, there were three birds which appeared to be Rusty Blackbirds. In September, October, and November the large flocks of grackles and Cowbirds do considerable damage in kafir corn fields, in some cases eating practically all the grain in the field.

Orchard Orioles and Baltimore Orioles are fairly common. I see only a few American Goldfinches during the summer but some report seeing them frequently. English Sparrows and Harris's Sparrows are present in large numbers the year round. Fox, Lark, and Black-throated Sparrows are seen, especially the two former. The Slate-colored Junco is very common in late winter.

The Cardinal is present during the entire year. Rose-breasted and Blue Grosbeaks are but rarely seen. Indigo, and Painted Buntings are present but the latter is very rare. Even during the hottest days the Dickcissel is active and singing. The only swallow I have had opportunity to observe is the Barn Swallow and true to its name one or more broods are raised in the barn every year. Small flocks of Cedar Waxwings are sometimes seen. The White-rumped Shrike is present practically all the year and the Northern Shrike sometimes ranges this far south.

The Red-eyed Vireo is sometimes found here. The Yellow Warbler and Maryland Yellow-throat are seen, especially the former. Mockingbirds, Catbirds, and Brown Thrashers are all common during the summer. Among wrens, the House, and Carolina Wrens are both common.

The White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher occur here but are not common. Black-capped Chickadees are quite common. In the thrush family, Robins are very common, the Wood Thrush and Bluebird comparatively rare.

WELLINGTON, KANSAS.