

SOME WHISTLING SWAN OBSERVATIONS IN WESTERN ALASKA

Herbert W. Brandt (Alaska Bird Trails, 1943: 325) stated that Whistling Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) were rare in the Hooper Bay region during the summer of 1924. Through the efforts of the Alaska Game Commission much greater protection has been given the species in recent years. Due to this protection and the decreased shooting by Eskimos, the species has increased a great deal during the past decade. Henry Kyllingstad, teacher at Mountain Village on the lower Yukon from 1942 through 1948, stated that he had seen a remarkable increase while he was there.

On an hour trip at Bethel June 4, 1946, I observed 2 swans just north of the village. On an all-day hike June 5, 1946, at Johnson River I flushed 15 swans, all feeding on lakes southwest of our cabin. They were in pairs except for 1 individual. They were on the move at 3:24 a.m., 5:05 a.m., 5:22 a.m., and 5:35 a.m. Their calls resembled "O-o-o-o-o-oa" or "Goo-oo-oo-a". When they rose from the water the pounding of their wings on the surface was plainly audible from .50 to .75 mile away. Many of the lakes and streams west of Johnson River (30 miles west of Bethel) were frozen, which could account for the concentration of swans at that time. During 165 hours in the field at Johnson River between June 4 and 20, I observed 30 swans (observations on 6 of 17 days), an average of 0.18 per hour. No swans were seen during the plane trip from Bethel to Johnson River and return.

During a 125 mile flight from Bethel to Chevak (just east of Hooper Bay) on June 20, 1946, 2 pairs and 3 single birds were seen. One was sitting on a nest near the shore of a small lake, while its mate was feeding along the shore.

On June 21, 1946 I flew from Chevak to Mountain Village, a distance of 85 miles, observing the greatest concentration of swans—8 single individuals and 8 couples—, totaling 24, and probably representing 8 to 16 pairs. As a rule they were feeding on small lakes. Two were sitting on nests, 1 of which was on an island about 9 feet long near the shore. It was well lined with down, and when we flew over, the adult slid off into the water. We passed over her so swiftly, though, that she returned immediately to the plainly discernible eggs. The other swan had built her own island in the marshy lake border. It was a large mass of vegetation several feet across and also contained eggs. The incubating swan slid off the eggs as we came into sight but returned immediately after we had passed. Her mate was feeding only about 300 feet away. At the second nest the swan's mate was not observed. We did not observe any swans on this trip after crossing the Yukon.

On June 22, we flew from Mountain Village to Marshall, a distance of 60 miles, observing only 1 swan, and that on the south side of the Yukon. From Marshall to Bethel, another 57 miles, an area with a few scattered stunted spruces, but still tundra in nature, we observed 3 groups of 2 swans.—LAWRENCE H. WALKINSHAW, 1703 Central Tower, Battle Creek, Michigan.

TWO BIRDS NEW FOR THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

On May 13, 1939, a storm of great violence struck Green Island in Laguna Madre, Texas. The following morning a great concentration of passerine birds covered the island. Among the multitudes of warblers, orioles, flycatchers, and other land birds was a small flock of male Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*). The local authorities stated that to their knowledge this was the first record of the Bobolink for the county, and probably for the entire Rio Grande valley.

On May 6, 1948, while driving from Port Isabel to San Benito we came upon an adult Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) resting on the road. This individual could not have been in good physical condition for I barely missed catching it in my hands. Aided by a strong wind, the bird just managed to rise and sailed off with an unsteady flight over extensive chaparral

country, and from all appearances settled far out in that area. I have been unable to find another record of the occurrence of the Sooty Tern in the Rio Grande valley.—ALLAN D. CRUICKSHANK, Rye, New York.

SUMMER Tanager IN MICHIGAN

On November 6, 1948, George M. Sutton and I collected a Summer Tanager (*Piranga r. rubra*) about a mile south of Pinckney, Livingston County, Michigan.

The specimen, an immature female, weighed 28.2 gms. The wing measured 91.5 mm, the tail, 69. The ovary was small and the skull was incompletely ossified. The stomach was full of fruit remains (grape?), with traces of insects. The specimen, number 116078, is now in the Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan.

This bird is the first record of the Summer Tanager for Michigan. However, its occurrence in Michigan is scarcely as remarkable as the date of its occurrence. Even the Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) leaves Michigan long before November, usually by the middle or end of September, although Magee banded a female and noted a male nearby at Sault Ste. Marie on October 21, 1923 (Magee, 1926, *Wilson Bull.* 38 (3): 163). In central Ohio, *Piranga rubra* breeds north to Licking County; in eastern Ohio it ranges farther north; in western Ohio, it breeds only to the general region of Dayton (Hicks, 1935, *Ohio State Univ. Studies* 40 (5): 175).

Although it may be useless to speculate on the reason for the bird's visit, it seems worthwhile to record the fact that the weather during the early part of the month was stormy, and on November 5 and 6 a rather strong south wind prevailed.—HARRISON B. TORDOFF, Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

TEXAS HABITAT OF BOTTERI'S SPARROW AND GULF COAST RECORDS OF WINTERING SPARROWS

It is perhaps worth recording that the habitat of Botteri's Sparrow (*Aimophila botterii*) in the Brownsville, Texas, area has changed materially since the publication of Harper's article on that species (1930, *Auk*, 47, 177-185.). Harper gives a careful description of the terrain between Brownsville and Port Isabel on the coast. Overgrazing, which he specifies as not existing in the area at the time of his visit, is now all too apparent. Once the citrus groves and the richer tableland growth ends and the salt prairie to the east begins, there is no vegetation but a stubby grass with patches, along the road, of cedars, agarita and mesquite. The typical salt grass association, which appears to be the strict habitat preference of this species and which is well illustrated in his photographs, now occurs only on the very borders of the sea itself or the neighboring lagoons, both near Port Isabel and farther south at Boca Chica. It was here only that I found Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*) singing from March 11, 1946 on, and later on March 22 farther north above Corpus Christi at Rockport in similar environment. From the above evidence it seems that the summer range of Botteri's Sparrow has been seriously reduced in the Brownsville area of Texas.

The following species were collected and positively identified during this period:

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis oblitus*), a common wintering species along the sea edge from Rockport to Boca Chica, taken between March 4 and March 23.

Nevada Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis nevadensis*), found at Port Isabel in tufts of grass along the beach, March 11.

Western Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum perpallidus*), taken at Brownsville and at Austwell, Mar. 3-11. The upper mandible seems to become darker with the approach of the nesting season, starting with the ridge of the culmen and working downwards on each side.

Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*), was in breeding condition and also in very worn