

Nesting ecology and habits of the Dickcissel on the Arkansas Grand Prairie.—The Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*), a typical prairie bird, is the second most common breeding bird on the Arkansas Grand Prairie. Only the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) is more abundant. Observations reported here were made from 1950 to 1955 and during a brief period in May 1962.

Dickcissels are principally summer residents on the Arkansas prairie, although a few birds are found every winter. First spring arrivals usually appear by the second or third week in April. In 1952, first males were recorded on 10 and 11 April; in 1951, on 19 April. By 27 April 1951, many females had arrived. In central Illinois, Gross (1921. *Auk*, 38:11) observed the first males about the last week in April or the first week in May. The females usually arrived about a week later.

The earliest records of nest building on the Arkansas Grand Prairie were on 5 May 1962. By 15 May 1962, at least four nests contained complete clutches of eggs. In central Illinois, Gross (Ibid.:167) found first nests during the last week of May. The latest nesting date at Stuttgart, Arkansas, was 22 July 1952, when a nest was found containing young nearly ready to fledge. Clutch size in 13 nests ranged from 3 to 5 eggs (1 clutch of 3 eggs; 9 of 4; 3 of 5). Nests were from 3 inches to 4 feet from the ground, with an average height of approximately 3 feet for 20 nests. Overmire (1962. *Auk*, 79:115) reported the mean height of 94 Oklahoma nests to be 4 feet. Ten of the Arkansas nests were in briar (*Rubus* sp.), four in haw (*Crataegus* sp.), three in buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and one each in an undetermined grass (Gramineae), plum (*Prunus* sp.), and dogwood (*Cornus* sp.).

On the basis of nest site preference, the Dickcissel is essentially a bird of the briar patch. An optimum nesting habitat on the Arkansas Grand Prairie consists of briar patches along roadsides bordering maturing oat fields. At the time of Gross's study in Illinois (*Auk*, Ibid.) Dickcissels nested mostly in meadows. Nesting densities in Arkansas were considerably higher along brushy roadside borders than in open fields. This was determined by censusing territorial male Dickcissels in 80 randomly selected plots. There were 40 10-acre field plots and 40 roadside strips, each ½ mile long and 150 yards wide. The average density along brushy roadside borders was approximately one territorial male (or pair) per 7 acres, compared with one male (or pair) per 20 acres out in open fields.

Flocking begins soon after the nesting season, and feeding is concentrated mostly in cultivated rice fields. A flock numbering 30 birds was observed as early as 24 July 1952. The largest flock recorded contained over 500 birds, which were feeding in a rice field on 6 September 1954. Gross (*Auk*, Ibid.:12) observed a roost of at least 485 Dickcissels in Illinois on 10 August 1918.

Virtually all winter records at Stuttgart were of individual birds seen about barnyards, where they were associated with House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). Several dates of occurrence were as follows: 29 November 1951, 13 January 1952, 14 February 1952, and 11 March 1952.—BROOKE MEANLEY, *Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, 18 December 1962.*

Prairie Warbler nests on a 0.6-acre island.—On 12 July 1960, a Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*) was incubating four eggs on a small island approximately 300 yards from the mainland in Lake Lanier, Georgia. The nest was approximately 3 feet from the ground in a small deciduous tree. Vegetation on the island consisted of a sparse growth of broom-sedge (*Andropogon virginicus*), occasional forbs, and several deciduous trees about 5 feet high. Originally the island was part of a farm which was abandoned when

the lake was formed in 1957. The vegetation on the nearest mainland was secondary oak-hickory stands interspersed with pastures.

On 23 July 1960, I made observations at the nest area from 11:35 AM to 1:30 PM (EST). An adult Prairie Warbler fed three fledglings perched in broom-sedge tussocks, which were 20, 50, and 55 feet from the nest. They remained near these positions throughout the observation period. The young birds were silent except when the adult approached with food or foraged nearby. On these occasions a rapid twitter was emitted. The adult was usually observed to forage on the ground from 5 to 30 feet from a perched fledgling. When an insect was captured, the parent usually fed the nearest young bird. Often the parent uttered a single call note as it foraged. During the period of observation, 22 food items were brought to the fledglings. The first received eight items, the second five, and the third nine. Apparently only one parent was involved in the feeding of the young. The adult was never observed to leave the island and probably was able to find a sufficient amount of food without traveling to the mainland. When I revisited the island on 5 August 1960 I found no Prairie Warblers; presumably the brood had been successful and the individuals had dispersed.

Although this island is considerably smaller than the annual average territory size of the Prairie Warbler—3.5 acres (Nolan, pers. comm.)—the brood fledged. These observations suggest that a territory size of 3.5 acres is not necessary for the raising and fledging of a brood. Apparently the food supply on the island was sufficient for the family of warblers. Since the warblers were the only birds nesting on the island, there was probably no competition for insect food with other birds; however, the sparseness of the stand of vegetation as compared with other, local old-field communities would tend to discount any suggested overabundance of food.

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A partial albino Red-winged Blackbird with a deformed bill.—An unusual male Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) was collected on 24 March 1963, 5 miles east of Fresno, Fresno County, California. The upper mandible had apparently grown sharply decurved to the right of the lower mandible. The lower mandibular tomium was markedly "rolled" inward. The tongue was dried and frayed distally for 4 mm and protruded between the lower mandibular tomium. The bird was little to moderately fat, weighing 59 grams two hours after death. The specimen also showed partial albinism: the outer vane of the middle alular quill and the proximal 1.5 cm of the outer vanes of the last eight primary remiges being white on both wings.

Normal territorial behavior including song and agonistic behavior was observed. The right testis measured 5×4 mm; the left testis, $5\frac{1}{2} \times 4$ mm. Unfortunately, the bill abnormality was noticed post-mortem, eliminating the possibility of observing feeding behavior.

A similar bill deformity was reported for the American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) by Batts (1954. *Wilson Bull.*, 66:142). The present report is the only record of this type of bill abnormality that I could find in the literature for a passerine species.—EUGENE S. MORTON, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, 20 May 1963.*