

THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK

Sept., 1972

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

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PROGRAM FOR SEPTEMBER:

To launch our new season in the traditional manner, members are asked to bring their own color slides for viewing. To coordinate their showing, please contact Esther Waddill, Program Chairman, prior to the meeting.

SUMMER SIGHTINGS:

This has been a very interesting summer from the standpoint of birdlife in the Texas Panhandle with a number of unusual observations being reported by various members.

Backing up to the first day of May, Carolyn Stallwitz, Jo Mayer and Rita Hoehn observed a male Cape May Warbler in Dumas. This, or another, bird was seen at the same location a few days later by Barbara Lund. The only other sightings of this species reported from the Panhandle were by Darthula Walker, Laura Saunders and Anna Hibbets who saw one or more near Canyon on Oct. 17, 1936, and by Joe Bailey who found one, again near Canyon, on May 5, 1956. What is so good about the Stallwitz/Mayer/Hoehn bird is that Stallwitz was able to get a colored photograph of it, a method of confirmation that is unbeatable outside of a bird in the hand. This photo, along with one of a male Hooded Warbler taken at about the same time and place, have been deposited in the Texas Photo-Record File at Texas A&M University. A truly remarkable sighting was made by Mrs. Stallwitz who reports on a Phainopepla that spent three days in Dumas during February. Unfortunately a photo was not secured of this bird. This is a far out-of-range observation. It is interesting to note that the only record of this species from Oklahoma was of a female seen on Feb. 4, 1962 (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma Birds, 457) in Grant County. The only record from Colorado is from Weld Co., Aug. 29/30, 1965 (Bailey & Niedrach, 1965, Birds of Colorado, 486).

Although the Long-billed Curlew has been reported in Hartley Co. for several years during the annual North America Breeding Bird Surveys, Mrs. Stallwitz found six pairs plus two chicks there on June 9 of this year. All of these unusual observations are, we believe, but a prelude to others that will be coming from the Moore County area.

On June 25th Ken Seyffert directed his attention to the Skittle Creek area south of McLean, Gray Co. This was done on the advice of Jack Williams of Pampa who reported good birding there, and he was certainly right for 50 species were seen that day. By far the most interesting observation was that of a male American Goldfinch, somewhat out of range for that time of year. A late migrant? Malingering? Nesting? Also present was a pair of Marsh Hawks.

All during July of last year Rena Ross reported a singing Hermit Thrush around her home on south Travis. This year one was reported by Thelma Fox singing through June 28 near her home on south Hayden. These observations are unusual in that the only locality in which this species nests in Texas is in the Guadalupe Mountains.

On July 31 and the days following Rena Ross reported a Carolina Chickadee in her yard. This species is not foreign to Potter County in the summer but heretofore has been reported only from the Canadian River breaks. The

only other reported observation of it in Amarillo was by Thelma Fox on Dec. 4, 1963. Rena Ross reported having a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in her yard on Aug. 4 and it was seen almost daily for the next week or so.

Col. L. R. Wolfe in his Check-list of the Birds of Texas lists the Black & White Warbler as a resident of the Panhandle. On whose observations this statement is based we do not know; however, Rena Ross had a singing male of this species in her yard on July 20. We have no other records for the summer months.

Buffalo Lake was productive of some interesting observations this summer, Ken Seyffert reported several pairs of Yellow-headed Blackbirds during June that appeared to have set up nesting territories. They were all gone by mid-July, however, and apparently did not nest. At least one pair of the many Eared Grebes present produced young as an adult was observed with a chick on July 30. The American Coot nested also for two juvenals were seen on August 6. Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Pintails, Shovelers, and Gadwallls spent the summer at the lake but only the young of the latter were reported seen by KS (7 on Aug. 6). A Great-crowned Flycatcher on June 18 was west of its nesting range (KS also saw one in the Palo Duro on Aug. 27) and three Barn Owls that spent the summer raises the question of whether or not they nested there (and if so, where?). Although no young of the Mallard were seen at Buffalo Lake, a female with six juvenals were seen at Elysian Fields by KS on July 16. Two pairs of Ruddy Ducks were also seen that day but no young were found.

The Canadian River has long been noted as a highway down which typical eastern species of birds have moved westward. This was well illustrated this summer by the observations of Ken Seyffert. On July 2 he found a pair of Brown Thrashers feeding young still in the nest and by the 9th they had fledged. The nest was about 14' up in the top of a young hackberry tree heavily overgrown with grape vines. Nearby, in an extensive and dense plum thicket also heavily covered with grape vines, one or more Catbirds were seen on the same dates. A typical Catbird nest was found but it proved to be empty and no young were observed. Also on July 2 a male Indigo Bunting was found singing vigorously, moving about from one singing perch to another and giving every indication of being on territory. On the same date two pairs of Eastern Bluebirds were seen, one pair feeding young still in their nest located about 25' up in the dead limb of a cottonwood. 5 Common Grackles were seen and the Yellow-shafted Flickers were very common (but no Red-shafts!). Other typical eastern species present were Blue Jays, Cardinals, Eastern Kingbirds, Downy Woodpeckers and Red-headed Woodpeckers. This is abundant evidence that the eastern birds are moving west, but are the western species moving east? If not, why not? Readers' views on this phenomenon will be welcomed.

North of the river, in Hartley Co., Ken Seyffert saw a pair of adult Golden Eagles with one young on July 9. The young one lit on top of the bluff overlooking the road where the observer was. Soon a Mockingbird began harassing the young eagle even to the point of alighting on its back and pecking it. To no avail, however, as the large bird showed

unperturbed.

On the road to Boys' Ranch from Amarillo, but still in Potter Co., Ken Seyffert found a nest of the Curve-billed Thrasher on June 11. The nest contained four eggs. This is the first reported nesting record for Potter Co. One suspects that if this entire area of mesquite/cholla association were thoroughly surveyed the nesting of the Curve-bill would prove to be not uncommon. The nest was found about 3½' up in a cholla. Also nesting in a cholla was a Loggerhead Shrike found at Buffalo Lake on June 18. The nest contained 4 or more young (4 or more because the nest was about 6½' up in the cactus and had to be reached into with great care) and it was the only cholla plant for miles around.

Not to be left out is Lake Tanglewood. Peggy Acord reported a singing Eastern Phoebe from there during the entire summer, and a fledgling giving begging calls on Sept. 3. This is a first for Randall Co. Also present were several pairs of Say's Phoebes. In town on Aug. 25 she reported a Red-breasted Nuthatch in her yard. This is the earliest reported date for this species and the first August record.

The Palo Duro Canyon produced one interesting observation. On July 16 Ken Seyffert found two Brown Towhees together near the head of South Brush Draw, but a nest was not found. This is the first summer record for this species in Randall Co. Scrub Jays and Verdins were also seen.

An observation of interest was made by Jack Williams. During the first week in June he reported five or six Least Terns in the river bottom about five miles below Greenbelt Dam, Donley Co.

What is probably an early date for Scrub Jays was reported by Rita Kinney as six or seven passed through her yard on Sept. 6, causing considerable excitement. There is a small resident population in the Palo Duro but sightings on the plains above indicate the species is a migrant and winter resident.

On Sept. 4 Ken Seyffert had the good fortune while at Elysian Fields, Randall Co. to observe a Short-billed Dowitcher, closely and at length. The lone bird was first observed as it circle in for a landing, calling intermittently as it descended from a considerable height and alighting among a group of Killdeer feeding in a plowed field. An unusual place to see a dowitcher! The bird was observed closely from about 40 yards distance through a zoom-scope set at 25X. It was in transition plumage with its back and head still dark brown with the feathers of its back edged in buff. The breast and belly shaded from gray to white with slight spotting or barring down the flanks. It eventually squatted down into a furrow revealing as it did so the white tail and upper tail coverts lightly barred. After flushing, it circled in company with a Killdeer showing their almost identical size. Quite often it gave its three syllabled call which is the distinguishing characteristic between it and the Long-billed. It was the only dowitcher present.

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS:

The fourth season of Audubon Wildlife Films promises to be a very exciting one. The films are shown Sunday afternoons at 2:30 in the Garden Center. The season's schedule is as follows:

- Oct. 29 - "Sky Island" with Robert E. Fultz.
- Nov. 26 - "Bermuda - Land & Sea" with Janet Jahoda.
- Feb. 18 - "Treasure of East Africa" with Bower E. Rudrud.
- Mar. 18 - "New Zealand Spring" with Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.

This series of films has proven to be very successful in the past and we urge all members to help in making the coming season even more so. Advance orders for tickets will be accepted at any time at Amarillo Garden Center, 1400 Street Drive, Amarillo, 79106. Single adult season ticket is \$5.00. Family season ticket is \$10.00.

A JOB FOR THE TPAS:

Heretofore almost all of our bird records have been concentrated on Potter and Randall Counties. Many hours have been spent afield during the last twenty years observing and recording the daily birdlife of this two-county area. The accumulation of sufficient records has enabled us to issue a Potter/Randall County Checklist. The time has now come to do the same for the entire Panhandle. After all, we are the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society. Our group has expanded to include memberships of people in other counties. This includes active birders in Gray, Hemphill, Hutchinson, Moore and Farmer Counties. Records are accumulating for Oldham and Donley counties. We urge all of these members to keep records of their observations. With this information we can eventually issue individual county checklists. If you do not care to keep records, please jot down your observations showing numbers, places, dates, and send them to our Recorder (Peggy Acord, 1911 Cherry, Amarillo 79106) or to the Editor (Ken Seyffert, 2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo 79103). Nesting records are also important. Our records are very inadequate in this respect. Remember, we want to include the entire Panhandle in our picture of birdlife. If you are traveling in another county than your home county, please keep a record of your observations. We are interested in them all. To do this properly requires the daily observations of many people working over a relatively long time. Our pleasure in birds can be turned to another account by producing information of importance.

Calendar:

- Sept. 18 - Monthly Society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p.m.
Program - color slides.
- Oct. 16 - Monthly Society meeting.
- Oct. 29 - Audubon Wildlife Film - 2:30 p.m. at the Garden Center.
"Sky Island", with Robt. E. Fultz.