

South Dakota Bird Notes

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Whole No. 99



Bald Eagle

—Photo Courtesy of South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks

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President's Page

IT IS a pleasure to greet you with my first message as president of SDOU. Although a charter member of the organization, I still feel something of a newcomer because I did not return to my home state until 1966. Since that time I have been quite active in field work but have successfully evaded my obligations on the organization level. But as one old hand put it the labor force is getting smaller each year; I took this (with no offense) as a subtle suggestion that I get to work rather than to devote all of my time to bird watching.



The SDOU meeting at Augustana College in Sioux Falls was a success, even though attendance was down somewhat from previous meetings. I was unable to attend the morning session on Saturday, but judging by the quality of the papers presented at the afternoon session I am sure the entire program was informative and educational. The papers presented by Gil Blankespoor and Herb Krause were especially interesting; the paper co-authored by these careful observers emphasized the value of data accumulated over a period of time, even though the information is not recorded for a particular project or research.

Christmas Counts and other winter birding activities turn my thoughts to bird feeders. I trust that every member has a feeding station of some kind for the pleasure of having birds near a window during the cold wintry days. Suet alone will bring in five or six species of birds, and it takes so little time to hang a chunk of suet from a nearby tree. The feeders

containing sunflower seeds and other foods will increase the potential visitor list.

The rare birds that appear at feeding stations frequently amaze me, and my own experience with the Boreal Chickadee last winter is a good example. I had only four species of birds coming to the feeder at the time, including only two chickadees, but I looked out one morning and observed a life species flitting around the feeding station. I had intended to drive 800 miles to Duluth later in the winter to see the Boreal Chickadee.

The only Gray-crowned Rosy Finch observed in eastern South Dakota turned up at a feeding station in Volin a few years ago where it remained for several weeks. It was observed and photographed by many delighted birders. There are many other unusual sightings that have been recorded at winter feeding stations, including Varied Thrush, Hoary Redpoll and the single South Dakota record for the Black-throated Sparrow.

Keep in mind the importance of calling other observers to share your luck if a rare bird comes to your feeder. We should always try to have more than one observation of these birds, aside from the enjoyment we give our fellow birders.

It is unlikely that we will have an invasion of northern finches to match that of 1972-73, but a smaller echo flight can be expected. There are always two or three species of the northern birds in the area sometime during the winter season. They may not appear at your feeding station, but their bright colors and cheery calls help to shorten the winter months wherever they are found.—Bruce K. Harris

Recent Additions to the Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge Bird List

Conrad A. Fietland

IN SEPTEMBER, 1969, Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge issued a revised edition of the refuge bird list. The new list contained 235 species of birds which have been recorded on the refuge since 1936. Since the list was issued, 22 species of birds have been identified at the refuge that are not on the list.

These birds fall into three categories: Those that are true accidentals (Black Brant, Curve-billed Thrasher); those that are of fairly regular occurrences (Western Sandpiper, Ovenbird); and those that fall somewhere in between with too little information available to decide whether they should be considered accidentals or not (Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Pinyon Jay).

Following is a list of the 22 species along with the dates of observations and names of the people making those observations.

Cattle Egret—The first record of a Cattle Egret at Lacreek was a single bird observed in Pool 8 on June 26, 1972, by Victor Hall. The pool was being drained at the time.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron—The Yellow-crowned Night Heron was recorded in 1970 when one was present from June 8 through June 19. The bird was identified by Donald and Joan Hammer. Photographs were taken and the observation was previously reported in the September, 1970 issue of "Bird Notes." On April 30, 1971, a single bird was observed by this author and Victor Hall. I also observed a Yellow-crowned Night Heron on May 4, 1971, possibly the same individual that was seen five days earlier. Harold Burgess and Jay Bowmaster reported an immature

Yellow-crowned Night Heron on Pool 5 on August 30, 1973.

Black Brant—A Black Brant joined our captive goose flock on April 19, 1971, and remained through April 23. It was first seen by Victor Hall and later by this author, B. J. Rose, and several others. Photographs were taken, and the observation was reported in the June, 1971 issue of "Bird Notes."

Ross' Goose—Two Ross' Geese were observed among our captive goose flock on April 2, 1971, by this author and Victor Hall. On April 16, 1971, two Ross' Geese, believed to be the same pair, were back in the same pen. Photographs were taken, and the observation was reported in the June, 1971 issue of "Bird Notes." On March 28, 1973, a single Ross' Goose was identified by this author among a flock of about 14 Snow Geese. Harold Burgess observed an adult Ross' Goose on Sept. 25, 1973.

White-winged Scoter—Victor Hall reported that repeated observations of a single bird of this species were made from Oct. 25 through Oct. 31, 1970, in the borrow ditch below Pool 9. Publication of the observation was made in the December, 1970 issue of "Bird Notes." Another White-winged Scoter was seen Oct. 25, 1972, by Harold Burgess and Charles Zimmerman, and the latter saw the bird again the next day. This bird was found on a trout pond on the Cedar Creek addition to the refuge.

Goshawk—The first field identification of a Goshawk was made Nov. 4, 1972, by Harold Burgess. He found the bird in a shelterbelt near one of the refuge houses. Another Goshawk was seen by Burgess two days later.

Bobwhite—Bobwhites have been released in this area in the past, but not for at least three years. For about a week in late July, 1973, a single Bobwhite was present near one of the refuge houses where it was seen by Greg Koeln, Con Hillman, Harold Burgess, this author, and several others. Two were seen on the edge of the Nebraska sandhills on Aug. 9, 1973, by Koeln and Burgess.

Piping Plover—The Piping Plover was added to the refuge bird list on May 2, 1973, when a single bird was seen on Dike 2 by Harold Burgess and this author. I made a second observation of a Piping Plover on May 13, 1973, on recently exposed mud flats in Pool 4.

Short-billed Dowitcher—B. J. Rose made a careful sight identification of four Short-billed Dowitchers on April 25, 1971.

Western Sandpiper—The Western Sandpiper was first seen at Lacreek when this author identified five members of the species on a sand bar in Little White River Pool on April 12, 1971. Four Western Sandpipers were captured in a mist net by this author and Greg Koeln from July 17, 1973, through Aug. 2, 1973. Measurements of these birds were taken and the identification was confirmed by Harold Burgess.

Long-eared Owl—I observed two Long-eared Owls at very close range (10 feet) in a shelterbelt on March 30, 1972. About two weeks later I saw another Long-eared Owl in a wooded area on the Cedar Creek addition to the refuge.

Purple Martin—A female Purple Martin was seen trying to find shelter in old Cliff Swallow nests on April 8, 1973, by Harold Burgess. The bird also was seen by Greg Koeln and this author.

Pinyon Jay—Six Pinyon Jays were seen sitting on the tower near refuge headquarters on Nov. 4, 1972, by Harold Burgess.

Curve-billed Thrasher—B. J. Rose found a Curve-billed Thrasher at refuge headquarters on the eve of the SDOU Meeting, May 25, 1973. Later, I also

observed the bird while it was sitting on the roof of one of the buildings.

Veery—A Veery was captured in a mist net on May 27, 1971 by James Bryce. The identification was confirmed by this author, Victor Hall, and others.

Philadelphia Vireo—A Philadelphia Vireo was captured in a mist net by Greg Koeln on June 12, 1973. Identification was confirmed by Harold Burgess.

Ovenbird—The first refuge record of an Ovenbird occurred on Sept. 15, 1971, when one was captured in a mist net by James Bryce. An Ovenbird was observed May 17, 1972, by this author in the Elm Creek woods, and individuals were captured in a mist net near refuge headquarters on May 7 and May 16, 1973.

Hooded Warbler—A female Hooded Warbler was captured in a mist net by this author on May 17, 1973. The identification was confirmed by Harold Burgess and Ronald Perry before the bird was banded and released.

Blue Grosbeak—A Blue Grosbeak was seen on the Little White River Recreation Area on June 2, 1971, by this author. Another graciously put in an appearance at the SDOU Spring Meeting where it was seen on May 26, 1973, by this author and several others.

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch—A Gray-crowned Rosy Finch appeared at refuge headquarters on Oct. 24, 1972, where it was identified by Harold Burgess, Charles Zimmerman, and three other members of the refuge staff.

Gray-headed Junco—At the time this bird was identified it was called a Gray-headed Junco. Whatever the name, it was seen May 26, 1973, at the SDOU Spring Meeting by this author and several others. Since it is now considered a Dark-eyed Junco along with the Slate-colored and Oregon Juncos, it is not a new species, but still interesting.

Fox Sparrow—A Fox Sparrow was seen at refuge headquarters Oct. 30, 1972, by Harold Burgess and this author. The bird was observed again the next day.

SDOU 1973 Winter Meeting

June Harter

THE PROGRAM for our meeting in Sioux Falls was highlighted by the first public presentation of a film, and the delivery of several valuable papers. Dr. S. G. Froiland, along with his committee for the organization of the meeting, deserves our commendations.

Dr. Walter J. Breckenridge, Director Emeritus, James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota, presented his new film, "Minnesota Valley Saga," to the members and the public on Saturday evening, Nov. 10. The pictorial history of the Minnesota Valley was accompanied with a commentary given by Dr. Breckenridge, and he included a projection of probable changes. The unique program was brought about through the efforts of Herbert Krause.

Papers, business, and a meeting of the Board of Directors constituted the daytime program on Saturday. The Check-List Committee convened Sunday morning.

Presentations in the formal session included:

"Aspergillosis in Birds," by Daniel Call.

"Duck Plague Outbreak at Lake Andes," by Hazel Shave.

"The Role of Birds in Sleeping Sickness," by G. Parikh.

"A Three Year Population Study of a Designated Route," by Herbert Krause and Gilbert Blankespoor.

"Falconry and Literature, a Reclamation," by Gervase Hittle.

"New Approaches to Raptor Management," by Byron Harrell.

"Influence of Nest Site Microclimate on Parental Behavior in Redwing Blackbird," by Gilbert Blankespoor.

"Let the Waters Run Free," a film by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

We hope that the papers presented at the meeting will be sent to "Bird Notes" for publication.

During the business meeting, Esther (Mrs. Richard) Edie and Dr. S. G. Froiland were elected to serve on the Board of Directors. The members also voted to budget \$100 for a promotional campaign to increase the membership in 1974.

Bruce Harris is the new president of SDOU and Bill Lemons has the dual position of vice-president and secretary. Also during their business meeting the board selected Vermillion for the headquarters of the Spring Meeting. The program will focus on the sand dunes and other habitats that may be destined for destruction. The dates, barring unforeseen circumstances, will be May 24-26.

REGISTRATION LIST—1973

November 9-10

Armour—Mrs. Louis Crutchett.

Brookings—Mrs. Bennett Froiland, David and Nelda Holden, Mrs. Ronald Shave, Dr. and Mrs. Charles Taylor.

Clear Lake—Bruce K. Harris.

Highmore—June Harter.

Huron—J. W. and Lucille Johnson.

Meckling—Jean L. Husat, Gervase G. Hittle and Bill Lemons.

Rapid City—L. M. Baylor and N. R. Whitney.

Sioux Falls—Gilbert Blankespoor, S. G. Froiland, Augie Hoeger, W. E. Halbritter, Fred Klawiter and Herbert Krause.

Vermillion—Byron and Joyce Harrell.

Yankton—Mr. and Mrs. Willis Hall.

—Highmore

Book Review

J. W. Johnson

ADVENTURES IN BIRDING. Confessions of a Lister.—Jean Piatt. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 265 pp. Chapter headpieces by Mathew Kalmenoff. \$7.95.

The subtitle sets the tone for much of the book; the "Adventures" tend to be understated. But "Confessions" could be downright misleading to anyone who hasn't been well ground in the birding mills. Fortunately, most will read more into the book than it sets forth in detail. Should the inexperienced happen onto the book and be seduced by its beguiling prose into suddenly deciding to become one with that exclusive group, the 600 club, he will learn his limitations quickly, with little harm. The 600's are people who have seen and recognized 600 or more birds in North America north of the Rio Grande. Being "just a lister" the way the Piatts, Jean and Maybelle, do it is not all that easy or casual.

And the necessary travel and study takes more time and money than most birders have to spare, even for attaining the rarified regions where members of the 600 club have their being. Fewer even would be content with the prospect of spending "our declining years in some home for the indigent" as a result.

But, for the price of the book, even such as we can have hours of the next best thing—with none of the discomforts of a mountain slope in winter or icy waves slopping over the sides of a boat that should be larger. We can join up with people who actually do these things and meet the birds they see, cooperative or not. We can have the essence of their countless hours of homework before each trip without effort, as the author points out how they know for sure what bird they are seeing. Being able to know the bird under strange field conditions, the first time, takes more than a quick once-

over of Peterson, as those of us who have tried it know only too well.

Piatt has consideration for the reader too. He makes that apparent by picking the interesting "adventures" to detail, leads with them, slipping in the needed background where it is absorbed without being intrusive. Happily, he is above chronology, yet takes the trouble to give the more orderly reader data for reassembly of scenes to conform with the calendar.

Not every one of the 671 birds they have studied and recognized in the field is given the full treatment. Nobody could take that, as Piatt makes clear. But among the most interesting ones are some of our South Dakota birds that we see every year and check off with little thought. Others are birds we have met with and made much of in our own modest trips about the country and we find interest in the author's reaction to places, birds, and people we too have enjoyed. Every page is a pleasurable reading experience.

The neat drawings of birds by Kalmenoff heading the chapters have an appeal all their own. His birds have personality the photographer can only hope to show with a rare bit of luck.

Piatt, born in Ohio, lived in northeast Indianapolis during his early school years, near Crown Hill Cemetery, knew the grave of James Whitcomb Riley there, even lay on the slab covering it often as he dreamed up answers to questions of the universe and people in it, imagined what thoughts Riley might have added. After the University of Pennsylvania, he found his life work in experimental embryology—which provided the resources for two memberships in the 600 club—Huron

General Notes of Special Interest

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER AND MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE: RARE VISITORS AT A RAPID CITY FEEDING STATION—The winter of 1972-73 may have been somewhat exceptional for a widespread dispersal of the Clark's Nutcracker from its typical winter habitats. A friend at Chadron, Neb., noted the phenomenon in writing: "Everybody has Clark's Nutcrackers except Chadron, but we had many of them a few years ago." Another friend at Eugene, Ore., reported this species was in that area and even was dispersed westward very near to the Pacific coast during the winter of 1972-73. In western South Dakota we had this nutcracker reported in uncommon places during the same winter.

Reports came from the lower elevations west of Rapid City in Cleghorn Canyon and along Rimrock Highway (SD 44) between Rapid City and Johnson Siding, particularly at the Leighton Palmerton residence. Rollie Larson saw Clark's Nutcracker in the Spring Creek area near Hermosa, and I heard of an otherwise unconfirmed sighting near the White River. Also, a few Clark's Nutcrackers visited feeders during the winter in western Rapid City—the first occurrence of this species within the city, to my knowledge.

At my residence in western Rapid City, a Clark's Nutcracker appeared at the suet feeder on Nov. 27, 1972. From then through Feb. 16, 1973, two Clark's Nutcrackers feasted regularly at the suet feeder. While two birds occasionally appeared at the same time and were distinguishable by size and color (one

being larger and slightly darker gray), usually the birds came separately.

My notes for Dec. 1, 1972 read: "I stood as close as eight feet to the larger Clark's Nutcracker. The plumage markings are typical of what is shown in Robbins' 'Birds of North America,' except that the white line on the folded wing is not as wide and conspicuous as Robbins depicts." The temperature on Dec. 11, 1972 was below zero, and my notes indicate that a nutcracker fed continuously on suet from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

According to Pettingill and Whitney ("Birds of the Black Hills," 1965) the Clark's Nutcracker is a rare or uncommon visitor to the Black Hills. While we have no evidence that the species breeds in the Hills, we cannot exclude the possibility of a small breeding population that might have made an altitudinal and eastward migration. A more likely probability, however, is that the influx of nutcrackers into our area came from populations associated with the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming.

On Dec. 23, 1972, Dr. N. R. Whitney came to my home to see the Clark's Nutcracker, and while waiting for its appearance, Whitney saw a Mountain Chickadee come to a sunflower-seed feeder. This individual was a fairly regular visitor through Jan. 3, 1973. The feeding behavior of this Mountain Chickadee was distinctive in that the bird approached the feeder cautiously by short flights from branch to branch. Then the chickadee darted to the feeder, snatched a seed, and flew quickly to the tall elms across the street. This behavior was in contrast to that of the Mountain

Chickadee that visited Gertrude Bachmann's feeder during the winter of 1966-67. The latter bird was much more conspicuous and less "wild" in its movements, while the one at my feeder remained inactive barely long enough for satisfactory identification.—L. M. Baylor, SDSM&T, Rapid City

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OLDSQUAW AND WHITE-WINGED SCOTER IN DEUEL COUNTY—My second sighting of an Oldsquaw in South Dakota occurred on Oct. 28, 1973, when I found a female (or imm.) at Lake Alice, Deuel County (two miles east of Tunerville). The bird was observed for about 15 minutes as it swam with a mixed group of diving ducks, including a White-winged Scoter. At one time the two rare birds were seen swimming alongside each other, and could be viewed together in the telescope. They were no more than 75 yards offshore, and were observed under fairly good light conditions. The diving habit, medium size, chunky build and varied white blotching on the Oldsquaw identified it from any other diving ducks in the area. It appeared to be mostly white and gray—entirely different from any other divers.

On one other occasion, Nov. 11, 1968, I observed an Oldsquaw in South Dakota. The bird, also an immature or female, was seen on Big Stone Lake near Hartford Beach. The sighting was made at some distance as the bird was at least 300 yards out on the lake. Observation was made with a 20-power scope, and the identification was considered positive.

The White-winged Scoter at Lake Alice represents at least the third record I have for this species at the lake. The individual observed with the Oldsquaw had been sighted earlier in the morning; in fact, I was looking for the scoter among the hundreds of Scaup and Redheads in the area when I spotted the Oldsquaw. The wing bar was clearly visible when the bird flapped its wings, although it was never observed in flight.

A White-winged Scoter that I observed at Lake Alice on Nov. 8, 1973, may have been a different bird. It appeared to be much darker than the individual seen on Oct. 28.

Prior to these sightings I had a positive record for an adult White-winged Scoter at Lake Alice on May 1, 1971, and possible sightings of groups of four and seven birds on Oct. 27 and Nov. 3, 1971. The latter groups definitely were scoters, but specific determination was not possible because they were not observed in flight. They may have been Surf Scoters.

Oldsquaw and White-winged Scoters have been observed numerous times in South Dakota, and specimens have been taken. However, they seldom are present more than once or twice in any one year.—Bruce K. Harris, Clear Lake

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ROBIN NEST AT FORT MEADE—It was May 30, 1973, when I first saw the Robin nest on the porch post at Fort Meade Military Museum. During the next nine days I enjoyed watching the parents and three young from my ringside seat.

At first, I thought that the parent birds were not too smart in their method of feeding. The youngster that could stretch its neck the farthest and open its mouth the widest always got the worm. Why did not the parents rotate from one young to another so that all would get the same amount of food? But they kept gorging one particular Robin. I finally realized what was happening. The favored bird eventually went to sleep with its head hanging over the edge of the nest, and the parents proceeded to fill bird number two. When it went to sleep, they started on the third youngster. All three slept for a while, then awakened for a renewal of the same sequence.

I was not present when the fledglings left the nest during the weekend of June 9-10, but I did observe the parents feeding their family on the ground for a few more days.—Arthur W. Piehl, Sturgis, S. Dak.

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A Robin Singing at Dawn

Just at the break of a springtime day,
When the last paling star has gone,
Listening upon my pillow I lay,
To a robin singing at dawn.

Many a grander song may be heard,
But, Oh, for the sweetness and cheer
Of the robin's song by rapture stirred,
Sung as the new-born day draws near.

Though life's sky so dark we can't see through
The light of hope is never gone;
Another day may our hopes renew,
And a robin may sing at dawn.

—By **Hattie Washburn**

At her homestead near Altamont, Deuel County, Hattie Washburn (1878-1972) became one of the earliest writers and publishers of articles and poems about the birds of South Dakota. Many were the result of careful research of the prairie birds near her home.

The December, 1970 issue of "Bird Notes" contains more information about the author.—Ed.