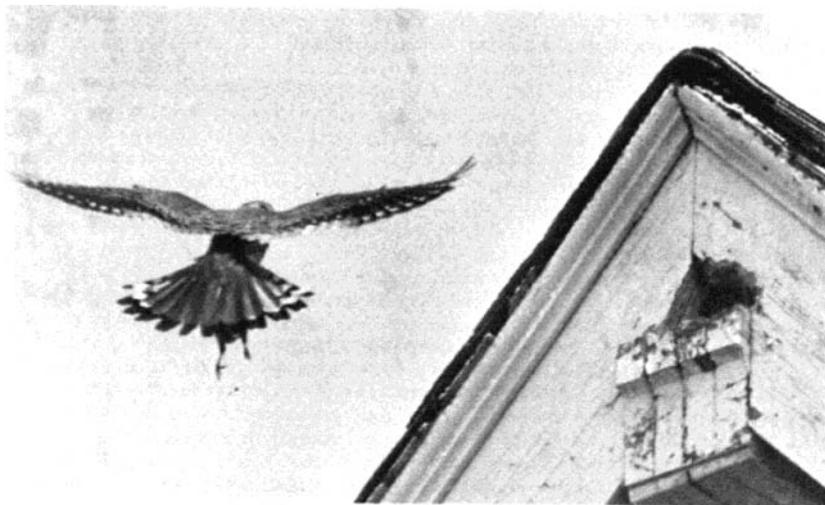


**ON THE BEHAVIOR OF AMERICAN  
KESTRELS NESTING IN TOWN**

BY GEORGE M. SUTTON AND JACK D. TYLER

**F**or some years after Sutton had moved to Norman, central Oklahoma, in 1952, he saw the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) often enough in summer on the University of Oklahoma campus to convince him that it was nesting thereabouts. Not, however, until 19 June 1960 did he obtain proof that it was doing so. On that date David Spradling found a male eyas kestrel, badly crippled, on the ground back of one of the old buildings facing the North Oval. The eyas could neither stand nor grasp a perch. Though well feathered, it was not by any means old enough to fly. It was stub-tailed and much natal down clung to the plumage of its head. Sutton looked in vain for a parent bird flying to or from the ledge or crevice from which the young bird had fallen. To this day he cannot say where the eyrie was, though he knows of one nook in which pigeons have nested regularly.



**AMERICAN KESTREL**

*Male carrying plucked prey to nest hole on University of Oklahoma campus.  
Photographed by Stephen Sisney of The Norman Transcript on 1 June 1979.*

On 1 May 1979, as Tyler was walking across the campus, he happened to see a kestrel, followed by a milling swarm of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*), flying toward an old, three-storied dwelling (formerly occupied by the Acacia Fraternity) at the corner of Elm and Cruce streets. There, instead of alighting on the roof, it entered a hole in a gable just below the ridgepole. The hole, which was roughly circular, might have been drilled by a Common Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), a species known to winter regularly, and to nest occasionally, on the campus.

Sutton, informed of what Tyler had seen, looked daily for kestrels as he walked to and from the campus, though he did not visit the house at the corner of Elm and Cruce until 25 May. On that date he watched the nest hole for about an hour in the late afternoon. He saw no kestrel, either adult or young, during that period. Convinced that the birds had been nesting there, he suspected that the brood had fledged.

The following evening (26 May), after watching the nest hole from about 1830 to 1900, he spied a bird that he decided could be nothing but a kestrel (he was without a binocular) perched atop the eleven-story Physical Sciences Building (PSB) across Elm Street to the east. In plain sight, though inconspicuous because so far away, the bird remained at that one spot for almost an hour (1900 to 1950).

At 1951 a second kestrel flew in at housetop level from the northeast carrying in one foot a plucked small bird, almost certainly a full-grown House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). This kestrel, the male, flew toward, then past, the nest hole, alighted on a utility wire above Cruce Street, perched there for about three minutes, and made off southwestward, still carrying its prey.

At 2000, a kestrel again flew in with prey from the northeast, wheeled sharply as it headed for the nest hole, popped in without the slightest pause, and came right out. Immediately thereafter so much happened that Sutton was not sure which parent had taken the prey in, for even as that bird had flounced upward and alighted directly above the nest hole, its mate had appeared, alighted close to it, given it something, possibly an insect, and flown off. The recipient, after nibbling at what it held in its foot, flew off in the opposite direction. Presently both birds were visible high in air, making their way to the top of the PSB, where they alighted not far apart.

At 2040 that same evening, the male flew in from the southwest straight to the nest hole, propped himself with widespread tail as he looked in, and flew off without entering. By 2100 the light was fading. At 2110 the last of the Chimney Swifts circled overhead. About that time the two kestrels left the PSB, flying off in opposite directions. After a further wait of 15 minutes, Sutton decided that neither parent would be spending the night at the nest.

Sutton was impressed by three facts about what he had observed: 1. Not a sound had either parent kestrel made while coming and going. Sutton had fully expected one or both to dive at him, crying *killie* in a shrill voice. They did not seem to be in the least perturbed by his presence, nor by the passing of innumerable other persons, cars, dogs, cats, etc. 2. Not once did a Chimney Swift go out of its way to dive at either of the kestrels. 3. Though the kestrel eyases must have been old enough to tear up prey — the parents' visits invariably were brief — none of them ever looked out of the nest hole.

At noon on the following day (27 May), both parent kestrels were moving about near the nest hole, alighting on the ridge pole above it, at the edge of the roof close by, or in a big mimosa whose branches extended over part of the roof. Sutton, not knowing when the eggs had hatched, suspected that the oldest of the brood had left the nest, but as he walked about the building and adjacent parking lot, searching carefully for a fledgling, the adult kestrels paid little attention to him.

At 1530 that day, Sutton returned for a two-hour watch period, again finding the adult kestrels not far from the nest hole, the female in the mimosa only a few yards away, the male perching a few feet from the ground on a sign-board across the street to the south. Neither bird cried out or dived at him. Presently both flew to the top of the PSB, where they perched not far apart.

At 1540, both birds flew to the ridgepole above the nest hole, the male with a small prey item, some or all of which he gave to the female, then flew off. The female nibbled at (possibly ate) what she held in one foot, then also flew off — without entering the hole. At 1600 she returned, entered the hole, came out after a very brief stay, and flew off. At 1635 both parents alighted on the ridgepole directly above the nest, neither with prey, then flew to the top of the PSB.

At 1650 a flicker alighted at the edge of the roof only a few feet from the nest hole. Down came the male kestrel at breathtaking speed, barely missing the flicker, which dropped straight to the ground on half-spread wings. Presently it flew up, quite uninjured, alighted again at the edge of the roof — but at considerable distance from the nest hole — and again was dived at by the male kestrel, a little less fiercely this time. As it flew off, neither kestrel pursued it.

On 28 May (sky overcast; intermittent light rain), Sutton observed the kestrels from 0900 to 0915, when the pair perched continuously not far apart atop the PSB, and from 1330 to 1345, when only the male (atop the PSB) was in sight all the time. At 1330 (rain had stopped) both birds were atop the PSB. At 1331 the female flew off southward. At 1340 she returned with small, "longish looking" prey — possibly a frog or lizard — which she took straight to the nest unaccompanied by her mate. She was at the nest a full minute. When she came out she returned to the roof of the PSB, alighting not far from the male.

That evening Sutton and Tyler observed the pair from 1845 to 2002. At 1845 only the female — atop the PSB as usual — was in sight. At 1858 she flew rapidly southward to meet the incoming, prey-bearing male. After circling briefly with him, she returned to the roof, receiving from him there an unplucked bird that appeared to be larger than a House Sparrow. Carrying this (apparently in one foot), she flew to a favored spot at the roof's southwest corner, and plucked it.

At 1903, while the female kestrel was busy plucking, a flicker alighted not far from the kestrel nest. The male kestrel swooped, driving the flicker to shelter in a tree across the street, then returned to the top of the PSB. At 1909 the female carried the plucked prey down to the nest. There, presumably tearing up unusually large prey, she remained for seven minutes — a long stay. When she returned to the PSB roof, her mate was no longer there.

At 1934 the female kestrel flew from the PSB roof down to the top of the Rupel Jones Theatre, a low structure just north of the PSB. Here her mate, whose return the observers had not witnessed, gave her prey, another small bird. After carrying this to the roof of the PSB she plucked with more vigor than usual, and flew down with it to the nest. There, instead of going in, she clung at the entrance, supported by her widespread tail.

What occurred at this moment (1936) was noteworthy: for the first time since their observations had started, Sutton and Tyler heard a twittering cry — this not from either parent bird, however, but from the nest. It was the call of at least one hungry eyas.

At 1939 the male kestrel flew eastward from the PSB roof. He was out of sight until 1942, at which moment he flew directly over the observers, headed west. At 1947, a sprinkling rain started. Although neither Sutton nor Tyler witnessed the female's departure from the nest, they both saw her at 1948 — once more atop the PSB. At 1951 she flew to the parking area just north of the building in which the nest was, perhaps in pursuit of prey. The observers left the campus at 2002, at which time it was raining fairly hard.

When observations began at 1855 on 29 May (sunny, with some clouds), the kestrel pair were perched about 50 feet apart on the PSB roof. At 1856 they copulated there. At 1858 the male departed southwestward. At 1916 he returned, carrying an unplucked, medium-sized, long-tailed bird, possibly a Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). The female accepted this, flew with it to a "plucking spot" at the roof's southwest corner, and plucked vigorously. At 1919 she flew up, carrying the prey in one foot, circled the roof, returned to the plucking spot, and resumed work. At 1922 she flew with the prey to the north edge of the roof, alighted briefly near the male, then dropped swiftly down on set wings to the nest. At 1934, while she was still at the nest, her mate flew off. A moment later she emerged from the nest hole, gave perfunctory chase to a passing flicker, and returned to the PSB roof. At 1948, two well-feathered eyases were clearly visible just inside the nest hole.

On 30 May observations continued from 0927 to 1003 (Sutton and Tyler) and from 1610 to 1715 (Sutton, Tyler, and Warren D. Harden). At 0927 both kestrels were atop the PSB. At 0933 the male flew off southward, returning at 0953 with a small bird, which he gave to the female, who took it to the northwest corner of the roof for plucking. At 0955 — to the astonishment of the observers — a Mockingbird appeared above the roof, alighted on an antenna, and lunged twice at the female kestrel, almost hitting her. The kestrel, obviously annoyed, flew up with the prey, circled the roof twice, alighted at the

southwest corner, and resumed her plucking despite the threats of the mocker. At 1001 she flew to the nest with the plucked prey, staying there less than a minute.

At 1610 the kestrel pair were atop the PSB, the female plucking a small bird at the southwest corner. At 1615 she took this to the nest, apparently shoving it in, without entering the hole. At 1618 the pair copulated on the roof of the PSB (Harden). From 1640 to 1700 all three observers, assisted by campus police, went to the PSB roof, found there scattered remains of several House Sparrows (flight feathers, feet, and parts of heads chiefly), of a small lizard, and of a half-grown Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*). The observers were fully aware of the possibility that the Killdeer had been caught not by a kestrel but by some other raptorial bird.

Observations continued on 31 May from 0750 to 0753 (Sutton), from 1145 to 1305 (Sutton and Tyler), from 1535 to 1655 (Sutton), from about 1600 to 1700 (Harden and Stephen Sisney, a *Norman Transcript* photographer), and from 1700 to 1800 (Harden). From 0750 to 0753 neither parent bird was in sight anywhere, but later that day there was much activity and the two eyases were clearly visible from time to time just inside the nest entrance. At 1202 a Mockingbird again visited the PSB roof, this time lunging at the male kestrel, who ducked when attacked but made not the slightest attempt to fight back. When not attacking, the mocker ran nimbly along the roof's west edge, high on its long legs with tail held up and wagging from side to side. Late that afternoon Harden twice saw one of the kestrels stoop toward the parking area just north of the building in which the nest was, as if intent on catching prey. On each occasion a Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), shrieking excitedly, flew round the building even as the kestrel, without prey, returned to the roof of the PSB.

From 1 to 3 June Sutton continued to see two eyases at the nest hole. At 1441 on 1 June he saw one of the old birds catch (and eat?) an insect high in air. From about 1700 to 1800 that afternoon Stephen Sisney watched one of the kestrels as it plucked prey on the roof of the Rupel Jones Theatre. His classic photo of the male carrying prey to the nest was taken at about 1730. On 3 June (a very warm day), the eyases remained almost continuously just inside the nest entrance with mouths wide open, panting. One eyas probably left the nest on the evening of 3 June or before 0750 on 4 June. On 5 and 6 June, Sutton never saw more than one eyas at the nest hole. The last time he saw an eyas at the nest was between showers on 6 June at about 1930.

On 8 June (at about 0730) Sutton watched both parent kestrels flying back and forth above a low part of the PSB, obviously agitated. Neither of them dived at him or called *killee*. The fledged young ones were surely somewhere close by, but nowhere in sight. At 0740 one of the parent birds dived suddenly at and caught a passing House Sparrow. Had Sutton succeeded in keeping this parent bird in sight, he surely would have found one or both of the young birds.

On the evening of 9 June, Mervin R. Barnes, of the university faculty, saw both of the young kestrels perched not far apart on a telephone wire just south of the nest hole. The parent birds were in plain sight atop the PSB at the time.

On the evening of 10 June Sutton saw the two young birds, fluffed out comfortably and still a little short-tailed, perched not far apart at the south edge of the roof of the Rupel Jones Theatre. The parent birds were at the north edge of the PSB roof at the time. After 10 June he did not see any kestrel that he knew to be a young one, though he continued for a week or so to see one or more kestrels flying about the campus.

#### CONCLUSIONS

During the latter part of the fledging period at this American Kestrel nest, the male parent appeared to do most of the hunting, the female most of the plucking of prey. Repeatedly the authors saw the male bringing prey to the female, who accepted it while perched at or near one of her plucking stations. Never did they see him passing prey to her while both were flying, or dropping it to her from the air. On three occasions they saw him taking plucked prey to the nest, but never did they see him actually plucking it. They repeatedly saw the female plucking prey, but never did they see her passing plucked prey to her mate, so plucked prey carried by him could have been plucked by him at his own plucking station (or stations) quite apart from those used by the female.

So much has been said about the American Kestrel's eating of grasshoppers, mice, etc. that the authors were genuinely surprised by the fact that prey brought to the two

eyases was almost exclusively small birds. Most of these were House Sparrows, an abundant and fecund species at the very height of its reproductive season in late May and early June. One prey item might have been a Mockingbird, but no Mockingbird remains were among those found by the authors on the PSB roof.

The utter silence of the parent birds throughout the whole observation period was noteworthy. Perhaps they had become so thoroughly accustomed to urbanized man that they were not disturbed by his comings and goings.

518 WEST BROOKS, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069; DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, CAMERON UNIVERSITY, LAWTON, OKLAHOMA 73505. 27 OCTOBER 1979.

## AMERICAN KESTREL POSSIBLY TWO-BROODED IN CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

BY ELIZABETH A. BLACK

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is believed to be "one brooded" in Oklahoma (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 127). In the summer of 1979, however, two broods were reared at a nest in downtown Oklahoma City, central Oklahoma. The first of these (three young) left the nest on or about 17 June, the second (four young) in mid September. Whether the same female produced all seven young is conjectural, for neither of the old birds was banded or color-marked; but departure of the two broods was witnessed by Ernest Craig, who has been watching the comings and goings of the kestrels from his window on the fourth floor of an office building at the corner of Fourth and Broadway since the spring of 1971. Year after year the nest has been just outside this window in a cavity at the top of a concrete column about 45 feet from the ground. The cavity's entrance, about 6 inches wide and 4 high, faces west, but it is shaded from the afternoon sun by part of the column's ornate capital. To the best of Mr. Craig's knowledge, this is the first time two broods have been reared in one season at this nest.

Examining the nest has been next to impossible, so no one knows how many eggs were laid in 1979. One bird of the first brood was a male, but the sex of that male's two siblings was not ascertained. All four of the second brood were males. Departure from the nest may have been a bit premature for both broods, since each of the young birds was seen to "crash-land" on the street or sidewalk below the nest. So incapable of flight were the four of the second brood that they were caught and turned over to me, one by one, respectively on the 7th, 10th, 11th, and 12th of September. When I first handled them, they were short-winged and short-tailed. On 30 September, when I released all four in the wild, they flew strongly.

Summer after summer, from mid-February to mid-June, Ernest Craig and others in his office have watched the parent kestrels coming and going. Broods have, as a rule, numbered three or four young. From 1971 to 1976, the female parent was recognizable as an individual, for one of her legs was deformed. Departure of the young from the nest has usually been before mid-morning. Never has the whole brood left at the same time. So poorly have the young ones flown on their first flight that only one or two of them have managed to reach an open field across the street. Most of them have

gone down to the sidewalk or street below the nest. There, unattended by their parents, they have been rescued by Mr. Craig and his fellows, who have halted traffic, etc., in their behalf.

After the first brood left the nest in 1979, Mr. Craig was surprised to observe what he believed to be mature birds still flying about the area. He did not know, of course, how many of the young had survived, or where these young might be. Nor could he be sure that the old birds were the same as those that had cared for the first brood. But presently he noticed that the kestrels were bringing such prey items as mice, lizards, and grasshoppers to the nest just outside his office window. By mid-August he thought he could see young kestrels just inside the entrance to the nest. From that point on everyone watched the nest with special interest until 7 September, when the first of the second brood departed from it.

608 THOMPSON AVENUE NORTH, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73105. 10 OCTOBER 1979.

## IS THE AMERICAN KESTREL TWO-BROODED IN OKLAHOMA?

BY GEORGE M. SUTTON

Elizabeth A. Black's important paper in this issue brings into focus the need for careful work on multibroodedness in birds. Two broods of American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) certainly were reared to near fledging at a nest in downtown Oklahoma City in the summer of 1979: there can be no doubt of this.

As Mrs. Black wisely states, however, no one knows whether the two broods were reared by the same pair, for the adult birds were not banded or color-marked or in any way recognizable as individuals. One female may or may not have laid the seven eggs. Two wholly different pairs of adults could have reared the two broods. So the two-broodedness that demands our attention is not that of a given female, or of a given pair, *but of a given nest*. Every young bird that left that nest in the summer of 1979 did so under human surveillance, and every one did so before being able to fly well. It occurs to me that human activity observed by the eyases through the office window might have led them to leave the nest before they were quite ready to go; furthermore, that if the first brood of three left so prematurely that they survived for only a few days, they cannot be considered a fully reared brood. In that case, the parent birds (if they were, indeed, the same pair), driven by the urge to reproduce, proceeded to try again. Their second attempt was successful, but would it have been so without the help of those who rescued the young birds and turned them over to Mrs. Black? The question is not unreasonable.

If we assume that the same pair of adults did bring the two broods to near fledging, can we state that they actually produced even one brood? Do not misunderstand me. I am not blaming Ernest Craig for watching over the nest too closely. I am not blaming anyone for anything. But I do feel that those three young of the first brood might not have survived and that, scientifically speaking, we cannot consider them a brood at all since they

may not have reached full self-sufficiency. A truly two-brooded species brings two broods to the point at which at least one young individual of each brood can care for itself.

I am publishing this paper not to justify my calling *Falco sparverius* "one brooded" in Oklahoma, but rather to stimulate thinking on what the phenomenon of two-broodedness actually is.

818 WEST BROOKS ST., NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069. 15 OCTOBER 1979.

## GENERAL NOTES

**Large aggregation of Great Blue Herons in Kiowa County, Oklahoma.**—From 1305 to 1330 on 26 November 1978 (50° F., heavy overcast, north wind 10-15 m.p.h.), Jack D. Tyler, James Calaway, Charles Clemons, Robert Hollander, Edward Sands, Edith Scott, Terry Zupan, and I observed about 190 Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) on the extensive mudflats along the eastern shore at the shallow north end of Lake Altus in Kiowa County, southwestern Oklahoma. Groups of from five to 30 of the birds were wading among thin clumps of salt cedar (*Tamarix gallica*), while scattered individuals fed in somewhat deeper water well out from the lake's edge. Also feeding and loafing in the area were about 300 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), a few Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), some Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*), and about 150 diving ducks of the genus *Aythya*.

During the preceding summer and fall, this part of Oklahoma received very little rain. This dryness and the local demand for irrigation water were doubtless responsible for the unusually low lake-level. The herons were probably taking advantage of the concentrations of animal food in the shallow water. So far as I know, there is no breeding colony of Great Blue Herons at all close to Lake Altus. Colonies near Taloga, along the Canadian River in Dewey County, west-central Oklahoma, and near Fargo, Ellis County, in the northwestern part of the main body of the state, are, respectively, about 80 miles to the northeast and 100 miles to the north of Lake Altus.

What we observed might well have been the greatest number of fully fledged Great Blue Herons ever seen at one time in Oklahoma. In large heronries, the totals of young and old birds countable at the height of the breeding season might, of course, be equally large. On 31 December 1963, W. Marvin Davis counted 51 Great Blue Herons standing on the frozen surface of Canton Reservoir in Blaine County, west-central Oklahoma (1964, Audubon Field Notes, 18: 256).—Michael F. Smith, Box 3223, Fort Sill, Oklahoma 73503, 29 November 1978.

**Inca Dove in Comanche County, Oklahoma.**—On 19 December 1977, while I was driving through a seldom used part of the "shop area" near the headquarters buildings of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, my pickup truck flushed a

small dove whose "tight" wingbeats and long tail, with its conspicuous white outer feathers, told me instantly that the bird was an Inca Dove (*Scardafella inca*). The species was well known to me, for it had been common in and near Phoenix, Arizona, where I had lived in 1964 and 1965.

When I told George Frazier, the refuge's mechanic, about the dove he said that he had been seeing it "all summer." He had often flushed it from a gravelly spot at which he had parked his personal vehicle when reporting for work in the morning. He had not thought his observations worth reporting for, having seen much of the Inca Dove in the Río Grande Valley and at Corpus Christi, Texas, he had assumed that it was common on the refuge also.

Other refuge personnel who observed the dove in December were Lindsey Bell and Elmer Parker, who saw it on 5 December, and Robert Karges, who saw it on 20 December.

*Scardafella inca* has not heretofore been reported from Comanche County, Oklahoma, but it was seen repeatedly in Jackson County in the winter of 1972-73 (Sutton, 1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 20), and a specimen has been collected in Caddo County (Felis, 1976, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 9: 33-34).—Eugene A. Bartnicki, *Wildlife Biologist, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Cache, Oklahoma 73527, 28 February 1979.*

**Groove-billed Ani in Washington County, Oklahoma.**—In mid-morning on 20 October 1979 (clear day: 77°F.; south wind gusting up to 30 m.p.h.), Randall A. Porter and I saw a Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) near Copan, Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma. We were at the east end of the almost completed Copan Dam (scheduled to impound the Caney River in 1982) at the time. As we walked toward scattered small ponds above the dam, two Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) flew from oaks to our right toward a small pond on our left. Following them in flight was a slim, black, long-tailed bird that dropped into the shrubbery before we could train our binoculars on it.

Approaching cautiously through the dry vegetation, we saw the bird again, this time in a willow sapling across a pond. Using our 10x binoculars, we decided that it could be nothing but an ani. We watched it for more than half an hour, part of the time through a 40x spotting scope. We noted the grooves in its high, thin bill and the hint of greenish shine in its plumage. A liquid *sweee-oh* that it gave reminded us of one of the calls of a male Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). It moved from ground-level to about 5 feet up. Frequently it preened its feathers. Presently it flew to our side of the pond. As we moved closer, it called excitedly, flew back across the pond, and disappeared. We made no attempt to see it again for a while: but an hour later we looked for it in vain. Nor could Randall Porter find it in the area the following morning.

There is one other *Crotophaga sulcirostris* record for northeastern Oklahoma—that of a bird seen 12 miles north of Coweta, Wagoner County

on 27 October 1966 by Yula M. Thomas and Edna Flippo (1967, Audubon Field Notes, 21: 53). To be noted is the fact that in 1979 the weather had been very dry in late summer and early fall and that from 18 to 20 October the south wind had been strong.—Ella Delap, 409 N. Wyandotte, Dewey, Oklahoma 74029, 27 October 1979.

**Tree Sparrows killed and eaten by meadowlarks.**—Near the Corps of Engineers office building at Hulah Reservoir, in a remote wooded part of Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma, staff personnel operate a feeding station for birds in winter. Building and station are in a cleared area, the latter being fully 300 feet from the nearest trees. Common winter birds are the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), Western Meadowlark (*S. neglecta*), and Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*). At times large numbers of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) descend to the station, scaring off the other birds.

On 13 January 1979, a blizzard covered the ground with 3 inches of snow. The following day we killed three Starlings with a pellet gun. We left the dead birds where they lay, believing that some nocturnal predator would find them; but to our surprise meadowlarks began pecking at and eating them, this despite the quantities of seeds that we had scattered on the snow.

In late afternoon on 15 January (air temperature about 13°F. at noon; snow still 3 inches deep), Park Ranger Wes Masonhall and I saw a meadowlark suddenly walk toward and grab *with both feet* a Tree Sparrow, a maneuver that obliged the meadowlark to fall to its side while striking its victim with its beak. The commotion did not seem to frighten the Tree Sparrows, but it did attract the other meadowlarks, several of which started to peck the captured sparrow. Rivalry developed: one meadowlark, more aggressive than the others, jabbed savagely at the sparrow's captor, forcing that bird to release its prey. The aggressor strode off with the dead sparrow in its beak. When it stopped to feed, however, the other meadowlarks put it to flight. Eventually, still carrying the sparrow in its beak, it disappeared in the distance.

Almost immediately, the vanquished meadowlark caught another sparrow; another free-for-all developed; and the sparrow was killed and eaten. The living sparrows, obviously ravenous, and possibly weakened by starvation, did not seem to realize that the meadowlarks would be predatory.

We do not know whether the meadowlarks were of the Eastern species or the Western. Both are present in this part of Oklahoma in winter, though the Eastern is the common breeding bird. Meadowlarks observed feeding on road-kills along a highway in southwestern New Mexico during a three-day spell of severe winter weather (snow 6-10 inches deep) were known to be of both Eastern and Western species (Hubbard and Hubbard, 1969, Wilson Bull., 81: 107-108). An Eastern Meadowlark observed near Bath, New York, on 5 July 1939 was feeding on a freshly killed meadowlark that had been

"partly smashed by automobile traffic" (Terres, 1956, Auk, 73: 289) — evidence that meat-eating is not strictly confined to periods of severe winter weather.—Michael P. Schrick, *Hulah Project Office, Corps of Engineers, Rt. 1, Box 620, Copan, Oklahoma 74022, 29 January 1979.*

**Third winter record of Dickcissel in Washington County, Oklahoma.**—Toward evening on 24 January 1978, I noticed a different "sparrow" feeding among the House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in my yard in Dewey, Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma. The larger bill, paler color, yellow breast, and eye-stripe convinced me that the bird was a Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*). When wind ruffled the feathers a trace of black necklace was visible across the upper breast. The bird remained only a few minutes, all the while spreading and closing its tail feathers as if suspicious or agitated. The following morning I saw the Dickcissel again. This time it was perching in a large oak not far from the house. Again it was spreading and closing its tail. I watched it for about ten minutes. It did no feeding during this period. On the morning of 26 January I watched it again for a short time. It was feeding with the sparrows, as usual. I saw the rusty wing patches clearly. During the three-day period above discussed, snow covered the ground and the air temperature did not rise above 35°F.

There are two previous records for the Dickcissel in winter in Washington County: from 1 to 8 February 1966 (snow and ice on ground) one was observed by Sophia C. Mery, Doris Williamson, Dotty M. Goard, *et al.* feeding with House Sparrows at the Williamson residence in Bartlesville (Norman, 1973, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 6: 33); on 8 January 1973 (3-4 inches of snow on ground) Gene Hendricks saw one, again with House Sparrows, at the Hendricks residence in Bartlesville.—Ella Delap, 409 N. Wyandotte, Dewey, Oklahoma 74029, 14 March 1978.

**Brown-capped Rosy Finch and House Finch in Grant County, Oklahoma.**—On 16 and 18 February 1979 (weather cold; 3 inches of snow on ground; prevailing wind in area in winter from north and west), my wife Ann and I saw a Brown-capped Rosy Finch (*Leucosticte australis*) in our yard in Wakita, Grant County, north-central Oklahoma. The bird was attracted especially by a heated bird-bath, to which we saw it go six times on the 16th and twice on the 18th. On the 16th we also saw it feeding on wheat at a feeder along with several House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and perching for about 15 minutes well above ground in a mulberry tree not far from the feeder.

The House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), a brightly colored male, we saw only on the 16th. It was rather shy. We did not see it go to the bird-bath.

Adverse weather conditions might well have been responsible for the presence of these two western birds in north-central Oklahoma. The winter of 1978-79 was the most severe that we have experienced within the past 51 years. No rosy finch of any species has heretofore been sighted anywhere in Oklahoma. The House Finch, on the other hand, has been seen eastward to Beckham, Harmon, Caddo, and Cleveland counties (Sutton, 1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p.

43) and also to Jackson County (Tyler, 1979, Stovall Mus. Contr. 2, p. 50) and Comanche County (1978, Amer. birds, 32:1182).—Lyle L. Byfield, *P.O. Box 24, Wakita, Oklahoma 73771, 3 April 1979.*

FROM THE EDITOR: Rod W. Smith and Jack S. Barclay have recently published in *American Birds* (1978, 32: 1123-27) an important paper on the westward range extension of the American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*). A summary of their findings is in order since many students of ornithology in Oklahoma may not even be aware of the fact that woodcocks nest in the state. Data were collected from North Dakota to Texas, and all states except Nebraska reported breeding considerably west of the generally accepted western limits. Earliest dates for courtship ranged from late January in Oklahoma and Texas to 24 April in North Dakota. Nesting began as early as 14 February in Oklahoma and 3 April in South Dakota. Some birds hatched in Minnesota and Wisconsin migrated through or wintered in the southern survey states. The species may be commoner west of its accepted range than has previously been believed.—Jack D. Tyler.

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INDEX OF BIRD NAMES

BY LOUIS E. MCGEE AND JANET MCGEE

- |  |                                    |  |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Actitis macularia</i> : 20-21             | <i>australis, Leucosticte</i> : 34 | <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i> : 34         |
| <i>acuta, Anas</i> : 14                      | Avocet, American: 12, 14, 20       | <i>purpureus</i> : 7                     |
| <i>albifrons, Sterna</i> : 20                | <i>Aythya</i> : 31                 | <i>caspia, Sterna</i> : 21               |
| <i>alexandrinus, Charadrius</i> : 20         |                                    | <i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i> : 13  |
| <i>americana, Fulica</i> : 13                | <i>bicolor, Iridoprocne</i> : 24   | <i>celata, Vermivora</i> : 16            |
| <i>americana, Recurvirostra</i> : 12, 14, 20 | Blackbird, Rusty: 6-7              | <i>Chaetura pelagica</i> : 26            |
| <i>americana, Spiza</i> : 34                 | <i>Bubo virginianus</i> : 5-6      | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> : 20      |
| <i>Anas acuta</i> : 14                       | <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> : 5       | <i>vociferus</i> : 20, 28                |
| <i>clypeata</i> : 13, 14                     |                                    | <i>chloropus, Gallinula</i> : 19         |
| <i>crecca</i> : 13, 14, 31                   | <i>californicus, Larus</i> : 17-19 | <i>citrea, Protonotaria</i> : 15-16      |
| <i>discors</i> : 13, 14                      | <i>Calypte anna</i> : 22           | <i>clypeata, Anas</i> : 13, 14           |
| <i>platyrhynchos</i> : 13, 14                | <i>Capella gallinago</i> : 7       | <i>Colaptes auratus</i> : 26, 27         |
| Ani, Groove-billed: 32-33                    | Cardinal: 33                       | colubris, <i>Archilochus</i> : 22, 23    |
| <i>anna, Calypte</i> : 22                    | <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i> : 33  | Coot, American: 13                       |
| <i>arborea, Spizella</i> : 33                | <i>Carduelis flammea</i> : 7-8     | <i>coronata, Dendroica</i> : 16          |
| <i>Archilochus colubris</i> : 22, 23         | <i>hornemanni</i> : 8              | Cowbird, Brown-headed: 32                |
| <i>Ardea herodias</i> : 31                   | <i>pinus</i> : 7, 8                | <i>crecca, Anas</i> : 13, 14, 31         |
| <i>argentatus, Larus</i> : 17-19             | <i>tristis</i> : 6-7, 8, 33        | <i>cristata, Cyanocitta</i> : 24, 32, 33 |
| <i>ater, Molothrus</i> : 32                  | <i>carolinus, Euphagus</i> : 6-7   | <i>Crotaphaga sulcirostris</i> : 32-33   |
| <i>atricilla, Larus</i> : 21                 |                                    | <i>cutellatus, Lophodytes</i> : 31       |
| <i>auratus, Colaptes</i> : 26, 27            |                                    | <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i> : 24, 32, 33  |

*delawarensis*, Larus: 11, 12, 17-19, 31  
*Dendroica coronata*: 16  
  *discolor*: 16  
  *townsendi*: 16  
Dickcissel: 34  
*discolor*, *Dendroica*: 16  
*discoors*, *Anas*: 13, 14  
*domeiticus*, *Passer*: 26-29, 34  
Dove, Inca: 31-32  
*Dryocopus pileatus*: 23

Eagle, Bald: 1-4, 8  
*elegans*, *Rallus*: 14  
*elegans*, *Sterna*: 21  
*erythrophthalmus*, *Pipilo*: 9-11, 16  
*erythrorhynchus*, *Pelecanus*: 12  
*Euphagus carolinus*: 6-7

*Falco peregrinus*: 13-14  
  *sparverius*: 25-31  
Falcon, Peregrine: 13-14  
*fedoa*, *Limosa*: 13  
Finch, Brown-capped Rosy: 34  
  House: 34  
  Purple: 7  
*flammea*, *Carduelis*: 7-8  
*flammea*, *Carduelis flammea*: 7, 8  
Flicker, Common: 26-27  
Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed: 23  
*forficata*, *Muscivora*: 23  
*forsteri*, *Sterna*: 12  
*Fregata magnificens*: 21  
  *minor*: 21  
Frigatebird, Great: 21  
  Magnificent: 21  
*Fulca americana*: 13

*gallinago*, *Capella*: 7  
*Gallinula chloropus*: 19  
Gallinule, Common: 19  
  Purple: 19-20  
Godwit, Marbled: 13  
Goldfinch, American: 6-7, 8, 33  
Grackle, Common: 7  
Gull, California: 17-19  
  Franklin's: 12-18  
  Herring: 17-19  
  Laughing: 21  
  Ring-billed: 11, 12, 17-19, 31

*Habiaetus leucocephalus*: 1-4, 8  
Hawk, Red-tailed: 5  
*herodias*, *Ardea*: 31  
Heron, Great Blue: 31  
*Hirundo rustica*: 24  
*hornemanni*, *Carduelis*: 8  
Hummingbird, Anna's: 22  
  Ruby-throated: 22, 23  
  Rufous: 21-23  
*hyemalis*, *Junco*: 33

*inca*, *Scardafella*: 31-32  
*Iridoprocne bicolor*: 24  
*jamaicensis*, *Buteo*: 5  
Jay, Blue: 24, 32, 33  
Junco, Dark-eyed: 33  
*Junco hyemalis*: 33

Kestrel, American: 25-31  
Killdeer: 20, 28

Kingbird, Western: 6

*Larus argentatus*: 17-19  
  *atricilla*: 21  
  *californicus*: 17-19  
  *delawarensis*: 11, 12, 17-19, 31  
  *pupiscan*: 12, 18  
*leucocephalus*, *Habiaetus*: 1-4, 8  
*Leucosticte australis*: 34  
*lewis*, *Melanerpes*: 14-15  
*Limosa fedoa*: 13  
*Lophodytes cucullatus*: 31

*malcularia*, *Actitis*: 20-21  
*magna*, *Sturnella*: 33  
*magnificens*, *Fregata*: 21  
Mallard: 13, 14  
*martinica*, *Porphyryla*: 19-20  
*maxima*, *Sterna*: 21  
Meadowlark, Eastern: 33  
  Western: 33  
*Melanerpes lewis*: 14-15  
Merganser, Hooded: 31  
*mexicanus*, *Carpodacus*: 34  
*migratorius*, *Turdus*: 7  
*Mimus polyglottos*: 27-29  
  *minor*, *Fregata*: 21  
  *minor*, *Philohela*: 34-35  
Mockingbird: 27-29  
*Molothrus ater*: 32  
*Muscivora forficata*: 23

*neglecta*, *Sturnella*: 33  
*Nyctea scandiaca*: 4-5

*occidentalis*, *Pelecanus*: 11-13, 21  
Owl, Great Horned: 5-6  
  Snowy: 4-5

*Passer domesticus*: 26-29, 34  
*pelagica*, *Chaetura*: 26  
*Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*: 12  
  *occidentalis*: 11-13, 21  
  Pelican, Brown: 11-13, 21  
  White: 12  
*peregrinus*, *Falco*: 13-14  
*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*: 14, 24  
Phalarope, Wilson's: 13  
*Philohela minor*: 34-35  
Phoebe, Say's: 6  
*pileatus*, *Dryocopus*: 23  
Pintail: 14  
*pinus*, *Carduelis*: 7, 8  
*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*: 9-11, 16  
*pupiscan*, *Larus*: 12, 18  
*Piranga rubra*: 24  
*platyrhynchus*, *Anas*: 13, 14  
Plover, Snowy: 20  
*polyglottos*, *Mimus*: 27-29  
*Porphyryla martinica*: 19-20  
*Protonotaria citrea*: 15-16  
*purpureus*, *Carpodacus*: 7  
*pusilla*, *Wilsonia*: 16  
*pyrrhonota*, *Petrochelidon*: 14, 24

*Quiscalus quiscula*: 7  
*quiscula*, *Quiscalus*: 7

Rail, King: 14  
*Rallus elegans*: 14  
*Recurvirostra americana*: 12, 14, 20  
Redpoll, Common: 7-8

Hoary: 8  
Redstart, American: 24  
Robin: 7  
*rubra*, *Piranga*: 24  
*rufus*, *Selasphorus*: 21-23  
*rustica*, *Hirundo*: 24  
*ruticilla*, *Setophaga*: 24  
Sandpiper, Spotted: 20-21  
*saya*, *Sayornis*: 6  
*Sayornis saya*: 6  
*scandiaca*, *Nyctea*: 4-5  
*Scardafella inca*: 31-32  
*Selasphorus rufus*: 21-23  
*semipalmatus*, *Catoptrophorus*: 13  
*Setophaga ruticilla*: 24  
Shoveler, Northern: 13, 14  
Siskin, Pine: 7, 8  
Snipe, Common: 7  
Sparrow, House: 26-29, 34  
  Tree: 33  
*sparverius*, *Falco*: 25-31  
*Spiza americana*: 34  
*Spizella arborea*: 33  
Starling: 6, 7, 15, 28, 33  
*Steganopus tricolor*: 13  
*Sterna albifrons*: 20  
  *caspia*: 21  
  *elegans*: 21  
  *forsteri*: 12  
  *maxima*: 21  
*Sturnella magna*: 33  
*neglecta*: 33  
*Sturnus vulgaris*: 6, 7, 15, 28, 33  
*sulcirostris*, *Crotophaga*: 32-33  
Swallow, Barn: 24  
  Cliff: 14, 24  
  Tree: 24  
Swift, Chimney: 26

Tanager, Summer: 24  
Teal, Blue-winged: 13, 14  
  Green-winged: 13, 14, 31  
Tern, Caspian: 21  
  Elegant: 21  
  Forster's: 12  
  Least: 20  
  Royal: 21  
Towhee, Rufous-sided: 9-11, 16  
*townsendi*, *Dendroica*: 16  
*tricolor*, *Steganopus*: 13  
*tristis*, *Carduelis*: 6-7, 8, 33  
*Turdus migratorius*: 7  
*Tyrannus verticalis*: 6  
*Vermivora celata*: 16  
*verticalis*, *Tyrannus*: 6  
*virginianus*, *Bubo*: 5-6  
*vociferus*, *Charadrius*: 20, 28  
*vulgaris*, *Sturnus*: 6, 7, 15, 28, 33  
Warbler, Orange-crowned: 16  
  Prairie: 16  
  Prothonotary: 15-16  
  Townsend's: 16  
  Wilson's: 16  
  Yellow-rumped: 16  
  Willet: 13  
*Wilsonia pusilla*: 16  
Woodcock, American: 34-35  
Woodpecker, Lewis's: 14-15  
  Pileated: 23

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