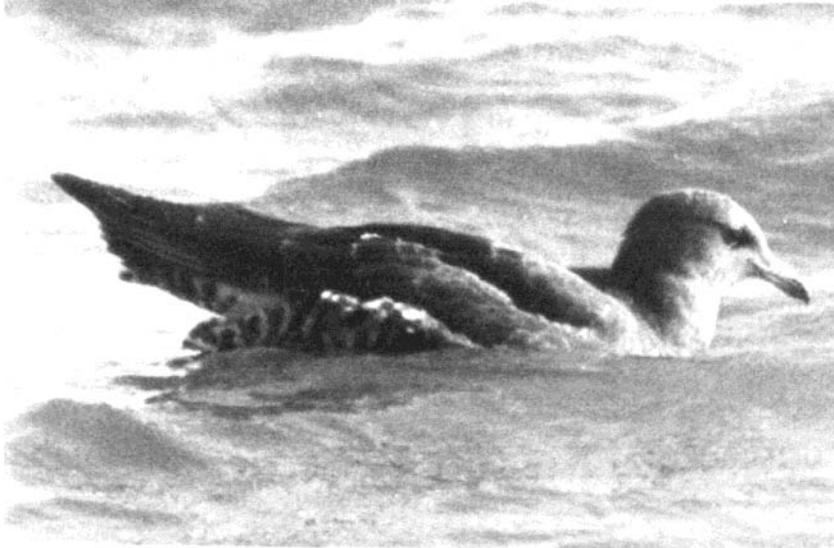


A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA: POMARINE JAEGER

By JOHN S. SHACKFORD

At about 0930 on 12 November 1979, at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma, I observed a dark, gull-like bird that I assumed was a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), an assumption based largely on the fact that the Parasitic was the only jaeger listed "officially" for the state. The bird looked much like a jaeger I had seen and photographed on 27 September 1975, an individual identified provisionally by George M. Sutton as a Pomarine Jaeger (*S. pomarinus*), but not reported as such since no specimen of that species had ever been collected in Oklahoma. That bird's bill, which was dark on its distal third, but flesh-colored otherwise, was, in Dr. Sutton's opinion, too blunt or "chunky" for that of a Parasitic Jaeger or Long-tailed Jaeger (*S. longicaudus*). The photographs that I took showed this "chunky" bill fairly well, but Dr. Sutton felt that they were not quite clear enough to stand as evidence that *S. pomarinus* belonged on Oklahoma's "official" list of birds.



POMARINE JAEGER

An immature bird photographed at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City on 17 November 1979 by John S. Shackford. Note the heaviness, almost the bluntness, of the bill.

The jaeger that I observed for about an hour on 12 November 1979 kept well out from shore. It flew strongly and seemed to be in good health. From time to time it chased one of the several Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) that were flying about the lake. Not while I was watching it did it force any gull to disgorge food. I did not hear it cry out. At rest on the water it was dark all over except for light markings on the flanks and under tail coverts. When it was flying, light flashed occasionally from the under side of its wings.

I saw the jaeger almost every day between 12 and 18 November — a week of unusually fine weather throughout central Oklahoma. Others who also observed it were my wife Diane, Wesley S. Isaacs, John G. Newell, Ernest E. Wilson and his son Craig, Kathryn Belcher, and Gwen Field.

The bird was less active and less wary as the days passed. Gradually it spent more time idly floating on the water, drifting closer and closer to shore, though never quite to it. On 17 November it surprised me by swimming to within a few yards of the water's edge to investigate sticks that I tossed in its direction. I could not help thinking that it mistook these for something to eat. I photographed it several times that day. On the following day Ernest Wilson also photographed it.

On the evening of 18 November the jaeger was not on the lake proper but just north of it on one of the small "settling ponds" used by the Oklahoma City Water Department. On 19 November, at this same pond, I saw no flying or swimming jaeger, but presently I spied a dark carcass floating on water purification sludge about 30 yards out from shore. Convinced that this was the bird I had been seeing, I tried to snag it by casting a fishline — but in vain. The sludge was far too "boggy" for safe wading.

On 28 November, Warren D. Harden and I laid broad boards on the sludge and Harden, advancing precariously, finally reached and retrieved the carcass. Most of it was missing, for evidently a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) or other predator had fed upon it, but the wings and feet were there, and the bones of these proved to be those of a Pomarine Jaeger. The humeri, in particular, were much larger than those of adult Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers collected on Baffin Island in the summer of 1953 by Dr. Sutton. Diagnostic remains are now at the Bird Range at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

I am grateful to Warren Harden, who made the journey out to the carcass, and to D. Scott Wood, who compared the specimen's wing bones directly with those of the other jaeger species.

ROUTE 1, BOX 125, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73111. 4 DECEMBER 1979.

A GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE COLONY IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

By RANDALL A. PORTER

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) was sighted only six times in Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma, prior to the year 1979. These early sightings were: on 7 May

1967, a single bird just north of Bartlesville, by Maryan Matuszak (see Davis, 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8: 13); on 11 May 1967, three birds just west of Dewey, by Marlin Lee (see Davis, *loc. cit.*); on 8 May 1969, a male and female just west of Dewey, by Dotty M. Goard; on 23 April 1976, three males just north of the Tulsa County line west of Vera, by Odie McReynolds; on 11 March 1977, a male and two females 1 mile west of Dewey, by Ella Delap; and on 4 April 1978, a flock of about ten males and ten females just west of Dewey, by Dotty M. Goard *et al.* None of these sightings was believed to represent a breeding population.

On the morning of 28 April 1979, however, at a pond near the so-called Washington County Barn, 2 miles west of Dewey, Paul Hefty observed a sizeable company of male and female birds that obviously had established themselves for the season. One of the females was carrying nest material. The pond, which was about 2 feet deep, with muddy bottom, measured about 50 x 75 feet. In it grew a lush stand of cattails.

That evening, Ella Delap and I counted five male and ten female Great-tailed Grackles at the pond, but saw no further evidence of nesting.

On 18 May, accompanied by several members of the Bartlesville Audubon Society, I visited the pond, finding there three male birds and about 25 females. All of the males were displaying and several females were carrying food. A fourth male was in a pasture about a mile away. The six nests that we found were along the edge of the cattail stand. One of these held at least two recently hatched chicks, another four eggs, another two eggs. Three of the nests we could not see into, and we felt sure that there were still other nests back from the edge of the cattails. Nests that we examined were 2 to 3 feet above water, supported wholly by the cattail stalks.

On 28 May, I counted six adult males and 28 adult females at the pond. None of the males was carrying food, but of the females that flew up from the cattails, 13 were carrying food. About ten young birds jumped from nests as I waded along the edge of the cattails. One fledgling flew fairly well for about 6 feet.

On 3 June, the colony was thriving and noisy. Many young birds had by this time left the cattails and were being fed on a grassy slope bordering a road close by. Watching the adult females closely, I could tell that many of them were taking food to young ones still in the cattails — though not necessarily in nests. Every adult male seemed to be giving his attention chiefly to displaying. With body plumage fluffed up and wings drooping, each would strut before a female, uttering grating cries. In response some females fluttered their wings a little, as if begging for food, but most of them ignored the protestations of the males. When I approached the cattails closely, about 40 young birds flew out. Most of these flew so well that I found myself wondering whether the ardent displaying of the adult males indicated the beginning of a second egg-laying for the season.

By 10 June, however, activity at the pond had subsided noticeably. As I

approached the cattails about 20 grackles flew out, four of them adult males, the rest adult females and young birds. The young were indistinguishable in color from the adult females. A film of oil, especially noticeable near the cattails, may have been caused by rock-crushing operations not far from the pond.

On 17 June, the whole area was quiet. When I first approached the pond, I saw one adult male grackle and three females (or females and fully fledged young). Four very young birds that I flushed from the cattails could fly only a little. At another pond about 150 yards away, I saw a flock of about 15 grackles, all females or females and fully fledged young.

On 1 July, I saw four adult females, three of them carrying food to nests or young in the cattails, one giving food to a young bird fully as large as herself along a creek about 100 yards west of the pond.

5307 RANCH ROAD, BARTLESVILLE, OKLAHOMA 74003, 12 SEPTEMBER 1979.

GENERAL NOTES

Roseate Spoonbill in Comanche County, Oklahoma. — At 1100 on 22 August 1979, along the south shore of the Public Service Company's storage lake, 7 miles southeast of Lawton, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, we discovered a large, unfamiliar wading bird. It was about three-quarters the size of a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) standing not far from it, and it was white instead of blue-gray. Suspecting that it was a Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*), we drove back to Lawton for photographic equipment. When we returned a few hours later, Janet M. McGee and Jack D. Tyler were with us.

Examined carefully through a telescope, the bird revealed several facts: 1. When it raised its wings to preen, a suffusion of shell-pink showed in their linings. 2. The long, flesh-colored bill was spoon-shaped at its tip. 3. The long legs were pale flesh-color. 4. The head was completely covered with white feathers. We concluded that the bird could be nothing but an immature Roseate Spoonbill, a species that Dr. Tyler had seen many times on the Gulf Coast of Texas.

Approaching the surprisingly unwary bird to within about 35 yards, and using telephoto lenses, Clemons and Tyler took several photos. For long stretches of time, the spoonbill stood motionless. When feeding, it dragged its bill back and forth through the soft mud. Occasionally it preened vigorously. We observed no interaction between it and the several herons and shorebirds that were feeding nearby. Advancing toward it, we flushed first the herons, then the spoonbill, which came to rest on a small peninsula about 200 yards east of us. When flushed a second time, the spoonbill left the lake.

The bird did not, however, leave the area for good. On at least seven occasions between 22 August and 12 September (on the whole a not unusually hot period) it was observed by several persons, among them David Allison and his wife Joy, Leonard Beavers and his wife Esther, and Michael Morgan. Invariably it was seen along the lake's south shore, a dependence on feeding area that confirms the following statement, made as long ago as 1840 — in his famed "Birds of America" — by John James Audubon, and quoted by Bent

(1926, U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 135:19): "Whenever a feeding place seems to be productive, the spoonbills are wont to return to it until they have been much disturbed . . ." The last person to see our spoonbill was Brad Carlton, who, on the evening of 12 September, watched it until it flew off at dusk.

The above account documents the first spoonbill record for Comanche County and the second for southwestern Oklahoma. The species has been reported once from Tillman County: from 10-13 October 1955, Myra B. Lamb saw one at Murray Lake, 1 mile west of Frederick (Tyler, 1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Contr. Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, No. 2, p. 12). According to Sutton (1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., p. 5), *Ajaja ajaja* has been seen in Oklahoma between 30 June and 15 October "westward to Tillman, Cleveland, Oklahoma, Garfield, and Alfalfa counties." All four specimens in the University of Oklahoma bird collection are from Choctaw County, southeastern Oklahoma, and all are immature. According to Sutton's summary of records, an *adult* Roseate Spoonbill has yet to be sighted by anyone in Oklahoma.—Charles Clemons, Rt. 1, Cache, Oklahoma 73527, and James Malinowski, Rt. 4, Cache, Oklahoma 73527, 27 February 1980.

White-winged Scoter taken in Grant County, Oklahoma. — At about 1500 on 8 November 1979 — sky overcast; light rain; air temperature near 6° C. (42° F.) — Don Turvey shot as game an immature drake White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*) at a farm pond 25.7 kilometers (16 miles) south and 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) west of Manchester, Grant County, north-central Oklahoma. The bird was with about 15 Lesser Scaups (*Aythya affinis*) and one Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*). The specimen, now in the bird collection at the University of Oklahoma (UOMZ 16124), was prepared by D. Scott Wood, who found it to be surprisingly thin (weight: 1109 grams).

Melanitta deglandi is not common in Oklahoma; it has been recorded from 19 October to 26 March — exceptionally to 13 April and 2 June (Sutton, 1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 8). According to George M. Sutton's summary of records it has been reported from Washington, Tulsa, Wagoner, and Johnston counties in the east to Alfalfa, Payne, and Grady counties in the west (specimens from Wagoner, Osage, Kay, Cleveland, Pontotoc, and Johnston counties). — Mark E. Byard, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, 504 Foster, Ponca City, Oklahoma 74061, 27 February 1980.

Mississippi Kite strikes human being. — For many years my husband and I have started each day with a 2-mile walk through the woods near our house at the edge of Duncan, Stephens County, southwestern Oklahoma. Developers have recently been clearing the area. A small pond has been drained and its tributary stream diverted. More than a mile of concrete roadway now penetrates the forest of post oak and blackjack. Green Herons (*Butorides striatus*) that used to nest in cottonwoods and willows near the pond no longer do so. From time to time we have seen Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) in the woodland, but never very many. Extension of the roadway has made the area opener, hence possibly more acceptable to the kites.

In the spring of 1979 we discovered three kite nests, each a flimsy structure of sticks about 15 inches in diameter. At two nests the adult birds were in attendance. We often saw all four of them in the air at once. In April and May they weren't at all aggressive. On 26 June, however, they dive-bombed a party of three human strollers, and on 29 June one of the birds swooped at my husband and me, approaching to within 8 or 10 feet before sharply pulling up and away. Being dive-bombed must be experienced to be fully appreciated. The kite's sudden plunge is beautiful and exciting, but the *swoosh* of the attack is breathtaking. On 2 July, one of the kites swooped from the rear, hit my head with quite some force, and flew swiftly up and off. It all took place so swiftly that we did not realize what had happened. When the kite had risen 30 or 40 feet, we noticed something trailing from its talons. We thought at first that this "something" was strands of my hair; then we saw that it was only my hair-net. We decided to find sticks with which to defend ourselves.

During June and July, we continued our morning walks. At the same place each day we saw an adult kite perched in one or the other of two trees. As soon as we appeared, we were dive-bombed. By waving sticks over our heads we protected ourselves. Being attacked by the graceful birds was exhilarating, but we didn't want to be hit by them.

On the morning of 30 July, nine kites were in evidence flying from one side of the road to the other. Some alighted from time to time, allowing us to pass within 30 feet or so, while others continued to fly, escorting us through the woods. Some of the nine might well have been recently fledged young ones. — Mina Coombes Engle, *1003 Oakview, Duncan, Oklahoma 73533, 1 April 1980*.

Late fledging of large brood of House Wrens in central Oklahoma.—At my home in Oklahoma City, central Oklahoma, a pair of House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) fledged a brood of six young in the summer of 1979. The season was unusual in that much rain fell and the temperature highs did not exceed the mid-nineties. In this south-central part of the species' breeding range "full sets of eggs are sometimes deserted" (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 406) — reproductive failure that may be a direct result of continuing hot weather and drought.

The nest was in a flimsy cardboard birdhouse (a fold-into-place artifact with the trade name "Love Nest") that my husband and I had put up in the spring of 1978 and left up all winter. It was on a post about 10 feet from the kitchen window and 3 feet above a covered feeder on a separate post. No birds had occupied it in 1978.

A male House Wren began singing in the yard late in the spring of 1979. He sang with tail down, not cocked-up, and his wings fluttered at the beginning of each song. He went into the box quite often, and sang as he emerged. In mid-June he began taking twigs into the box. He continued with this activity for several days.

On 24 June a second House Wren appeared in the yard — a bird with a tail so worn that it was stubby. As this newcomer investigated the birdhouse, the singing of the male became so excited that his wings fluttered throughout each performance. The newcomer was, I decided, a female. Though silent most of the time, she occasionally scolded. She took a few short twigs and pieces of dead

grass into the birdhouse. On 2 July the male carried bits of cottony material, wads of spider webbing perhaps, into the box.

I made no attempt to ascertain when egg-laying started, for the birdhouse was in such sad condition that I did not want to disturb it. Nor did I keep a record of the female's stays at the nest, feeding periods, etc. Judging from what I saw of the male's comings and goings, he did not incubate the eggs at all. On 26 July I noticed that his songs were shorter and less frequent than they had been, and that he scolded more often. I watched as he took small green caterpillars into the birdhouse. I could not hear the young wrens begging for food, but I knew that at least some of the eggs had hatched.

By the end of July the male had stopped singing. I did not see or hear him during the rest of the nesting period except once when he scolded a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) that visited the feeder briefly. The female wren took food to the nest regularly. Most of this was insects and spiders captured in the vegetable garden, but it included suet that I had put into the feeder in mid-July.

Between 0800 and 1100 on 10 August the six young wrens, each able to fly fairly well, left the birdhouse. I witnessed the fledging from start to finish. At 0800 I was sitting on the patio watching the mother bird taking food to the nest. The calling of the brood was quite loud. Suddenly the mother lit on the feeder below the birdhouse and began to coax the young out with a chipping call that was different from her usual scold. The cries of the young sounded much like those of their mother at this time. Presently the first of the brood emerged and flew about 8 feet, following the mother into a nearby shrub. Four more chicks followed, one about every five minutes, all in the same way and into the same shrub. While one was still in the box, all became suddenly quiet. The silence lasted about five minutes — while a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) soared overhead. When the kite had gone, the cries of the young wrens started again. The one that refused to leave perched at the entrance to the birdhouse and chirped. Its mother had to take food to it several times before finally coaxing it out. It left the birdhouse at about 1100.

The fledged brood remained in the yard all that day, continuing to be noisy. They stayed in our general area for the remainder of August, usually in the hedge at the back of the yard, and generally very noisy. The father rejoined his family and began to sing again, but the performances lacked exuberance. He sang throughout the rest of August, and into September. He continued to defend the birdhouse for two days after the fledging with scolding that was especially noticeable when a Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*) showed more than passing interest in the box.

The above is a detailed account of an exceptionally late nesting. The date of fledging is several days later than the latest heretofore on record for Oklahoma. On 1 August 1960, near Guymon, Texas County, Oklahoma, G. M. Sutton observed a brood of five young that had just left the nest (Sutton, *loc. cit.*). Three young birds banded as nestlings by H. S. Cooksey and his wife in Cleveland County on 4 August 1955 would, according to the Sutton Summary on file at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range, have left the nest two or three days later.—Carolyn Gritzmaker, 4020 N.W. 20, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73107, 1 September 1979.

Fall records for Swainson's Thrush in southwestern Oklahoma. —

According to George M. Sutton's summary of Oklahoma records for Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*), that species has not often been seen in southwestern Oklahoma at any season. Tyler (1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 39) states that fall sightings for the area span the period between 21 September and 5 October. In our "urban-riparian" backyard in Lawton, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, we have seen Swainson's Thrush as follows (one bird on each occasion): 21 September 1972; 5 October 1973; 13 September and 8 October 1974; 16, 24, 27, 28 September 1975 (bird photographed and banded on 28 September); and 16 September 1979 (bird banded and photographed). In view of the fact that Sutton's summary indicates southward migration through other parts of Oklahoma as early as 29 August 1963 and 1 September 1971 (both records for Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma) and as 1 and 2 September 1974 (both for Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma), we suspect that *Catharus ustulatus* is to be looked for in southwestern Oklahoma even earlier than 13 September, but our sightings on 5 October 1973 and 8 October 1974 are the very latest for the state, the only other October record being that of a specimen found dead under the TV tower near Coweta in Wagoner County, northeastern Oklahoma on 3 October 1976 (Norman, 1977, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 10: 7). — Louis E. McGee and Janet M. McGee, 1703 N. W. 43rd St., Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, 15 April 1980.

Breeding of Great-tailed Grackle in Osage County, Oklahoma.—On 4 July 1978 Elizabeth Hicks and I spent the morning birding at Hulah Reservoir, a large impoundment of the Caney River in Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma. About noon, while we were resting in the shade (temperature about 100°F.), a female Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) alighted on the mudflat about 50 yards from us. Presently a second grackle, recognizable as a fledgling from its begging behavior, alighted near the first and received from it a frog about 2 inches long (head to tip of outstretched hind legs). The old bird resumed its food-hunting among the weeds at the mudflat's edge, caught another frog, and flew with this to two more young grackles that were waiting in the shade of some willows. The fledgling that received the frog did not swallow it, so the old bird gave it to the other.

All three of the young grackles were well feathered, as large as their mother, and flying strongly. We clearly saw the dark eye of the one on the mudflat, but the other two were in the shade and we could not tell what their eye-color was. We watched the four birds for about 20 minutes. During this period we saw two other Great-tailed Grackles, both of them female-like, but no adult males. Miss Hicks had, however, seen one or more adult males in this same area on 16 June 1972 and on 24 and 25 May 1975.

The breeding of *Quiscalus mexicanus* in Osage County has not heretofore been reported. The species has, however, been seen on several occasions in spring in Washington County and it is known to have nested in Tulsa County as early as 1964 (Davis, 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8: 12-13).—Ella Delap, 409 N. Wyandotte, Dewey, Oklahoma 74029, 4 August 1978.