

A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA: WILSON'S PLOVER

BY JERI McMAHON

On 15 August 1982 (weather warm, but not excessively so; sky clear; little wind), while participating in a Tulsa Audubon Society field trip to a cluster of four sewage ponds in the eastern part of Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, Elwyn Aud (of Tulsa), Inez Strohink (of Muskogee) and I happened upon a shorebird that puzzled me greatly. It was smaller than the several Killdeers (*Charadrius vociferus*) that were feeding about the ponds, was pale tan or buff on its upperparts, had a noticeable white stripe above the eye, and was white below save for the tan, rather wide, single neck-band. A noticeable feature was its big, all-black bill, which was almost as long as its head. I came to the conclusion that the bird could be nothing but an adult female or immature Wilson's Plover (*C. wilsonia*), but was hesitant to say so since I had never before seen the species anywhere. I recorded it in my notes that evening as a



WILSON'S PLOVER

*A somewhat faded adult female, or possibly an immature bird, that frequented sewage ponds in Tulsa County for several weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1982. Photographed by John S. Shackford on 25 August 1982.*

Wilson's Plover. It was obviously too small and too long-billed for a Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*).

Within the ponds were extensive mudflats on which many shorebirds were feeding. We identified Pectoral, Least, and Western sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*, *C. minutilla*, and *C. mauri*, respectively), Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*), and Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularia*), in addition to the above-mentioned Killdeers. When we first saw the Wilson's Plover it was close to a Killdeer, so direct comparison was possible, but most of the time it kept apart from the other birds. We watched it through our spotting scopes for about five minutes. During most of that period it simply stood there; but presently it walked a short way, "sat down" for a while as if for a rest, and flew off. Had it been "sitting down" when we first went past the spot at which it was feeding we might never have seen it, for its coloration was very protective.

When I returned to my home in Fort Gibson that evening I telephoned James L. Norman of Muskogee, telling him of my belief that the puzzling bird I had seen was a Wilson's Plover. He agreed that my description fitted that species well and he expressed a hope that the bird would linger long enough at the ponds for everyone to have a further look.

Several of the persons who were on the 15 August field trip saw the moot plover, but not all of them did. Six days later (21 August), James W. Arterburn of Tulsa, quite without having been told to be on the lookout for something unusual, came upon the bird at the ponds. He was so puzzled by it that he called James C. Hoffman and Elizabeth Hayes, suggesting that they all make a point of seeing the bird again if possible. As a result of his calls, the following Tulsans went to the ponds early the following morning (22 August): Arterburn, Hoffman, Elizabeth Hayes, K. Hayes, R. G. Jennings, and J. S. Tomer. Hoffman, who had become familiar with *Charadrius wilsonia* on the Atlantic coast, immediately confirmed my tentative identification: the big-billed plover was indeed a Wilson's. And Tomer photographed it.

Word spread fast that the sewage ponds had a bird everyone would want to see. On 23 August the following were there to see it: J. L. Norman and Marion Norman of Muskogee, J. S. Tomer and his wife Patricia, Arterburn, and Hoffman. Tomer and Arterburn took photos on that date.

On 24 August the following Tulsans saw the plover: Terri Bruner, Eileen Docekal, Elizabeth Hayes, Deloris Isted, Alice Hensey, Anne Long, Aline Romero, Roberta Whaling, Rosemary Locke, Louise Rogers, Juanita Martin, Jennie Siebert, G. Riggs, and J. S. Tomer. Tomer took more photos.

On 25 August John S. Shackford of Oklahoma City, Dotty M. Goard of Bartlesville, and Ella Delap of Dewey drove to Tulsa to see the bird and Shackford took several photos, one of which is reproduced here as a halftone. Another shows how protective a bird's coloration can be. In this shot the bird figure is not out of focus, but so similar are the tones of its upperparts to those

of the habitat that the upper edge of its body melts into the background. There stands the bird, its head and underparts clear enough, but so like the habitat is the back that there is no contour line.

Nearly every birder of the Tulsa area had a look at the rare visitor during its stay. On 26 August Wesley Isaacs and his son Kevin drove from Oklahoma City to see it; R. J. Farris of Tulsa photographed it; and J. S. Tomer took more photos.

On 28 August the following Tulsans saw it: Tomer, J. Sisler, R. G. Jennings, Terri Bruner, Elwyn Aud, Louise Rogers, Dorothy Norris, K. Ashley, Juanita Martin, M. Overby, Joan Sullens, J. Dickerson, J. Tindle, Aline Romero, W. F. Whaling, and Roberta Whaling. Whaling took photographs. H. W. Goard and Dotty M. Goard of Bartlesville drove over to see it.

From 28 August on, the plover was observed repeatedly: on 29 August by K. Hayes, Elizabeth Hayes, R. J. Sherry, W. F. Whaling, and Roberta Whaling; on 31 August by Dotty M. Goard, Ella Delap, Phyllis Chapman, R. Hunter, Marjorie Dearmont, Alice Hensey, N. J. Thayer, Margaret Thayer, and J. Sisler; on 3 September by Eleanor Sieg and Elizabeth Hayes; on 4 September by R. G. Jennings and Terri Bruner; on 12 September by Lois Rodgers and Ruth Kern; on 29 September by J. C. Hoffman; on 31 August by Dotty M. Goard and Ella Delap. I am not sure of the last date on which it was seen, but J. S. Tomer photographed it on 4 October and J. C. Hoffman saw it on 9 October.

*Charadrius wilsonia* is a New World species that lives along ocean coasts. On the Atlantic side it breeds from New Jersey southward through the West Indies to northern South America and on the Pacific side from central Baja California to Colombia and Peru; it winters from South Carolina, Louisiana, southeastern Texas, central Baja California and central Sonora southward to central eastern Brazil and Peru (AOU Check-list, 1957, p. 169). According to the AOU Check-list (1957, p. 170) the species is "accidental in Ohio (Lucas County)."

ROUTE 2, BOX 908, FORT GIBSON, OKLAHOMA 74434, 20 SEPTEMBER 1982.

## SMITH'S LONGSPUR IN BREEDING PLUMAGE IN OKLAHOMA IN DECEMBER

BY JOHN S. TOMER

While participating in the Tulsa Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count on 20 December 1981 (weather bright and mild), Jerry Sisler and I found a flock of eight Smith's Longspurs (*Calcarius pictus*) in northern Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma. We had made a point of visiting the open prairie of that part of the county, knowing that longspurs were likely to be there. As we were driving alongside a big pasture 5 miles east of Sperry, Sisler noticed the little flock as it flew, longspur fashion, not far above the ground and alighted in the grass. They were a long way from the road. Stopping the car, we got out and started walking toward the place at which they had landed.

As we approached them, the longspurs flew up and toward us, landing

within 100 feet of where we were standing. By this time we felt sure they were Smith's from the characteristic clicking callnote and the white wing-patch that we saw occasionally as they circled overhead and dove into the grass. We walked slowly into the area where they landed. When we saw the first bird on the ground we were almost in the middle of the flock. They were quite visible since there were many grassless spots in this area. As I watched with binocular, I saw two or three birds that were in the usual buffy winter plumage and that had the noticeable white wing-patch. I was only about 30 feet from them.

I noticed particularly one bird that was facing me. The clear orange-buff of its breast was noticeable. As it turned, giving me a look at its profile, I was amazed to see the contrasting black-and-white head pattern of a male in full breeding plumage. I called excitedly to Sisler, pointing to where the bird was. He looked and was immediately impressed by the bird's striking head pattern. We both were able to study it carefully and recognized it as an extraordinary treat, not having seen this plumage before.

Smith's Longspur is present in winter on central Oklahoma's plains and prairies. It arrives about the last week in October, is present all winter, and has left by the second week in April (Sutton, 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma



#### MALE SMITH'S LONGSPUR IN BREEDING PLUMAGE

*A photograph - taken by John S. Tomer at the University of Edmonton's Cameron Library in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada - of the hand-colored lithograph by William Swainson, the British ornithologist and bird artist. The picture illustrated Swainson's original description of "Emberiza (Plectrophanes) picta . . . Painted Bunting" in John Richardson's four-volume "Fauna Boreali-Americana" (1831, Vol. 2, p. 250, pl. 49). Swainson named and described several other American bird species new to science in the Richardson opus. The name Smith's was bestowed by Audubon in honor of Gideon B. Smith, a physician of Baltimore, Maryland.*

birds, p. 48). Normally the molt out of breeding plumage is complete before it arrives in the fall and the prebasic molt takes place north of Oklahoma as it migrates toward its nesting ground in the far north. None of the 34 Oklahoma specimens (three from Tulsa County) in the University of Oklahoma collection taken between 19 November and 20 March show signs of either molt; nor do three specimens from the Tulsa area (two in the U.S. National Museum, one in the University of Tulsa collection) taken between 30 November and 4 December show any sign of molt. How then can we account for the occurrence of this one aberrant male bird with seven others all apparently in regular winter plumage? Was it a result of a late prealternate molt (approximately 3 months late), or was it an early prebasic molt (approximately 4 months early)? I have not found in the literature mention of this sort of irregularity.

Sisler and I separately returned to the area where this bird was seen four times in the weeks following our observation. I did not find the longspurs again. Sisler found longspurs on one trip but could not get close enough to see them on the ground.

5911 EAST 46th STREET, TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74135, 15 AUGUST 1982.

### GENERAL NOTES

**Baikal Teal in Major County, Oklahoma.** — From 1345 to 1405 on 12 March 1981 (sky slightly overcast; source of light behind and to right of us), Mrs. Dorothy McIlroy of Ithaca, New York, and I observed an adult male Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) on the southeast borrowpit pond of the Law Sandpit just east of the Cimarron River bridge (on Highways 8 and 62) between Orienta and Cleo Springs, Major County, northwestern Oklahoma. We observed it through a 30 x Balscope and 10 x 40 binocular. It was with a flock of Ring-necked Ducks (*Aythya collaris*), Redheads (*A. americana*), and American Wigeons (*Anas americana*), a few Gadwalls (*A. strepera*), six Pintails (*A. acuta*), and two Green-winged Teal (*A. crecca*). We observed it again from 1608 to 1725, during which period the sky was clear and full sunlight that was behind us fell squarely on the bird.

Description: Teal-sized duck (compared directly with Green-winged Teal), riding high in water with tail held clear of water like American Wigeon. Head held so close to body that neck not usually distinguishable, rather like that of Green-winged Teal in repose. Head peaked but not crested. Bill slate gray with lighter sheen. Crown and nape black with green iridescence; creamy white line over each eye meeting on occiput; face tawny-buff with dark vertical bar from eye down across cheek to lower throat; widening black crescent with brilliant metallic green sheen extending posteriorly from eye, framing or cupping the tawny face forward of it; creamy white line down lateral posterior part of neck extending forward but still behind lower part of blackish facial crescent described above; chest tawny pink with darker spots; white vertical bar posterior to chest, positioned like white bar on chest of North American race of Green-winged Teal; sides and flanks gray to waterline; back brownish with three neatly placed long, thin, pointed scapular feathers, creamy white posteriorly, dark anteriorly, extending posteriorly and downward across gray sides, black posteriorly separated from gray flanks by sharp white bar, reminiscent of the white flank patch on American Wigeon or Blue-winged Teal but much more narrow; wings entire, i.e., full folded primaries seen on both left and right sides, brownish like back.

No interaction noted with other ducks but bird seemed to prefer company of Pintails and Green-winged Teal. Additional details noted during second

period of observation include: wing color medium brown; speculum greenish with light borders, noted when bird reared up on water and flapped vigorously; wing linings pale. When bird scratched head in preening, right leg noted to be medium gray and without a band (left leg not seen at all). Tail dark gray brown, showing moderate contrast with black rear end. In second period of observation, when brilliant sunlight fell on bird, metallic green sheen of black areas of head, face, and nape was especially conspicuous.

Actions of bird included swimming about, sleeping, preening, and some intermittent pecking at the water surface; it was not noted to dive or to dabble. In latter part of second observation period it came as close as 90 yards to observers. No vocalizations heard.

Above three paragraphs based on detailed notes taken at times of observation as noted above.

Realizing the rarity of the bird, I telephoned the Stovall Museum at the University of Oklahoma. The message was given directly to John S. Tomer and D. Scott Wood, who drove to the site and were able to see the bird at 1820. They studied it carefully with both 15-60 x telescope and 10 x binocular for thirty minutes. To my knowledge the bird was not seen thereafter.

The provenance of this particular bird will never be absolutely established, but it should be noted that the species has become rare in American collections (Richard Ryan-personal comm.). Moreover, in view of its association with obviously transient waterfowl and its apparent subsequent prompt departure, it could have been a legitimate Asiatic vagrant, a part of that sprinkling of Asiatic migrant species — including the Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), Common Crane (*Grus grus*), and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) — that make Great Plains birdwatching so unpredictable, and so delightful. Whether Asiatic or escape, the bird certainly lived up to its specific scientific name — *Anas formosa*, "beautiful dabbling duck". — Fritz G. Scheider, 4304 Belmont Dr., Liverpool, New York 13088, 12 July 1982.

**Sandhill Crane in Muskogee County, Oklahoma.** — On 28 November 1981, while I was watching a large flock of Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) feeding in a field near Fort Gibson, Muskogee County, east-central Oklahoma, a solitary Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) flew in, alighted among the geese, fed for a short time, and flew off. Knowing that the Sandhill Crane was uncommon in this part of Oklahoma, I called James L. Norman of Muskogee, who came at once and saw the bird, confirming my identification. According to Sutton (1967, Oklahoma Birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 153), *Grus canadensis* has heretofore been seen eastward in Oklahoma only as far as Washington, Tulsa, Johnston, and Bryan counties. — Jeri McMahon, Route 2, Box 908, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma 74434, 1 February 1982.

**Saw-whet Owl again in Texas County, Oklahoma.** — Shortly after noon on 21 November 1981 my daughter Robyn came running into the house to tell me that there was an owl in a pine tree in our neighbor's yard. Robyn and

her friend Lisa Lee had been hitting a badminton "birdie" back and forth in our driveway and they had hit it into the tree, an Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). When Robyn went to get the birdie out of the tree, she noticed the owl sitting on a branch. I, my wife Janice, and daughter Nadene went out to see it. It was about 7 feet up and about midway out on the branch. I identified it as a Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). The pine is on the property of Mr. and Mrs. Larry Tryon at 6044 Sunset Drive. While we were observing the owl, the Tryons came out and I showed the owl to them. I took several photographs of it with my personal camera without a flash and two with the Tryons' Polaroid with a flash, all at a distance of less than three feet. During all of this excitement and photographing, the owl appeared to be nervous but it remained in the same place on the branch. It stayed there the rest of the day, but we could not find it in the pine the next day.

*Aegolius acadicus* has been reported heretofore from Texas County on two occasions. On or about 29 November 1933 one was shot or found dead near the town of Eva (Long, 1934, Auk 51: 236-37). On 29 January 1957 a female (UOMZ 2850) was collected on the school grounds in Guymon by R. H. Davy (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 265). — Kenneth E. Schwindt, 6042 Sunset Drive, Guymon, Oklahoma 73942, 5 April 1982.

**Scrub Jay in Greer County, Oklahoma.** — On several occasions between 4 February and 10 March 1981, a Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) visited trees along the west edge of the yard surrounding the house provided for me as Park Naturalist at Quartz Mountain State Park in Greer County, southwestern Oklahoma. The weather throughout the period was mild; there was no snow, and the wind was never very strong. Mary Briley, my wife, was first to see the bird, which was (at 1315 on 4 February) in a post oak. She instantly recognized it as a jay, noting that it had no crest and that it was rather long-tailed. Two days later (6 February), we both saw it, and clearly enough this time to see dark streaks on its chest. It could not, in other words, be a Mexican Jay (*A. ultramarina*), for its underparts were not uniformly gray. Again it was in a post oak. We both saw it (at 1715) on 9 February, this time in a live oak. Mary saw it again on 11 February (at 0940, in a live oak). We both saw it on 1 March (at 1730 in a post oak), on 2 March (at 1630 in a post oak), and on 10 March (at 1700 in the top of a juniper). On some of the above-cited dates it was with birds of other species that were visiting a sunflower-seed feeder, but we never saw it at the feeder. Nor did we see it carrying or pounding open an acorn.

The Scrub Jay is common in the Black Mesa country at the northwestern corner of Cimarron County and it has been seen from time to time along the Cimarron River north of Boise City (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 372). During the winter of 1950-51 it was seen in Boise City and in or near Guymon, Texas County (1951, Audubon Field Notes

5:213). It has not heretofore been reported from any part of Oklahoma east of Guymon. — Jeff Briley, *Quartz Mountain State Park, Route 1, Lone Wolf, Oklahoma 73655, 22 February 1982.*

**Pine Warbler in Cleveland County, Oklahoma.** — Just before Christmas in 1980 an unfamiliar small bird appeared in the John S. Ezell yard at 801 Hoover Street in Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma. The clear yellow of its underparts, olive of its upperparts, white wingbars, and white at the tail-corners led the four members of the Ezell family — with the help of field guide pictures — to identify the bird correctly as a Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*), a species not heretofore reported from central Oklahoma. The warbler visited the feeder frequently from Christmas through 15 February 1981 along with several other bird species. It fed on suet and whole-wheat bread crumbs, some of which fell to the ground under the feeder. It often perched in a large slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) not far from the feeder. Two small longleaf pines (*P. palustris*) that also grow in the yard are, so far as I know, the only longleaf pines in the city. The weather was unseasonably mild throughout most of the period.

During the first week of January, Mrs. Ezell took several color photographs of the warbler, but in all of these the bird figure is very small. On 18 January, a fine day, I saw the warbler myself. It fed chiefly on the ground under the feeder about 20 feet from the window through which I watched. On about 30 January John S. Shackford of Oklahoma City photographed the bird in color (see halftone).

*Dendroica pinus* is common in the pinelands of southeastern Oklahoma. It is believed to be nonmigratory. It has been recorded northward to Delaware, **Mayes, Tulsa, and Osage counties** (Sutton, 1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds,



**PINE WARBLER**

*Photographed by John S. Shackford at the John S. Ezell residence in Norman, Oklahoma on or about 30 January 1981.*

Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. of Oklahoma, Norman, p. 37). A male specimen largely in juvenal feather (UOMZ 393) taken on 3 August 1950 by M. D. Arvey near Willis, Marshall County, southern Oklahoma, is the westernmost for the state. — George M. Sutton, 818 W. Brooks St., Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 28 January 1981.

**Sage Sparrow in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.**— In mid-afternoon on 2 January 1982 (sky clear; no wind), while Nanette Johnson, Carrie Swink, and I were participating in a Christmas Bird Count at Kenton, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, we saw two medium-sized sparrows that demanded our close attention. When first sighted, each was perched on a fencepost close to the east side of the highway about 1½ miles north and ½ mile east of town. We could approach them to within about 25 feet and had the sun at our backs, so we saw them clearly, even without binoculars. One was slightly darker than the other, but each was charcoal gray above and white below with dusky breast spot and side-streaking, dusky moustache stripe, and fairly conspicuous light eye-ring. We decided that they could be nothing but Sage Sparrows (*Amphispiza belli*), a species nowhere listed for Oklahoma but one that all three of us had seen on several occasions in Kansas.

When a truck passed, both birds sought cover in the brush close by. White spots showed on their outer tail feathers when they flew. The fence was lined with dead tumbleweed. Mesquite, yucca, and some sagebrush grew in the rocky soil at either side of the highway. Nanette Johnson crossed the fence, found the darker bird without much trouble, and put it to flight several times. The last time it flushed it flew to an open area near the bed of a small creek, then back to brushy cover.

In view of the fact that *Amphispiza belli* has long been known to winter in southwesternmost Kansas, where it has been "in some years common, in sagebrush" (Johnston, 1960, Directory to the bird-life of Kansas, Univ. of Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist. Misc. Publ. No. 23, p. 63), it is somewhat surprising that the species was not even mentioned by Weske (1968, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 1:9-10) among birds to be looked for in the Black Mesa country. — JoAnn S. Garrett, Route 4, Box 395A, Pleasant Hill, Missouri.

**Gray-headed Junco in Beckham County, Oklahoma.**—On 23 October 1979 (weather clear; air temperature from low of 36° F in early morning to high of 78° in afternoon; first light frost of the fall the preceding night), I saw the first Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) of the season in my yard in Elk City, Beckham County, southwestern Oklahoma. Among them were some individuals of the "pink-sided" form. The following evening, after a nighttime low of 45° and an afternoon high of 78°, I again saw several juncos in the yard. This time, using a binocular, I spotted one bird with noticeably rusty brown back.

It had been so long since I had seen Gray-headed Juncos (*Junco caniceps*) in Colorado, that I was reluctant to believe that I was seeing one in Elk City.

But all the important identification points were there: the gray head, rufous back, black in front of and around the eye, and the clear ashy gray of the sides and flanks. The bird was *J. caniceps*. I watched it for some time. Many of the juncos with it seemed to be of the "pink-sided" sort. The following evening (25 October) I saw it again, this time alone. I watched it as it drank at the birdbath and flew into a bald cypress tree near the house.

I did not see it again. Nor did I see any more juncos in my yard until 18 November. On that date I saw several "slate-colored" birds there. These remained in the neighborhood for the rest of the winter.

*Junco caniceps* is not easy to identify. Specimens had been taken in Cimarron and Texas counties (24 November to 18 May), but sight records (several of them published) for Beaver, Comanche, Cleveland, Oklahoma, and Payne counties are all in need of confirmation (see Sutton, 1974, Check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 46 and Tyler, 1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Stovall Mus. Contr. 2, p. 53). The species has not heretofore been reported from Beckham County. — Ina S. Brown, 106 Sunset, Elk City, Oklahoma 73644, 15 May 1980.

FROM THE EDITOR: A boost in membership of the O.O.S. is sorely needed. This will help put the organization on a sound financial footing, and will provide additional benefits. Any group involved with conservation and study of our rapidly dwindling natural resources is only as strong as the size and intensity of its membership. Greater numbers of trained eyes on Oklahoma's birdlife would result in a larger information-gathering network. (Many parts of Oklahoma contain few or no reliable observers.) A larger membership should lead to Bulletin contributions from a greater number of writers. Success at publication will foster and encourage renewed activity, spontaneous enthusiasm, and an even larger membership.

— J. D. Tyler

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