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POSSIBLE BREEDING OF LESSER NIGHTHAWK IN TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY ROBERT W. DICKERMAN

The Lesser Nighthawk *(Chordeiles acutipennis)* is known from Oklahoma by a single male with somewhat enlarged testes (UOMZ 4794) collected by W.M. Davis on 23 April 1961 in Boise City, Cimarron County, at the west end of the Panhandle (Sutton, G.M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 275). J.A. Grzybowski and G.D. Schnell (1984, Oklahoma ornithology, an annotated bibliography, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman) listed no references to the species published through mid-1983. The Lesser Nighthawk has nested as far north as southwestern Utah and central New Mexico (1983, AOU Check-list, 6th ed., p. 308). P.A. Johnsgard (1979, Birds of the Great Plains, Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln) omitted the species for lack of nesting evidence in the area covered.

DORSAL AND VENTRAL VIEWS OF JUVENILE NIGHTHAWKS
*Left to right, Lesser Nighthawks (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) AMNH 81621, Brownsville, Texas; USNM 340247, Tulsa County, Oklahoma; and Common Nighthawks* (Chordeiles minor) *USNM 235061 Fort Verde, Arizona (subspecies* henryi); *USNM 5595, Kansas, 70 miles west Fort Riley (subspecies* howelli).

In searching North American collections for pre-flight young of the Common Nighthawk *(Chordeiles minor)* for a study of geographic variation in the juvenal plumage of that species, I found a stubby-tailed Lesser Nighthawk from Tulsa County, Oklahoma! The specimen in the U.S. National Museum (No. 340247) was found on 15 June 1933, apparently by Edith R. Force, and was prepared as a "life-like" mount by A.E. Gilmore. The obverse of the original "watch-tag" label bears the field number "WJH 241" (= Wilson Junior High, *fide* John S. Tomer). Unfortunately, Tomer informed me that he was unable to find mention of this specimen in Miss Force's field notes which he is preparing for archiving in the University of Tulsa Library.

I have compared the specimen with series of nestlings of both species, including all of the North American subspecies of the Common Nighthawk. Its dorsal cinnamon color is among the richest of any *acutipennis* specimen I have seen (Dickerman, R.W., 1981, Geographic variation in the juvenal plumage of the Lesser Nighthawk *(Chordeiles acutipennis)*, Auk 98:619-621; and 1982, Further notes on the juvenal plumage of the Lesser Nighthawk, Auk 99:764). The specimen is finely vermiculated dorsally, lacking entirely the black shaft streakings found in all subspecies of the Common Nighthawk except the northern prairie form *sennetti* which is pale grayish to buffy, never cinnamon.

In the U.S. National Museum the specimen was identified as *Chordeiles minor howelli;* on the field tag is the notation in pencil: *"howelli* HCO." Harry C. Oberholser earlier had revised the nighthawks (1914, A monograph of the genus *Chordeiles* Swainson, type of a new family of goatsuckers, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. 86:1-121). The identification of the Oklahoma juvenile was obviously based on Oberholser's concept of what "should" have been in the area, rather than on the characters of the specimen itself.

Be that as it may, the specimen is assumed to have been found in Tulsa County. If so, because it obviously could not fly, the bird would have hatched there, thus providing the first breeding record for Oklahoma, and indicating at least a sporadic extension of the known nesting range of the species. The possibility that the chick was brought to Tulsa from somewhere in its known breeding range, however, cannot be discounted unequivocally.

DEPARTMENT OF MICROBIOLOGY, CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10021, AND AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, CENTRAL PARK AND 79TH ST., NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10024, 15 NOVEMBER 1984.

NESTING AND SUMMER RECORDS FOR OSPREYS IN OKLAHOMA

BY LOYD D. ISLEY AND JAMES W. LISH

In Oklahoma the Osprey *(Pandion haliaetus)* is best categorized as a transient species, most often being encountered around large bodies of water during spring and fall. Some birds spend the winter, but this is a rare occurrence. There are midsummer sightings, but no nests, for Alfalfa, Payne, and Tulsa counties (Sutton, G.M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 121). Even though M.M. Nice (1931, The birds of Oklahoma, Rev. ed., Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv. 3(1):76) reported that a pair nested during June

of 1928 along the Illinois River near Tahlequah in Cherokee County, there are no *valid* breeding records for the state (Sutton, G.M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 11). Herein are reported two records of Osprey nesting activity, one recent, the other from the late 1950's. The earlier account was related to James W. Lish by Phillip C. Clover.

About 1958 or 1959, Phillip C. Clover, now employed as a biological technician at the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, and his uncle discovered an Osprey nest near the Salt Fork River below the Salt Plains Reservoir dam, between section 30 and 31, T27N, R8W. Clover was unfamiliar with the species at that time but, because of the fishing activity of the birds, called them "fish hawks." He described the nest as being a large platform of sticks. On one occasion, he watched the adults feed fish to one (possibly two) young in the nest. Since he is now acquainted with the species, Clover is positive that these "fish hawks" were indeed Ospreys.

More recent nesting activity was observed by the senior author. In the spring of 1983 a pair of Ospreys at Robert S. Kerr Reservoir in east central Oklahoma produced young. Sometime between 15 March and 15 April, as Isley was taking his wife Danna and son Wayne fishing by boat up the Big Sallisaw Creek arm of the lake 4 miles southwest of Sallisaw, in Sequoyah County, they noticed a huge, bulky nest, composed primarily of good-sized branches and smaller twigs, 30 or 40 feet up in a large tree on the creek bank. Upon closer examination, they discovered that the nest was active. One of the old birds was perched on its edge, and appeared to be feeding a chick inside. Another adult flew in from the east and circled the nest tree for several moments.

They watched the Ospreys for a few minutes, then moved upstream to keep from scaring them. Numerous boats passed within 50 meters of the nest without startling the birds, but when one stopped in the immediate area, the raptors were noticeably agitated. From their vantage point a short distance upstream, the Isleys could at times see a young bird's head above the nest rim as the adult fed it. The other adult soon arrived, carrying a five-inch fish in its talons. When it landed on the edge of the nest, the other parent took to the air. During their limited observations, the Isley family never saw both parents on the nest together, although both actively dived for fish to feed the chicks.

Later in the month of April, Isley, Robert M. Burnett, and Debi Christie all had the opportunity to watch the feeding of the young by one parent as the other perched or flew about nearby. Their work took them up Sallisaw Creek, so they were able to check the nest often. For some reason, however, none of them thought to take pictures.

In the spring of 1984, flood waters prevented checking of the nest site. Water in the creek was moving too swiftly for safe boat operation, and overflows prevented gaining access by land. The fact that the nest tree was alive is worthy of note. Sutton (1967, *op. cit.*, p. 120) commented that the nest is "usually placed at the top of a dead stub."

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Tricolored Heron in Tulsa County, Oklahoma—Late on the morning of 25 April 1985, seasonal naturalist Karen Robinson and I were studying birds at the Oxley Nature Center in north Tulsa, Oklahoma. The morning was clear and mild (76° F), with a north breeze of 5-10 mph. At approximately 1115, we approached a low-lying area known as Blackbird Marsh and began scanning 20 to 30 Little Blue Herons *(Egretta caerulea),* some variegated with white, others uniformly bluish, that were feeding in the shallow waters. An oddly colored individual standing on a small island some 400 feet (120 m) from us attracted our attention. About the same size as the Little Blues, this one differed in being brown on the crown, neck and shoulders, rather than blue-gray. Too, the white of its throat, breast and belly stood out in bold contrast to the slaty undersides of the others. Its greenish-yellow legs and feet we also noted.

Soon the bird flew to an open area of the marsh about 500 feet (150 m) away and began searching for prey in the shallow water. Almost simultaneously, both of us commented on its longer neck and bill, as well as its unusually slender head compared to the Little Blue Herons nearby. To me, the bill resembled a Great Blue Heron's *(Ardea herodia)* more closely than that of a Little Blue.

After about two minutes of stalking prey, the bird flew off to adjacent Lake Sherry. As it passed to our left about 500 feet away, we could clearly see the contrast between its darker upperparts and white underside. When we referred to the National Geographic Society's Field guide to the birds of North America (1983, Wash., D.C.), it became apparent that what we had seen was an immature Tricolored Heron *(Egretta tricolor).*

I returned and photographed the heron at approximately 1715 on 26 April. For about 20 minutes that morning I studied the delicate hues of its plumage from a distance of about 200 feet (60 m).

The only other sighting of this species for Tulsa County was on 18 and 19 June 1965 when Anne and Bruce Reynolds saw one 3½ miles southeast of Tulsa (Tomer, J., 1966, Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci. 46:59).—Byron Ball, *Oxley Nature Center, 200 Civic Center, Rm. 642, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74103, 15 September 1985.*

Laughing Gull in Cimarron County, Oklahoma—On 23 June 1985, at the sewage lagoons a mile northeast of Boise City, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, in the far western Panhandle, I carefully observed a Laughing Gull *(Larus atricilla)* for 20 minutes. At about 1700, as I scanned the largest of the ponds through my 15X telescope, I was startled to see a duck-sized white bird with black head floating on the water approximately 150 yards (135 m) away. Because the bird was headed away from me into the strong south wind, I could not tell for certain whether it was a tern or a gull. Its rather large size was not suggestive of any smaller tern with which I was familiar, or even a Franklin's Gull *(Larus pipixcan).* My first impulse led me to think that the bird might be a Caspian Tern *(Sterna caspia).* I edged close enough to see that it was most assuredly a gull, but I was still baffled. Even though this individual stongly resembled a Franklin's Gull in nuptial dress, it was much too large. Finally, it flew up and began to circle overhead. Viewing conditions were near ideal, and the bird at times approached to within about 60 yards (55 m). Through both the telescope

and my 9-power binocular, I could discern that the bird's wingtips were black, the mantle gray, and that there was definitely no white between the two. Among North American gulls, only a Laughing Gull in full breeding plumage fits this description. Considering the many problems inherent in identifying gulls, many of which undergo several juvenile plumages as well as seasonal ones, recognizing this species in its *nuptial* plumage is comparatively easy. Other field marks I noted at the time were the reddish-black bill, all white tail, and whitish underwings. The gull soared over the ponds for perhaps 10 minutes before re-alighting, but was quite wary, for when I approached it a second time, it quickly took flight once again. The following morning it was gone.

The Laughing Gull is ordinarily associated with coastal waters, but there are several Oklahoma records. None of these, however, is for the Panhandle. The closest sighting is from near Arnett in Ellis County, 165 miles ESE of Boise City: on 3 June 1982, three adult birds in breeding feather were observed there by Gerald Maisel (1985, Bull, Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 18:21).—John S. Shackford, *Route 1, Box 125, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 9 October 1985.*

Nests of Western Kingbirds in pines.—Each summer since my moving to central Oklahoma in 1952, several pairs of Western Kingbirds *(Tyrannus verticalis)* have nested on the university campus in Norman. Most nests have been well up in partly dead Chinese elms, many of which have been cut down as they have become unsightly. As a rule, nests have been on branches well out from the main trunk in exposed positions. Bent (1942, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179, p. 59) states that nesting Western Kingbirds "seem to prefer an open situation where they can command a clear outlook." Whether choice of an "open situation" is a result of the birds' need for a "clear outlook" or not, the nestlings may benefit from some direct exposure to sunlight. Virtually every nest that I have watched during the past 20-some years has been unshaded by leafage in the middle of the day.

A nest that I watched in the summer of 1975 was well up in a Chinese elm on the east side of Asp Avenue about midway between the Zoology Building and the Stovall Museum. During the winter of 1975-76, this elm was removed. On 28 May 1976, I was surprised to see a Western Kingbird carrying string to a partly built nest about 15 feet up in a small Austrian pine only a few yards from the spot at which the Chinese elm had stood. Since this was the first Western Kingbird nest I had ever seen in a pine, I watched it with interest. Building continued off and on from 29-31 May, then stopped. Why the birds deserted I do not know.

About a month later, on 29 June, Karl W. Haller and I found another Western Kingbird nest in a pine, this one on the west side of Asp Avenue, 280 paces south of the nest just discussed and about 25 feet up. This nest probably held young, for we saw one of the old birds carrying food to it. What befell there, I do not know. I passed the nest almost every day, yet observed no activity at and near it from 29 June on.

On 20 July, Warren D. Harden, Jack D. Tyler, and I found a *third* nest in a pine, this one 32 paces directly south of the one that I had found on 28 May and that had been deserted on 31 May. In this third nest, which was about 20 feet

up, the young were almost ready to leave. I could see the heads of all four of them from the ground on 22 July. The brood fledged successfully, the last of them on 23 July.

Summary: Of three Western Kingbird nests in pines observed in 1976, one (only) was successful. At two other nests on the campus, one well up in a Chinese elm, the other on a transistor near the top of a telephone pole, the brood fledged successfully.—George M. Sutton, (deceased), *818 West Brooks St., Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 31 March 1980.*

First record of Scarlet Tanager in southwestern Oklahoma—At 0815 on the morning of 4 May 1985, several members of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society and I observed a male Scarlet Tanager *(Piranga olivacea)* near the Salt Fork of Red River bridge 2 miles west of Martha, in Jackson County, southwestern Oklahoma. The morning was cool, about 60° F, and skies were clear, but a bothersome south wind blew at approximately 15 or 20 mph. In a shelterbelt that lay parallel and adjacent to the river, and composed principally of black locust *(Robinia pseudo-acacia)* and Osage orange *(Maclura pomifera)* trees, Jeri McMahon first spotted the tanager. The bird quickly disappeared in the dense foliage so that not everyone in the party saw it, but those who did remarked that its red plumage was not very bright and that its wings were dull black. At one point, a Summer Tanager *(Piranga rubra)* landed near the Scarlet, offering us a chance to contrast the colors of the two. At 0830, Lawrence E. Dunn and I found the Scarlet Tanager again, this time about 50 yards east of the first location, in an eastward leg of the shelterbelt. It was singing in simple American Robin-like phrases a song not unlike a Summer Tanager's. We soon lost sight of it, but several moments later, John S. Shackford, Jim Bob Wilson, and several other persons heard the tanager singing from a mulberry tree *(Morus* sp.) and relocated it in the shelterbelt about 100 yards to the south.

Although the Scarlet Tanager has been recorded westward in Oklahoma to Payne, Oklahoma, and Cleveland counties during migration, and exceptionally as far west as Woodward, Harper and Cimarron counties, no previous record for the southwestern part of the state is known (Sutton, G.M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 41). At Boiling Springs State Park near Woodward, Woodward County, a pair is reported to have actually nested in July, 1967 (1967, Aud. Field Notes 21:584). J.D. Tyler (1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 48) listed the species as hypothetical, the closest published record apparently being of a male seen by G.E. Maxon on 4 June 1929 in the valley of the Pease River in Wilbarger County, north-central Texas, only a few miles south of Tillman and Jackson counties, Oklahoma (More, R.L., and J.K. Strecker, 1929, The summer birds of Wilbarger County, Texas, Contrib. Baylor Univ. Mus. 20:3-16).—Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biological Sciences, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, 6 May 1985.*

Early spring record for Indigo Bunting in Oklahoma.—At 1000 on 13 March 1985, Mark Eddings, Wayne Stancil and I noticed a conspicuous blue bird perched in the top of a 12-foot slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*) near White Wolf

Crossing on the Fort Sill Military Reservation, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma. White Wolf Crossing spans Medicine Creek at the east end of Medicine Bluff, hardly a mile north of the main Fort Sill Post Office. Even though the little bird remained for only 5 or 10 seconds before flying, we got good enough looks to identify it as a male Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*).

This species is listed by J. D. Tyler as a summer resident that has been recorded in southwestern Oklahoma from 21 April to 6 September (1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma from 21 April to 6 September (1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 49). The earliest previous record for the state was 7 April (Sutton, G. M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 579). An exceptionally wet previous fall and winter, together with unseasonably warm late winter weather might have been responsible for luring this bird northward so early. In fact, an unusually high number of plants were "greening-out" by the last week of February.—Allen Ratzlaff, *923 W. 7th, Stillwater Oklahoma 74074, 22 July 1985.*

Lark Bunting in Tulsa County, Oklahoma—On 10 May 1972, Mrs. Wilbur (Ruth) Schmell of 4738 South 69th East Avenue, southeast Tulsa, telephoned me about 0900 to inquire about the identity of a bird that was feeding in her yard. She described it as a small bird, completely black except for white on the wings. Since I could not think of any bird common to Tulsa that answered this description, I went immediately to her home, arriving about 0930. Only a glance was required to confirm that Mrs. Schmell had indeed described the bird accurately, for it was a Lark Bunting *(Calamospiza melanocorys)* feeding on the ground among several House Sparrows *(Passer domesticus)*. It was 30 to 40 feet away and in excellent light. I watched it with 7-power binoculars for several moments and noted the "heavy" bunting shape and the large white streak, widest at the shoulder, on each wing. Otherwise, the bird was all black.

Mrs. Schmell reported that the bunting first arrived in her yard at 0845, came back twice during the morning, and remained about 15 or 20 minutes each visit. Returning again about 1430, it stayed perhaps 45 minutes, but that was the last she saw of it.

There is one previous, though unsubstantiated, report of the species for Tulsa County: a bird in poor light was glimpsed by Yula Thomas on 21 August 1966 in Tulsa (Tulsa County Audubon Society records). Interestingly, both these sightings followed stormy weather in western Oklahoma, where this bird normally occurs.—*Polly Keating, 5213 S. Toledo, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74135 (current address: 37 Maple St., Seneca Falls, New York 13148), 23 May, 1972.*

FROM THE EDITOR.—Although the American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) reaches its western limits of range in central Oklahoma, it is notably uncommon here during migration and winter. Its real stronghold is eastern North America, particularly along the Atlantic Coast, where it is not only the most abundant surface-feeding duck, but also one of the largest. Understandably, then, it is usually the species of choice for most hunters in the east.

In his thought-provoking essay entitled: The North American Black Duck

(*Anas rubripes*): A case study of 28 years of failure in American wildlife management (Suppl. to Int. J. Stud. Anim. Prob. 4 (4), 1983), John W. Grandy presents convincing evidence based primarily on records of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that the species is in real trouble. Dr. Grandy is a former biologist with the Fish and Wildlife Service who has studied this duck for many years and it was the subject of his doctoral dissertation in 1972.

Reliable estimates indicate that the U.S. American Black Duck population fell steadily from near 700,000 in 1955 to approximately 300,000 birds in 1983, an overall decline of about 60%. The annual winter inventory made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the cornerstone for these alarming figures, but they are supported by other sources too. Hunters, as well as amateur and professional biologists from the U.S. and Canada, many working for conservation organizations or government agencies, have for several years voiced concern over the plight of this species, but were paid little heed. Marked declines in hunter success and breeding populations have been documented through banding data and other sources. In addition, American Black Ducks now have an abnormally high reproductive rate, a classic indication of a population substantially below carrying capacity.

Several causes for this decline have been postulated. Among them are: loss of habitat, severe winter mortality, pollution, disease, predation, accidents, oil spills, and mallard hybridization and competition.

Much of the breeding and winter ground available to the Black Duck is apparently not even utilized at all, therefore lack of habitat seems not to be the problem. Furthermore, 19 professional Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and experts concluded that only 15% of total annual mortality could be attributed to the remaining seven factors.

According to Grandy "hunting is the known cause of 50 to 60 percent of total annual mortality" incurred by American Black Ducks. Since hunting is the one factor that can be controlled by wildlife managers, why haven't effective restrictions been imposed to allow American Black Duck populations to recover? Grandy reasons as follows: hunters buy licenses which provide money with which state and federal wildlife agencies regulate and manage game populations. Sportsmen exert pressure on politicians (who in turn exert pressure on wildlife managers) to allow the resource to be hunted, regardless of current population status or long-term consequences. Result: a steadily declining American Black Duck population with no end in sight.—Jack D. Tyler.

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