

AN OKLAHOMA NEST OF THE COMMON RAVEN

BY DAVID F. PARMELEE

THE COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) may formerly have inhabited several parts of Oklahoma in which it has not been seen for a long time. More than a century ago, Samuel G. Woodhouse reported visiting "a bluff fifty feet perpendicular" and "numerous deep canyons" along the Verdigris River in north-eastern Oklahoma—rough country that in his own words "afforded breeding places for the ravens (*C. corax* L.)" (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 376). Since those early times the only completely valid Oklahoma records for *Corvus corax* have



NEST AND THREE EGGS OF COMMON RAVEN

Photographed 22 April 1967 by Dale W. Greiner at eastern end of Black Mesa a few miles northeast of Kenton, Cimarron County, Oklahoma.

been from the mesa country of northwestern Cimarron County. Here, where the big, handsome species breeds in small numbers, and where it has been seen or heard by almost every party visiting the area, it is probably non-migratory.

The only Common Raven nests thus far reported from Cimarron County were three "seen . . . on the side of the Black Mesa" on 21 May 1908 by R. Crompton Tate, for many years a resident of the village of Kenton, Oklahoma; these were not, so far as I know, climbed to, so their contents were not ascertained (Tate, 1923, *Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci.*, 3: 46; Nice, 1931, *The Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 127). Another nest, alleged to have been that of *C. corax*, found 18 feet up on an abandoned windmill near Boise City on 18 June 1935, and containing "seven young birds from three to ten days old" (Colvin, 1935, *Auk*, 52: 453-54), was almost certainly that of a White-necked Raven (*C. cryptoleucus*), a species known to breed regularly in the virtually treeless flat country about Boise City; to place its nest frequently on an old windmill; and to lay its eggs considerably later than the Common Raven does (Sutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-77).

On 22 April 1967, while my ornithology class and I were observing birds near Kenton, we found, climbed to, and photographed a Common Raven's nest at the easternmost end of the Black Mesa. With us were my colleagues Dale W. Greiner, Richard Sagness, Richard H. Schmidt, and Dwight Spencer; S. D. McDonald of the National Museum of Canada; and George M. Sutton. After we had parked our cars near the Cimarron River three miles northeast of Kenton, we fanned out and started up the mesa. We had climbed only a few hundred yards when a pair of Common Ravens flew out from the rocks above us and far to our right. The birds croaked so loudly in protest that we felt sure they had a nest nearby.

On the boldest cliffs we found whitewashed ledges and an old nest made of sticks; but in our eagerness we climbed too rapidly and actually passed the nest by. Convinced that an occupied nest must be somewhere in the immediate vicinity, we retraced our steps, eventually coming upon a large, nearly vertical crack in the cliff wall. There, almost hidden from view, on a rock lodged high in the crack, was a huge nest.

Greiner, Schmidt, and Eric Prather (one of the students) were first to see into the nest. They shouted down to the rest of us that there were "three greenish eggs." Greiner took a photograph from his position above the nest (see illustration). The three men could not reach the nest from where they stood without using rope; but the rest of us, by climbing to a ledge under the nest and scaling the wall from there, reached a point just above and behind the nest. Examining the eggs, I decided that they were fresh. The clutch may well have been incomplete. The nest was about three feet across and six inches deep. The lining, of deer hair and strips of bark principally, had an exceedingly foul odor.

The following spring, on 26 April 1968, the same nest, with apparently fresh

but vile smelling lining, held five eggs, which I collected. In the eggs were embryos about a week old. The ravens, possibly the same pair that had been there the year before, flew about croaking; at an elevation about the same as that of the top of the mesa, a Common Crow (*C. brachyrhynchos*) dived repeatedly at one of them.

We estimated that we saw or heard among the smaller mesas near Kenton about a dozen Common Ravens—in addition to the nesting pair. Some of these behaved as if they were neither paired nor breeding, though all appeared to be adult. Near the New Mexico state line we observed two loose flocks—one of 36 birds, the other of nine birds. In the mesa country proper we did not see or hear what we believed to be a White-necked Raven. That much smaller species seems to be restricted to the flat, treeless country.

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE, EM-PORIA, KANSAS 66801, 30 AUGUST 1968.

GENERAL NOTES

Purple Gallinule at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma.—About noon on 4 May 1968 I flushed a Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryula martinica*) from the edge of a cattail marsh at the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma. The flying bird looked purplish blue at a distance of about twenty feet. The feet trailed below the bird and were of a rich yellow or orange shade, not green as in the Common Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus*). The bird flew just over the tops of the cattails and dropped back into the marsh at a distance of about a hundred feet.

This is the northernmost and westernmost sighting of a Purple Gallinule in Oklahoma, according to the records cited by Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 164). The spring observation of a Purple Gallinule in an area north of the southeastern United States is in agreement with occasional spring records from as far north as eastern Canada (see *A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds*, 1957, p. 160).—Robert B. Payne, *Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 1 June 1968.*

Capture of American Coot by Great Horned Owl.—On the morning of 29 August 1968, while I was fishing alone from a boat along the north shore of Lake Texoma near the village of Willis, Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma, I noticed two American Coots (*Fulica americana*) resting on a sandbar between my boat and the shore. The sky was overcast. Directly over the sandbar were the branches of a large tree that towered above the hundreds of sapling willows lining the shore.

At about 11 o'clock a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) suddenly dropped from the big tree straight onto one of the coots while the other coot splashed awkwardly off. The owl did not use its beak in killing its prey. It simply sat there, in plain sight, glancing about with huge eyes open. Presently it flew back into the woods carrying the dead coot.

Two facts strike me as noteworthy—the capture of prey in broad daylight and the ability of the owl to carry such a heavy bird without apparent difficulty.—James P. Artman, 1014 Walnut Road, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 4 September 1968.

Leg-color in juvenal Piping Plover.—In Robert Verity Clem's excellent color-plate of three Semipalmated Plovers (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) and two Piping Plovers (*C. melodus*) in "The Shorebirds of North America" (1967, p. 57), he shows a juvenal Piping Plover with dark gray bill, eyelids, tarsi, and toes.

In a juvenal Piping Plover that I saw along the southwest shore of Lake Hefner in Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, on 24 August, 29 August, and 1 September 1968, and that I collected on 1 September, the bill was dark gray (throughout the basal half as well as at the tip), but the tarsi and toes were orange of a shade even brighter than that shown in Mr. Clem's drawing of an adult bird in breeding feather. That my specimen was young there can be no doubt, for the major wing- and leg-bones were not yet fully ossified, and the plumage of the upperparts was tipped with grayish white in such a way as to give the back a somewhat scaled appearance. I hesitate to say that Mr. Clem made a mistake, for some young Piping Plovers may indeed have dark gray legs; but some of them certainly are orange-legged.

The above-mentioned specimen is the third Piping Plover (the first in juvenal feather) to have been taken in Oklahoma. When collected it was with three Sanderlings (*Crocethia alba*). It is now No. 6376 in the bird collection at the University of Oklahoma.—Jack S. Roberts, 3706 N. W. 48th St. Circle, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73112, 4 September 1968.

Nesting of Upland Plover in Woodward County, Oklahoma.—For several years Upland Plovers (*Bartramia longicauda*) have summered in an extensive wheatfield on the Willard Peach ranch northwest of Mooreland, Woodward County, Oklahoma. In the spring of 1966 Mr. Peach observed two birds on several occasions, especially in a recently cut alfalfa field where they spent a good deal of time feeding. In the spring of 1967 he found the nest and plowed around it; but when Mrs. Peach and I tried to find it a week or so later either the eggs had hatched or the vegetation about them had become so tall that we could not find them.

During early June, 1968, various observers, including myself, repeatedly saw two plovers about 2 mi. west and $\frac{3}{4}$ mi. north of Mooreland. We hoped to find the nest. On June 10 a savage hailstorm cut a two-mile-wide swath through the area, ruining a great deal of wheat. While investigating wheat-damage, Mr. Peach found a male Upland Plover with badly broken wing and wounded side—apparently a victim of the storm, though just how the bird had been crippled was beyond determining. It might have flown into a fence. Mr. Peach brought the bird to me. I had it alive for three days, but it refused to eat. When it died, I presented it to the bird collection at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. George M. Sutton, who prepared the skin (No. 6347 in the collection), found that the gonads were not greatly enlarged (each testis about 2 x 3 mm.).

No one can be sure, of course, that the crippled male was one of the

two birds we had been seeing. After the storm, the other bird was not seen by anyone.—Doris Baransy, P. O. Box 321, Mooreland, Oklahoma 73852, 4 September 1968.

Black Skimmer in Oklahoma.—On the morning of 14 May 1967 I found a Black Skimmer (*Rynchops nigra*) on the fairly extensive mud flats at the north end of Lake Overholser, the large water-supply impoundment just west of Oklahoma City (1967, *Audubon Field Notes*, 21: 518). A cool north wind had been blowing during the preceding 24 hours. At 11:30 o'clock the sky was still overcast and the air temperature only 57° F.

There was a considerable concentration of shorebirds, gulls, terns, and ducks on the mud flats. The skimmer was resting with a group of Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*), Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*), Forster's Terns (*Sterna forsteri*), and Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). It seemed to be in good physical condition. It took flight with the other birds when the mixed flock was disturbed.

Word spread concerning the skimmer's presence and several observers came to confirm my identification. Among those who saw the bird were Thomas K. Shires, Nelson Hall, Herbert Chezem, Ernest Hicock, Betty Hicock, Roy Tillerson, and Joyce Tillerson. We kept the bird under observation at from 50 to 75 yards for over three hours. Identification was no problem, but no photographs were taken.

I checked the area carefully later in the day, but failed to find the bird. Since the Black Skimmer is a bird of outer coasts and tidal marshes, I conclude that its presence at Lake Overholser was accidental. So far as I know, *Rynchops nigra* has not heretofore been seen in Oklahoma.—John G. Newell, 4129 N. Everest, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 6 August 1968.

Williamson's Sapsucker in Oklahoma.—On 11 November 1967, while afield with my ornithology class in the mesa country near Kenton, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, I obtained a female Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*), apparently the first specimen of this species for the state. When first sighted, the bird was five or six feet from the ground, hitching down the trunk of a middle-sized, partly dead pinyon pine toward a little pool in a small canyon near the Laurance Regnier ranch-house 6 mi. south of Kenton. A notable feature of the freshly shot specimen was the pale greenish gray color of its tarsi and toes. It was not fat. It is now No. 6179 in the University of Oklahoma bird collection.

I believe the bird to be in first winter feather, though it may be in juvenal feather. There is no evidence of molt. Its chest is not black but light brown narrowly barred with black. It represents the Rocky Mountains race, *S. t. nataliae*, a form characterized primarily by smallness of bill (see Swarth, 1917, *Condor*, 19:63). Its bill, which measures 21 mm., is noticeably slenderer than that of an adult female from Utah in my personal collection.

My friend A. J. Krehbiel, of Clayton, New Mexico, informs me that the Williamson's Sapsucker has been recorded in and near Clayton as follows: on September 19, 1953, two females in Leighton's Grove on Perico Creek, 3 mi. south of Clayton; on October 4, 1953, two males, one in Clayton, one in Paradise

Canyon, 3 mi. north of Clayton; on April 3, 1955, a male along Perico Creek, 6 mi. west of Clayton; on October 23, 1955, a female in Paradise Canyon, 3 mi. north of Clayton; on April 19, 1959, a male in Clayton. Clayton is in northeastern New Mexico, about 11 mi. from the southwestern corner of the Oklahoma Panhandle.—George M. Sutton, *Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma*, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 28 May 1968.

Rufous-crowned Sparrow in Custer County, Oklahoma.—On 27 May 1968, in a deeply eroded gully 3 mi. north of Thomas, in northeastern Custer County, Oklahoma, I happened upon two Rufous-crowned Sparrows (*Aimophila ruficeps*). The walls of the gully were almost bare, but scattered shrubby grew near the top. Neither bird was singing and so far as I could tell neither was carrying food. Since *Aimophila ruficeps* had not been reported from Custer County, I collected one of the two, finding it to be a female with well defined brood-patch. The specimen is No. 6351 in the bird collection at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.—Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biology, Cameron State College, Lawton, Oklahoma 73501*, 15 November 1968.

Black-throated Sparrow in Kiowa County, Oklahoma.—On 5 March 1962, while mist-netting 3 mi. south of Lugert, Kiowa County, southwestern Oklahoma, I banded (No. 101-87558) and released an adult Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*). The bird was flushed from a large pile of cut brush in a weedy area along a stream bottom. Several Slate-colored Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) and a Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) were netted in the same area that morning.

According to Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, pp. 617-18), there is only one previous record for the Black-throated Sparrow east of the Panhandle's Black Mesa country in Cimarron County: a specimen taken by Sutton in central Oklahoma, near Lexington, Cleveland County, on 27 October 1956. The banded bird also represents unusually early spring arrival, 3 April being the earliest spring record heretofore reported (Sutton, *op. cit.*).—Willet T. Van Velzen, *Migratory Bird Populations Station, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Laurel, Md. 20810*, 26 September 1968.

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INDEX

- Actitis macularia*: 18
Aimophila ruficeps: 26
alba, *Crocethia*: 24
albonotatus, *Buteo*: 10
americana, *Fulica*: 23
 Recurvirostra: 11
Amphispiza bilineata: 26
Aquila chrysaetos: 9
Arenaria interpres: 14
Asio otus: 3
atroregularis, *Spizella*: 10
Avocet, American: 11
Bartramia longicauda: 24
bendirei, *Toxostoma*: 10
bilineata, *Amphispiza*: 26
 Bluebird, Western: 10
brachyrhynchus, *Corvus*: 23
brunneicapillus, *Campylorhynchus*: 10
Bubo virginianus: 23
bullockii, *Icterus*: 1-7
Buteo albonotatus: 10
Calidris canutus: 13-14
calliope, *Stellula*: 10
Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus: 10
canutus, *Calidris*: 13
 Cardinal: 17, 20
cardinalis, *Pyrhuloxia*: 17, 20
carolinensis, *Parus*: 17
Catherpes mexicanus: 3, 12
celsum, *Toxostoma curvirostre*: 20
Charadrius melodus: 18, 24
 semipalmatus: 24
 vociferus: 14, 18
 Chickadee, Carolina: 17
Chlidonias niger: 25
chloropus, *Gallinula*: 23
chrysaetos, *Aquila*: 9
circumcinctus, *Charadrius melodus*: 18
Circus hudsonius: 8
columbianus, *Olor*: 10
Columbigallina passerina: 18
Contopus pertinax: 10
 Coot, American: 23
corax, *Corvus*: 21-23
Corvus brachyrhynchus: 23
 corax: 21-23
 cryptoleucus: 11, 22
Crocethia alba: 24
 Crow, Common: 23
cryptoleucus, *Corvus*: 11, 22
cupido, *Tympanuchus*: 8
curvirostre, *Toxostoma*: 19, 19-20
Cypseloides niger: 10
delawarensis, *Larus*: 11, 25
 Dendrocopos pubescens: 6
 scalaris: 3
 Dendroica graciae: 10
 difficilis, *Empidonax*: 10
 domesticus, *Passer*: 11, 19
 Dendroica graciae: 10
 Dove, Ground: 18-19
 Mourning: 19
 Dowitcher, Long-billed: 14, 15
 Eagle, Golden: 9
 Empidonax difficilis: 10
 fulvifrons: 10
 Ereunetes mauri: 15
 pusillus: 15
 Erolia melanotos: 14
 minutilla: 15, 18
 Falco mexicanus: 8
 Falcon, Prairie: 8-9
 flava, *Piranga*: 10
 flavipes, *Totanus*: 15, 18
 Flycatcher, Buff-breasted: 10
 Coues's: 10
 Olivaceous: 10
 Western: 10
 forsteri, *Sterna*: 25
 Fulica americana: 23
 fulvifrons, *Empidonax*: 10
 galbula, *Icterus*: 1-7
 Gallinula chloropus: 23
 Gallinule, Common: 23
 Purple: 23
 graciae, *Dendroica*: 10
 Grosbeak, Black-headed: 18
 Rose-breasted: 16-18
 Gull, Franklin's: 25
 Ring-billed: 11, 25
 Hawk, Marsh: 8-9
 Zone-tailed: 10
 himantopus, *Micropalama*: 15
 hudsonius, *Circus*: 8
 Hummingbird, Calliope: 10
 huttoni, *Vireo*: 10
 hyemalis, *Junco*: 26
 Icterus bullockii: 1-7
 galbula: 1-7
 interpres, *Arenaria*: 14
 Junco hyemalis: 26
 Junco, Slate-colored: 26
 Killdeer: 14, 18
 Knot: 13-16
 Lanius ludovicianus: 20
 Larus delawarensis: 11, 25
 pipizcan: 25
 leucurus, *Dendrocopos pubescens*: 6
 Limnodromus scolopaceus: 14
 longicauda, *Bartramia*: 24

INDEX

- ludovicianus*, *Lanius*: 20
 Pheucticus: 16
macroura, *Zenaidura*: 19
macularia, *Actitis*: 18
martinica, *Porphyryla*: 23
mauri, *Ereunetes*: 15
melanocephalus, *Pheucticus*: 18
melanotos, *Erolia*: 14
melodus, *Charadrius*: 18, 24
mexicana, *Sialia*: 10
mexicanus, *Catherpes*: 3, 12
 Falco: 8
Micropalama himantopus: 15
minutilla, *Erolia*: 15, 18
Myiarchus tuberculifer: 10
nataliae, *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*: 25
nigra, *Rynchops*: 25
niger, *Chlidonias*: 25
 Cypseloides: 10
nuttallii, *Phalaenoptilus*: 19
occidentalis, *Strix*: 10
Olor columbianus: 10
Oriole, Baltimore: 1-7
 Bullock's: 1-7
otus, Asia: 3
Owl, Great Horned: 23
 Long-eared: 3
 Spotted: 10
Parus carolinensis: 17
Passer domesticus: 11, 19
passerina, *Columbigallina*: 18
pertinax, *Contopus*: 10
Phalaenoptilus nuttallii: 19
Pheucticus ludovicianus: 16
 melanocephalus: 18
pipixcan, *Larus*: 25
Piranga flava: 10
Plover, Black-bellied: 13, 15
 Piping: 18, 24
 Semipalmated: 24
 Upland: 24
Poor-will: 19
Porphyryla martinica: 23
Prairie Chicken, Greater: 8-9
pubescens, *Dendrocopos*: 6
pusilla, *Spizella*: 26
pusillus, *Ereunetes*: 15
Pyrrhuloxia cardinalis: 17, 20
Raven, Common: 21-23
 White-necked: 11, 22
Recurvirostra americana: 11
ruficeps, *Aimophila*: 26
Rynchops nigra: 25
Sanderling: 24
Sandpiper, Least: 15, 18
 Pectoral: 14, 15
 Semipalmated: 15
 Solitary: 18
 Spotted: 18
 Stilt: 15
 Western: 15
Sapsucker, Williamson's: 25-26
scalaris, *Dendrocopos*: 3
scolopaceus, *Limnodromus*: 14
semipalmatus, *Charadrius*: 24
Shrike, Loggerhead: 20
Sialia mexicana: 10
Skimmer, Black: 25
solitaria, *Tringa*: 18
Sparrow, Black-chinned: 10
 Black-throated: 26
 English: 11, 19
 Field: 26
 House: 11, 19
 Rufous-crowned: 26
Sphyrapicus thyroideus: 25-26
Spizella atrogularis: 10
 pusilla: 26
Squatarola squatarola: 13
Stellula calliope: 10
Sterna forsteri: 25
Strix occidentalis: 10
Swallow, Violet-green: 10
Swan, Whistling: 10-11
Swift, Black: 10
Tachycineta thalassina: 10
Tanager, Hepatic: 10
Tern, Black: 25
 Forster's: 25
thalassina, *Tachycineta*: 10
Thrasher, Bendire's: 10
 Crissal: 10
 Curve-billed: 19, 19-20
thyroideus, *Sphyrapicus*: 25-26
Totanus flavipes: 15, 18
Toxostoma bendirei: 10
 curvirostre: 19, 19-20
 dorsale: 10
Tringa solitaria: 18
tuberculifer, *Myiarchus*: 10
Turnstone, Ruddy: 14, 15
Tympanuchus cupido: 8
Vireo, Hutton's: 10
Vireo huttoni: 10
virginianus, *Bubo*: 23
vociferus, *Charadrius*: 14, 18
Warbler, Grace's: 10
Woodpecker, Downy: 6
 Ladder-backed: 3
Wren, Cactus: 10
 Canyon: 3, 11, 12
Yellowlegs, Lesser: 15, 18
Zenaidura macroura: 19