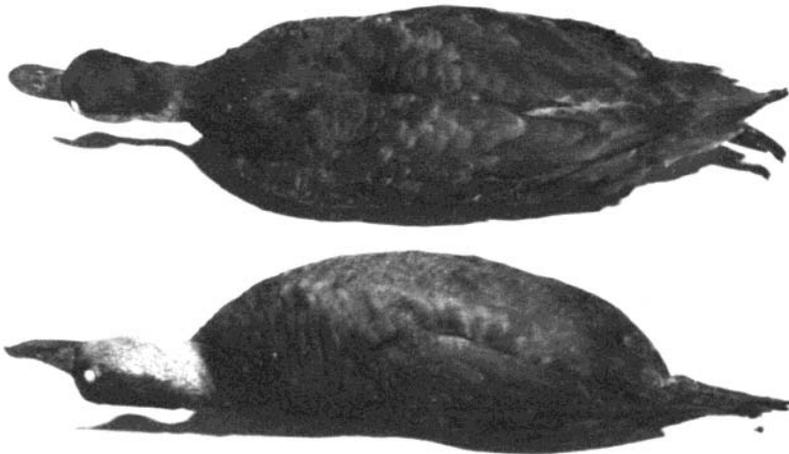


BLACK SCOTER: A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA

BY JACK CARDEN AND RANDY C. RUSHING

On 8 December 1985, while hunting ducks from a blind on the southeasternmost shore of Lake Ellsworth, 3 miles (5 km) west and 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Elgin, Comanche County, Oklahoma, the authors shot two unusual, darkly colored ducks as they banked in over their decoys. This twosome was in company with, but slightly below, a flock of about 15 Lesser Scaups (*Aythya affinis*). The day was mild and calm for late fall, and temperatures already had climbed to near 40°F by 7:30 a.m., when this incident took place.

We had avidly hunted Lake Ellsworth, as well as Lake Lawtonka, which lies 8 miles to the southwest, for the past 10 years or so, yet had never before encountered any duck of this description. Both birds were of the same sex and species. Their plumage was a non-uniform brownish-black, slightly darker across the dorsum, noticeably so on crown and nape. But this darkness sharply contrasted with the cheeks, sides of head and the throat, which were a dirty



BLACK SCOTERS

Fig. 1. Two adult hens shot 8 December 1985 at Lake Ellsworth, Comanche County, Oklahoma, by Jack Carden and Randy C. Rushing.

white, more-or-less suffused with brownish ticks and fine streaks (Fig. 1). We were surprised that the spread wing showed no white whatsoever. At a loss for a positive identification, but suspecting that the moot ducks were scoters of some sort, we froze them and contacted Jack D. Tyler at Cameron University in Lawton.

The two specimens (CUMZ 983, 985) were prepared by Tyler and deposited in the Cameron University Museum of Zoology. Both are adult female Black Scoters (*Melanitta nigra*), formerly called Common Scoters. The measurements (total length, wing, tail, tarsus, and culmen) of CUMZ 983, followed by those for CUMZ 985, are: 449, 447; 216, 225; 82, 75; 55, 57; and 40, 39 mm. Their respective weights were 785 and 815 g and neither was very fat.

These specimens represent the first authentication for this species in Oklahoma, although it is listed hypothetically for the state, i.e., there are a few unsubstantiated sight records (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 8). Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 82) lists the Black Scoter as a "transient and winter visitant" and cites five sightings as follows: 3 November, 1951, hen seen at Lake Yahola, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, Tulsa County, by O.W. and Ethel Letson (1952, Aud. Field Notes 6:25; Letson and Letson, 1952, Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci. 33:137); November 9, 10, 1963, John G. Newell and V. J. Vacin, Jr. saw one each date at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County (1964, Aud. Field Notes 18:50); three Black Scoters were allegedly shot by hunters from a fair-sized flock of ducks at a large Canadian County pond near Geary during the fall of 1948 (Harold S. Cooksey); 11 February, 1961, Sophia C. Mery observed a single bird near Bartlesville, Washington County (1961, Aud. Field Notes 15:342); and 2 March, same year, Lewis W. Oring saw a hen at Lake Hefner. Since 1963, the authors are aware of two other sight records: on 12 November, 1977, Rodney M. Kemper photographed an adult male (with yellow knob at base of bill) and three hens at Lake Lawtonka, but photos were unsatisfactory for proper documentation; three scoters, including at least one male with "big knob on bill and no white on wings," made a low pass over decoys in front of Jack Breathwit and Kenneth Cook at Lake Ellsworth on 22 November 1981 (both from Jack D. Tyler field notes).

The Black Scoter winters in North America "primarily on the Pacific coast . . . south to southern California and . . . on the Great Lakes, and on the Atlantic coast . . . south to South Carolina and Florida . . ." and is "casual throughout the interior of North America south to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and the Gulf coast" (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., pp. 90-91). In Oklahoma, the species should be carefully looked for on deep areas of the numerous large impoundments scattered over the state.

POSSIBLE COWBIRD PARASITISM OF YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT IN CIMARRON COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN S. SHACKFORD

On 25 June 1985, along the Cimarron River near the east end of the Black Mesa in northwest Cimarron County, Oklahoma, I found a young Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) and, 20 feet away, the nest of a Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) which contained two young chats and one infertile chat egg. I do not offer the following discussion as absolute proof that the chats raised the cowbird chick; perhaps the series of events which appeared to link them was merely coincidence.

About 1940 (CST) I heard the "chipping" of a young bird. Upon investigating, I found a flightless cowbird chick on the ground just outside a stand of salt cedar (*Tamarix gallica*) about 10 yards wide, which paralleled the Cimarron River bank. At first, I suspected that the cowbird's foster parents might be Northern (Bullock's) Orioles (*Icterus galbula bullockii*), for one was perched closeby. These orioles were common in the area, but I wanted to verify any instance of cowbird parasitism. Also, I had heard a chat and a Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*) singing nearby, so I decided to hold the chick briefly to see which species might actually respond with parental interest. Within minutes, two chats were "fussing" at me from as close as 10 feet away in the salt cedar thicket. They seemed to show much concern, particularly when the cowbird "chipped" or fluttered, but they kept their distance. However, I did hear additional "chipping" of young, and as I moved toward that spot, I saw one adult chat with food in its bill nearby. I soon found myself about eight feet away from a chat nest two feet high in a salt cedar tree six feet from the outer edge of the thicket. Growing to about the same height as the nest was a sparse stand of goldenrods (*Solidago* sp.). The nest, positioned between the slanted, maroon-colored trunk and several upright side limbs, and constructed of dead grasses, stood out from its dark surroundings. It held two young chats. Unlike the deep brownish scapular feathers that were accented with light edgings on the cowbird chick, the chat's backs were uniformly dark olive green. The streaked breast of the young cowbird was also distinctive and the baby chats appeared to be slightly smaller than the cowbird chick. After retrieving my camera and taking the first picture, one chick jumped from the nest and there, to my surprise, was an addled chat egg, white with several distinct brown spots of varying size, most numerous around the large end. It was much too small to be a cowbird egg. According to A. C. Bent (1953, Life histories of North American warblers, Pt. 2, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. 203:589, Wash., D.C.), clutch size for the chat varies from three to six eggs, but is normally five.

Although the chat has long been suspected of breeding in the Oklahoma Panhandle, this is the first nesting record there for this rather secretive species. The nearest known nest in Oklahoma was about 250 miles to the southeast in Caddo County: between 17-26 May, 1860, eight nests with eggs, two to four in number, were found in the Fort Cobb area by C. S. McCarthy (Nice, M. M.,

1931, *The birds of Oklahoma*, Rev. ed., Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv. 3(1):163). However, the species breeds in nearby New Mexico (Hubbard, J. P., 1978, Revised check-list of the birds of New Mexico, New Mexico Orn. Soc. Publ. No. 6, p. 78).

G. M. Sutton noted that "fledged cowbird attended by chats has not been reported" in Oklahoma, although he gives several records of cowbird eggs in chat nests (1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 522). Herbert Friedmann, a recognized authority on cowbirds, says that "in many parts of its range, the chat is said to desert its nest if a parasitic egg is laid in it," but "on a fair number of occasions, chats have hatched and reared cowbirds," often along with young chats. He adds further that there seems to be "a surprising variability of response (to cowbird eggs) on the part of the chat and that, in terms of present data, this variability appears to be local" (1963, *Host relations of the parasitic cowbirds*, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 233, Wash., D.C., pp. 121-122). But once young cowbirds are hatched the pattern is clear: "The adult host (of any species) reacts to the chick just as it would to its own young," and "acts, and seems, completely unaware of the substitution" (Friedmann, *op. cit.*, p. 31). Though I neither saw the cowbird chick in the chat nest nor observed it being fed directly by chats, I cannot help wondering why only the chats showed agitation at my presence if they were not the foster parents. The similarity in age between the chat and cowbird chicks, the short distance that the flightless cowbird was discovered from the chat nest (to my knowledge the only nest close by), and a below-normal clutch size for the chats all appear to lend further circumstantial weight to the strong possibility that the chats were the foster parents. Even the addled chat egg may be relevant, for as Harold Mayfield notes, "the host suffers from reduced hatching success of its own eggs" because (1) the cowbird egg, when it is larger than the host's "gets more than its share of the heat from the breast of the host" and (2) "when the cowbird egg hatches first, as it usually does, the host tends to slack off incubating even though its own eggs are still unhatched" (1977, *Amer. Birds* 31:108).

RT 1, BOX 125, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73111, 10 OCTOBER 1985.

GENERAL NOTES

Late fall sighting of Cinnamon Teal in Johnston County, Oklahoma.

—The Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) is usually seen migrating through western sections of Oklahoma from late summer (as early as 21 August) to as late as 1 December during the fall. In spring it has been recorded from 9 February to 22 May. Rarely does the species overwinter in Oklahoma, only four records being known, one each for Blaine (24 December), Payne (1 January), Oklahoma (15 January) and Caddo (31 January) counties. There is a strong probability that it has bred in the state (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, p. 7; Sutton, G. M. [1982] Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records [unpubl. files], Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman).

On the late fall date of 15 December 1984, Virgie Fly, Charlene Wood, Linda Van Riper and I watched a solitary male Cinnamon Teal loafing and feeding in Twin Pond on the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, Johnston County, south central Oklahoma. His unmistakable coppery color and small

size (compared to most other ducks) left no doubt as to his identity. The duck was too far away for me to take a recognizable photograph with my standard camera lens, but I could nevertheless see him quite clearly through my 7 x 50X binoculars. This sighting was reported to *American Birds* (1985, Vol. 39, p. 691), but details need to be on record. — Steve Van Riper, *Assistant Manager, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, Ajo, Arizona 85321, 24 January 1986.*

First nesting record of Gadwall in Oklahoma. — In the early evening of 1 August 1985, I observed a female Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) attending seven chicks with smoky-brown heads (about one-third grown) at the Boise City sewage ponds, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. The female was a non-descript mottled brown, and was difficult to identify at first. The gray and dull orange bill and gray tone of the brown plumage was noted, eliminating the Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*). She did not appear to have the petite head and neck of a female Northern Pintail (*A. acuta*). It was several minutes, however, before the white speculum could be clearly seen, confirming that she was a Gadwall. A male Gadwall was also observed on the pond, but not immediately near the female. He was indentified by his predominantly gray plumage, gray bill, and black tail coverts.

On 18 August 1985, I revisited the ponds, and found both the male and female Gadwalls with the young, now nearly full grown. The white specula were noted on both adults and a number of the young.

This represents the first reported nesting for the Gadwall in Oklahoma. A few late June and early July records are known from the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Alfalfa County (Sutton, G. M., 1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 63; Sutton, G. M. [1982], *Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records* [unpubl. files], Stovall Mus. Sci. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma). Fall arrivals (possibly summer vagrants) have been noted as early as 16 August 1968 and 1973 when many were seen at Webb's Lake near Hardesty, Texas County, by G. M. Sutton, W. A. Carter and J. D. Tyler, and on the Boise City sewage ponds, Cimarron County, by G. M. Sutton, W. A. Carter and J. Schenk, respectively, but not until 18 September in the main body of the state (Sutton [1982]). Lingering spring vagrants have been noted during early June in Alfalfa, Canadian, Osage and Roger Mills counties (Sutton [1982]).

The Gadwall has been known to breed south to southern New Mexico and northern Arizona (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, *Check-list of North American birds*, 6th ed., Allen Press, Lawrence, Kansas, p. 81), but not in recent times (Palmer, R. S., 1976, *Handbook of North American birds*, Vol. 2, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, p. 388). It is a locally rare (formerly uncommon to rare) summer resident in Texas, primarily the northwest region (Oberholser, H. C., 1974, *The bird life of Texas*, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, p. 159). Oberholser (1974) cites two breeding records of adults with young, one for Amarillo, Potter County, on 27 July 1945 (A. S. Hawkins), and the second in Dallas, Dallas County, on 4 July 1961 (Hazel Nichols and C. E. Kiblinger). M. G. McHenry (1965, *Nesting ducks of the Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Refuge*, Barton County, Kansas, M. S. Thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, p. 43) found it to be a fairly regular summer resident in limited numbers at Cheyenne

Bottoms, Kansas. I have noted a few Gadwalls regularly breeding in the Walden Lakes area, Jackson County, in north-central Colorado, during each summer visit from 1977-1986. — Joseph A. Grzybowski, 1701 Lenox, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 29 November 1986.

Unusually early spring sighting of Turkey Vulture in Comanche County, Oklahoma, and comments on arrival dates. — While we were playing basketball on an outdoor court in northeast Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, at about 1700 on 12 January 1986, we noticed a huge, dark bird slowly advancing from the south. For about three minutes, we intently watched as it approached, passed almost directly overhead, then gradually sailed northward out of view. At the time, the wind was from the north at 14-19 mph, temperature was 58°F, the atmosphere clear. When we first saw it, the bird was far off; still, we could tell that it was a raptor of some kind. As it neared, the deep dihedral angle of its wings and its moderately long tail made clear that the bird was a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*). Seldom flapping its wings, it drifted erratically while listing to and fro, gradually progressing into the wind. At the vulture's closest approach, a distance we estimated to be approximately 250-300 feet (90 m), the bird's naked red head and silvery primaries were visible.

Winter to date had been near normal in this part of Oklahoma. The average daily high temperature for December 1985 at nearby Fort Sill was 47.4°F, average low 25.9°F and the mean 36.7°F. Comparable normal averages (1939-85) for December are 53°, 32° and 42°F, respectively. For the first 12 days of January, usually the coldest month, the average high had been 50.3°F, low 25.6°F and mean 38.0°F (Fort Sill Weather Service records).

This sighting is exceptionally early for this part of Oklahoma. A total of 35 arrival dates recorded between 1938 and 1969 at the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge a few miles northwest of Lawton, and from 1970-1986 by Jack D. Tyler for the Lawton-Fort Sill area (a total of 52 years), indicate that the average earliest sighting was made on 2 March. The previous early date had been 31 January: on this date in 1962, refuge employee Edwin Drummond saw one at Mount Scott "during an unseasonable warm spell" (A. F. Halloran field notes). G. M. Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 9) gives dates of occurrence from 19 February to mid-December, but also mentions that many winter records exist, especially for southeastern counties. There are winter sightings for extreme northern Texas all along the Red River 50 miles south of the Wichita Refuge (Oberholser, H. C., 1974, The bird life of Texas, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, p. 201). — Jack D. Tyler, Department of Biology, Cameron University, and Jeff D. Tyler, 7709 SW Beta, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, 13 March 1986.

Mississippi Kite captures bat in mid-air. — In a neighbor's front yard near my home in Lawton, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, stands a huge old pecan tree (*Carya illinoensis*) where, night after night during August 1986, I watched nine Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) come to roost. At times I had observed them in pursuit of large airborne insects, usually cicadas (*Tibicen* sp.), in daylight hours.

At approximately 2030 on 30 August, I noticed a few small bats flying around the top of a second big pecan tree, this one located directly across the

street from my home. From the north side of the roost tree, a half-block to the west, a kite suddenly launched forth, circled east to south in a wide arc, then swiftly and unerringly "zeroed in" on one of the bats. Almost before I realized what was happening, the raptor had intercepted the bat from the side, seized it and flown to a nearby television antenna. As the kite bent down to eat the bat held in its talons, several pieces fell to the roof below. However, I was unable to retrieve them to ascertain the bat's identity. For about 15 minutes the kite dined on its unusual prey, then floated silently back through the gloaming to its roost tree.

Michael Waggener described an incident in which a Mississippi Kite struck a flying Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) above the Cameron University campus in Lawton on 29 July 1974 (1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 8:27). Waggener found the swift on the ground and it flew from his hand a few moments later, apparently unharmed. On 9 July 1986, Richard C. George and Richard T. DeVilbiss watched another kite at Cameron catch a Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) in flight, but released it after a few seconds; the smaller bird glided to the ground but was not found (in prep.). — Michael N. England, 1331 Ash Ave., Lawton, Oklahoma 73502, 1 January 1987.

An invasion of Northern Shrikes in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.— On 30 December 1984 the 23 observers conducting the Kenton-Black Mesa Christmas Bird Count in northwest Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, encountered a large concentration of Northern Shrikes (*Lanius excubitor*). Although 13 individual birds were tallied, the final figure reported was lowered to 10 to allow for possible duplication at the borders of the designated party areas. Separated into six parties, this large number of participants probably covered the area encompassed by the count circle as well or better than had ever before been possible. Greater than usual numbers of several other species, including nine Loggerhead Shrikes (*L. ludovicianus*), were also reported.

Amazingly, the first Northern Shrike of the day was not seen until noon when all six parties were eating lunch in Kenton. The first bird was discovered by several persons a mere 100 m northwest of the old general store. Those few not familiar with the species were shown the pertinent field marks. This first bird was a well-marked adult with the typical two-toned white and black plumage of the Northern Shrike, a thin eye-mask that did not meet on the forehead, and a noticeably hooked bill with pale yellow near the base of the lower mandible. When approached too closely, this shrike would fly approximately 5 to 10 m above the ground and land in the uppermost branches of small trees in typical shrike fashion.

After lunch, the parties left Kenton to cover their respective territories. My party (of five) encountered three different Northern Shrikes along the highway east of Kenton during mid-afternoon, the first only about 200 m east of town. Since this bird was an adult with distinct markings, it was assumed to be the same one seen earlier in Kenton. About 1 km east of town, however, we found another adult perched on a utility wire, one that was in somewhat less immaculate plumage, and obviously a different bird. After working along the Regnier Ranch road 4 km east of Kenton for an hour or so, our group returned to the Kenton highway, where we encountered a subadult Northern Shrike. Its

plumage was gray and its facial mask almost indistinct, but we did manage to detect yellow at the base of its lower mandible and saw that the upper mandible was strongly hooked.

While Northern Shrikes have been recorded on the Black Mesa Christmas Count before, the numbers we encountered were unprecedented for the state and would be considered unusually high anywhere on the High Plains. At the same time, evidence seems to point to the winter of 1984-85 as an invasion year for Northern Shrikes on the southern High Plains, an assumption that can be easily confirmed by a quick glance through the 85th Christmas Bird Count in American Birds (1985, Vol. 39, No. 4). In Colorado, the species was reported on 24 of the 29 published counts, with highs of 10 at Colorado Springs, Denver, and Rocky Mountain National Park. In all, 101 individuals were tallied in the state of Colorado, the largest total ever for a Christmas Bird Count in that state. In western Kansas, the Northern Shrike was recorded on only one count (published in the Kansas Orn. Soc. Bull. 36:17, 1985 but not in American Birds), but I saw several throughout the winter in west central Kansas. The high number of shrikes encountered at Kenton in late December was apparently but a small part of a regional phenomenon. — Scott Seltman, *Nekoma, Kansas 67559, 10 November 1986.*

FROM THE EDITOR.—Lester L. Short and associates from the American Museum of Natural History have verified rediscovery of at least one male and one female Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) in a remote area of eastern Cuba. In the July 1986 issue of Natural History magazine (95(7):26,28), Short relates how his party trudged to the site from the nearest town during early April 1986, and searched the north cut-over pine forest where the birds had been seen earlier by Cuban biologists. They did manage to get an occasional glimpse of the birds.

April is a breeding month, and Short is concerned by their failure to make typical courtship drumming noises. The Ivory-bills might have been found too late, for they may not now be breeding in this sub-optimal habitat.

Cuban authorities have agreed to try to save the species by following Short's recommendations, and their people are wholly sympathetic. Already, logging in the area has been curtailed. But the mountain range, which might have provided a refuge for the Ivorybills, was cut over by foreign companies (U.S.?) in the 1950's, resulting in soil erosion and poor shrub growth.

A correction should be made regarding the location of Oklahoma's first breeding record for the Eared Grebe. The June 1986 O.O.S. Bulletin (Vol. 19, pp. 9-11), gave it as Hajek Marsh, a place located a mile west and 3½ miles south of Lacey in northwestern Kingfisher County. However, the actual site was not Hajek Marsh, but a marshy spot in southwestern Garfield County, 4¾ miles south and 2¼ west of Drummond (NE ¼ Sect. 8, T20N, R8W). — Jack D. Tyler.

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