

GREAT KISKADEE IN ROGER MILLS COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY WARREN M. PULICH

The occurrence of the Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) is unexpected in Oklahoma. The following account and photo document the first valid record for the state and represent an extralimital range extension northward of about 425 miles.

On 25 and 26 November 1983, Dr. Ronald J. Hill, a physician from Odessa, Texas, visited the Black Kettle National Grasslands in Roger Mills County, west central Oklahoma. He spent both days in the Turkey Creek drainage about 6 miles southwest of the village of Crawford, or 3 miles west of Spring Creek Lake. The creek bed here wound through a grove of Eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) to a spring encircled by willows (*Salix* sp.), and emptied into a small lake less than a hundred yards away. The oak (*Quercus* sp.) thickets that dotted the low surrounding hills were alive with several species of wintering birds.

At approximately 1100, he noticed a bird of medium size perched low on a willow branch above the little creek. The bird's head was unusually large, but what had first caught Hill's eye was the brightness of its yellow breast. Closer scrutiny revealed that the head was striped black and white. When it took



GREAT KISKADEE

Two views of bird discovered and photographed in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, on 25 November 1983 by Ronald J. Hill. Note contrasting stripes on large head. The white throat, bright yellow belly, and heavy body proportions can also be seen.

flight, Hill noticed flashes of rusty brown in the bird's wings and tail. It was not overly shy, allowing the observer to approach to within 25 or 30 feet for photographs. Occasionally, the bird emitted a low whistle. It eventually flew down the creek about 75 feet, and again perched over the water. Here it began to "hawk" for insects in typical flycatcher fashion. Dr. Hill studied this unusual bird for about 45 minutes that day.

Next day, Dr. Hill, his wife Olivia, and their daughter found the Great Kiskadee where it had been the previous day. After carefully studying this bird once more, all three agreed upon its identification. They further noted that it behaved normally and did not appear to be incapacitated in any way.

The two slides kindly sent me by Dr. Hill clearly show the typical color, form and size of the species (see cover photo). These have been deposited in the files of the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee (OBRC), and establish this species on the official list of Oklahoma birds.

There is an unpublished sight record from Tulsa in northeastern Oklahoma. Mr. and Mrs. John O. Kremer reported that they observed a Great Kiskadee in a dense riparian woodland approximately a mile from the Arkansas River on 5 May 1972. They leisurely watched it for five to eight minutes under ideal light conditions from approximately 45 feet away. So confident were they in their identification that they telephoned Dr. George M. Sutton at the University of Oklahoma several days later. He admitted that he had no idea what other species it could have been, based on the detailed description given by the Kremers (letter in OBRC files).

The Great Kiskadee normally ranges south through Mexico to central Argentina (1983, A.O.U. Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., p. 467). In the United States, it is a locally common resident of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, occurring regularly northwestward along the Rio Grande River to the vicinity of Laredo in Webb County. Occasionally, it has been reported west to Val Verde County and north to Jim Wells County (Arnold, K.A., 1984, Checklist of the birds of Texas, Texas Ornithol. Soc., p. 80). There is one unconfirmed sighting for Big Bend National Park in Brewster County (Wauer, R.H., 1973, Birds of Big Bend National Park and vicinity, Univ. Texas, Austin, p. 207). Along the Gulf Coast, the species ranges northeastward to Nueces, Aransas and Chambers counties (Arnold, K.A., 1984, *loc. cit.*).

The record farthest inland for Texas was in San Marcos, about 30 miles south of Austin, where two kiskadees appeared on 14 and 15 January 1987. These were joined by a third bird on the 17th; all were seen and well photographed until 9 February (Williams, F., 1987, Amer. Birds 41:302). This locality is more than 400 miles south of Roger Mills County, Oklahoma.

George M. Sutton (1951, Mexican birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 44) pointed out that, although he observed Kiskadee Flycatchers in Mexico that spent considerable time along streams where insects appeared to be plentiful, these birds frequently caught minnows from low perches above water. It is possible that the species' propensity for fishing is more strongly developed than generally recognized. This habit could help to explain the Great Kiskadee's presence in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, in late fall.

I wish to thank Dr. Ronald J. Hill for allowing me to draw freely from his field notes and to present his slides to the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee. Dr. Jack D. Tyler gratefully provided me the data on the Tulsa sighting, and Greg Lasley of Austin alerted me to the San Marcos records.

BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS, IRVING, TEXAS 75060, 19 FEBRUARY 1988.

A PILEATED WOODPECKER NEST IN WOODWARD COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY STACI AND RANDALL HOBGET

During the warm midafternoon of 15 May 1987, as we were making camp at Boiling Springs State Park near Woodward, Woodward County, northwestern Oklahoma, we heard a dull *tap-tap-tap* coming from a damp, low-lying wooded area behind our tent. Upon investigation, we saw an adult male Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) clinging to the shaded eastern side of a towering cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*). The old tree, perhaps 65 feet tall, and long since dead, was devoid of bark on its upper trunk and branches. Other species making up these moist woods, part of the lush riparian habitat in the valley of the North Canadian River, included predominantly American elm (*Ulmus americana*), but also some Eastern red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), soapberries (*Sapindus drummondii*), walnuts (*Juglans* sp.), buckbrush (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). A well-shaded pool lay approximately 60 yards north of the big cottonwood.

Dissecting the woodland, and affording us a closer view of the woodpecker, was a hiking trail from which we noticed several oblong cavities in the western side of the cottonwood. After watching us for several moments, the bird edged around the trunk and stationed himself at one of these holes, about 35 feet above ground level. As he made this move, we became aware of activity within the nesting cavity, and suddenly realized that what we were seeing there were the sharp little bills of at least two Pileated nestlings. Soon we could see protruding from the nest hole the heads of two young woodpeckers about ready to fledge. Their crest feathers were pinkish instead of brilliant red as in the adult, and we could see some downy feathers among them.

This woodpecker quickly fed the chicks, then flew away. Soon, the adult female, with darker head lacking the red "whiskers" of the male, put in an appearance. She seemed unconcerned about our proximity, less than 30 feet from the base of the tree, and tended to the chicks without delay. She joined them inside the cavity for a very brief time, then emerged with what we believed to be a fecal sac in her bill.

Because we were attending the spring field meeting of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, many expert birders shared our sighting. First on the scene was John G. Newell, who told us that this represented the most westerly breeding record of the Pileated Woodpecker for Oklahoma. Adult birds had previously been seen in the park during winter (Powders, V., 1986, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 19:27-28).

For the next two days, the nest was studied and frequently photographed by numerous OOS members. Some felt that they might have seen three heads protruding from the cavity. Our photographs confirm only two, and we wonder if the third head might have been that of the female. Normal clutch size in this species is three to five (Reilly, E.M. Jr., 1968, The Audubon illustrated handbook of American birds, McGraw-Hill, N.Y., p. 272).

The chicks were fed every 30 to 40 minutes alternately by the parents, but we never saw both adults at the nest hole simultaneously. Several times we observed the male foraging, often low to the ground, on the trunks of larger trees nearby. Although the chicks became quite vociferous when the adults approached the nest, not once did we hear either of the old birds vocalize.

The nest tree protruded far above the surrounding woods and was popular with several other birds. Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), that were nesting at several other locations in the park, used the uppermost branches as a roost, and a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) had a nest cavity in an upper fork of the tree.

Pileated Woodpeckers, fairly common to eastern Oklahoma, become increasingly rare westward, where mature hardwood forests are confined to riparian situations. The western limit of range is more-or-less delineated by records from Alfalfa, Major, Canadian, Caddo, Comanche, and Jefferson counties (Sutton, G.M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 23). The westernmost breeding record heretofore was in northeast Stephens County, 165 miles to the southeast (McGee, L.E., and F. Neeld, 1972, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 5:5-7). Our findings extend the nesting range in Oklahoma westward about 100 miles.

7664 S. RACE ST., LITTLETON, COLORADO 80122, 14 SEPTEMBER 1987.

GENERAL NOTES

First Northern Harrier nest in southwestern Oklahoma. — At approximately 0830 on 14 April 1986, Craig Bitler and I discovered the nest of a Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) from a helicopter in which we were searching for coyotes over Fort Sill's East Range. The nest, located about 9 miles northeast of the main post office, contained four white eggs, but we saw no adult near it at the time, nor when we returned a few minutes later. The nest lay only about 75 yards north of a heavily used blacktop road, but was otherwise encompassed by mature mixedgrass prairie. It was situated on the open, east-facing side of a gentle slope, fairly well hidden amid leadplants (*Amarpha fruticosa*) two to three feet tall, numerous milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.) and little bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) that averaged about a foot high. Scattered dead stalks of big bluestem grass (*Andropogon gerardii*) three feet high, and a few other forbs we also noted around the site. The nest itself was a flattened mat of dried grasses and grass stems possibly two feet across. Some 40 yards east of it, a few small cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) and black willows (*Salix nigra*) lined a little ravine.

On 31 May, Sam Orr, Art Breaden and I returned to the nest. We found there two hatchlings a few days old, and three eggs in the nest. Clutch size is usually five, but varies from three to nine, with incubation lasting about 31 days (Reilly, E.M., Jr., 1968, *The Audubon illustrated handbook of American birds*, McGraw-Hill, N.Y., p. 106). Both adult birds circled overhead, calling loudly. We took photographs of the nest and departed soon thereafter. One picture on file at the Cameron University Museum of Zoology in Lawton (CUMZ 980) shows both nestlings and one of the eggs.

Once again, on 17 June, Orr, Breaden and I revisited the harrier nest between 1700 and 1745, this time in company with Breaden's son Wally and Jack D. Tyler from Cameron University. Both parent birds scolded us as they wheeled above the nest. There were now four young hawks in and near the nest: two females with dark brown eyes, a male with grayish-brown eyes, and another of uncertain sex (Clark W.S., and B.K. Wheeler, 1987, *A field guide to hawks of North America*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston). The latter was one of two older chicks. The younger two, considerably smaller, were still mostly covered with whitish down. The infertile egg (CUMZ 1011) was collected.

Tyler (1979, *Birds of southwestern Oklahoma*, Contrib. Stovall Mus., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 18) mentioned six summer sightings for the southwestern counties, but stated that no breeding record was known. The species is very common in winter, however, and great numbers roost in the mature grasslands of Fort Sill's East Range. — Toni Montaperto, *DEH, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Fort Sill, Oklahoma 73503, 15 September 1987*.

Juvenile Whooping Crane winters in western Oklahoma. — Unpublished files of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicate that observations of Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) in the western half of Oklahoma have occurred sporadically during fall and spring migration for many years. In recent years, sightings have increased as the numbers of both Whooping Cranes and observers have grown. No midwinter record of Whooping Cranes exists for Oklahoma, although they have been seen as late as 26 December (Sutton, G.M., 1974, *A check-list of Oklahoma birds*, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 12).

During the last week of January 1987, Oklahoma game ranger Gary Roller received a telephone call from Melvin Shantz, a farmer northwest of Hydro, Caddo County, Oklahoma, relating that he had recently observed a white bird fitting the general description of a Whooping Crane. He said that numerous Sandhill Cranes (*G. canadensis*) had been in his area since before Thanksgiving, but that he had only recently noticed the white bird. As refuge manager of the nearby Washita National Wildlife Refuge, I communicated frequently with Roller, and during that same week he told me about this report. I immediately enlisted the help of fellow refuge employee David Hollingsworth to attempt verification. We were both experienced with Whooping Cranes. I had served five years as assistant refuge manager of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in coastal Texas where they winter, and Hollingsworth was also a former employee there. In fact, he had been a member of the 1983 radiotelemetry team

that followed a Whooping Crane family by air from Aransas to Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta, Canada, where the species breeds.

At midday on 30 January 1987, Hollingsworth and I spotted a Whooping Crane feeding with about 200-300 Sandhill Cranes in a winter wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) field approximately 9 miles northwest of Hydro in extreme eastern Custer County, Oklahoma. We observed the bird for approximately 20 minutes through a variable power (20-60X) spotting scope and binoculars at a distance of about 200-250 yards. It was definitely a juvenile bird with some rusty coloration on the neck and scapular area. It also wore colored leg bands (left leg: white over black over white, right leg: orange over silver).

After returning to refuge headquarters, I telephoned Tom Stehn, refuge biologist at Aransas, and he gave me the following facts about the bird we had just observed: (a) it was a female (band number 86-21), as determined by the biologists who banded her as a fledgling; (b) she was the smallest and apparently the youngest of 21 chicks banded at Wood Buffalo Park during the summer of 1986; (c) she was the first offspring of a newly-established pair of Whooping Cranes of which the male was only three years old; and (d) her parents, first noted near Aransas on 18 November 1986, spent most of that winter on San Jose Island adjacent to the refuge.

I established regular telephone contact with Melvin Shantz who, along with several of his neighbors, was very cooperative in keeping me informed about sightings of #86-21. Several avid birders, including Ina Brown of Elk City and Judy Bandy, on the Washita Refuge staff, were instrumental in locating this bird during the period 31 January-8 February 1987.

Various sightings indicated that #86-21 mingled with an estimated 1,000 Sandhill Cranes that fed in the fields of winter wheat, harvested grain sorghum (*Sorghum spp.*) and harvested peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) in the general area straddling the Custer-Blaine County line south of the Canadian River. This vicinity lies approximately 6-10 miles northwest of Hydro, Oklahoma. Presumably, she roosted with the Sandhill Cranes in the sandbar and shallow water habitat of the Canadian River, although no roost observations were made. This area is a relatively quiet farming community with little hunting pressure for waterfowl or Sandhill Cranes, and the lack of major roads also minimizes human disturbance.

On the morning of 9 February 1987, a local citizen reported seeing a "white crane" with Sandhill Cranes in a sorghum field near Putnam, in Dewey County, Oklahoma, about 25 miles northwest of the Shantz farm. On 10 February, personnel of the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, in south central Kansas, observed #86-21 with several Sandhill Cranes not far from the refuge. This location, near Stafford, Kansas, is 170-180 miles north of the Shantz farm. On 15 February, Shantz saw #86-21 back near his farm and Hollingsworth photographed her in that vicinity on 21 February. Shantz last observed #86-21 on 11 March. On 17 March, USFWS employees sighted #86-21 along the Platte River near Kearney in south central Nebraska (pers. comm., James C. Lewis). Canadian Wildlife Service workers identified her not far from her hatching site in Wood Buffalo Park in the early summer of 1987, and again several times in mid and late summer near Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. This site is

about 200 miles north of her natal area and directly across Great Slave Lake (pers. comm., Tom Stehn).

An interesting postscript to this wintering incident is provided by the files at the Aransas Refuge (pers. comm., Tom Stehn). Whooping Crane #86-21 also failed to arrive at Aransas during its second winter (1987-88), spending the winter in the company of Sandhill Cranes in the vicinity of Edna, Texas, 50-60 miles north of the Aransas Refuge. On 14 March 1988, Melvin Shantz reported that "his" crane was back within 3 miles of his house in western Oklahoma, and USFWS employee Jon Brock confirmed that #86-21 was indeed there on 15 March 1988. Later in the month she was again seen along the Platte River near Kearney, Nebraska.

Kenneth O. Butts, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103-1306, 16 May 1988.*

A Blue-winged Warbler nest in Delaware County, Oklahoma. — On 1 June 1987, W. E. Miller of Tucson, Arizona, discovered a Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) and its nest containing four eggs near Brush Creek, about 3 miles south of Jay in Delaware County, Oklahoma. The eggs may well have been eaten by some predator later that day, for on 2 June, Miller led my wife Marguerite and me to the nest, which was now empty. It was collected and added to the Little Lewis Whirlwind School collection. Although no Blue-wings were seen or heard that morning, I heard the species sing intermittently on 4 June from the edge of the creek. That same day, Miller located an adult at the margin of a mature lowland forest approximately one-third mile from the nest site. A male sang in this same area on 6 June.

Habitat surrounding this nest consisted of a fairly dense bottomland woods of American elm (*Ulmus americana*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), and box elder (*Acer negundo*). The understory was dominated by scattered bushes, especially buckbrush (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), saplings of Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) and other trees, and wild grape vines (*Vitis* spp.). The nest was a deep cup on the ground, well concealed by dead leaves that covered the sides and arched partially over the top. A short entryway three or four inches long led into the cup.

Breeding records for the Blue-winged Warbler in Oklahoma are very limited and several are inconclusive. Woodhouse (1853, *Birds, in Report of an expedition down the Zuni and Colorado rivers by Capt. L. Sitgreaves, Wash., D.C., p. 72*) listed this species as "Common in the Indian territory. In the latter country it breeds." A. J. B. Kirn found it to be rare near Copan in Washington County, listing the dates of 26 and 27 April 1916 and 5 and 25 May 1917, but nests were not located (Nice, M.M., 1931, *The birds of Oklahoma, Rev. ed., Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv. No. 1, p. 156*).

In the Tulsa vicinity, the Blue-winged Warbler was believed to have nested in the 1930's (Force, E.R., and W. Hughes, 1940, *Time table of birds in Tulsa County, Oklahoma and vicinity, Tulsa Aud. Soc., p. 4*); it was also seen in 1950 from 22 May to 27 August (S. C. Mery). J. D. Ligon observed two birds 6 miles west of Westville, Adair County, in August, 1960. These birds were in "high

weeds near a road" and a "weedy pasture, covered in spots with brambles" (Sutton, G.M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 493). Despite the fact that this species has been reported occasionally from a number of localities throughout much of northeastern Oklahoma, recent nesting records have been confined to a few places near the Spavinaw Lakes in Delaware County. On 14 July 1951, J. L. Norman and I located a pair of scolding adult Blue-winged Warblers attending at least two young birds that were calling for food. They were in an abandoned field grown up to blackberries (*Rubus* spp.), mixed saplings and rank grasses and weeds near Spavinaw Creek above the head of Spavinaw Lake. On 22 May 1955 Norman found a nest in this same locality that contained three large young. On 16 June he photographed a fledgling nearby (Sutton, 1967, *loc. cit.*).

It is hoped that an intensive effort will be made to locate additional nesting Blue-winged Warblers in Oklahoma. Environs of recently built reservoirs in northeastern Oklahoma, such as Copan Reservoir in Washington County, should develop suitable habitats for this species. Areas near the head of Spavinaw Lake should also be investigated again. — Frederick M. Baumgartner, *Little Lewis Whirlwind Nature Center, Route 2, Box 51A, Jay, Oklahoma 74346, 21 April 1988.*

FROM THE EDITOR: The Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society invites contribution of notes and longer papers concerning the status, distribution, behavior, ecology, and historical aspects of the avifauna of Oklahoma and its contiguous regions. Lead papers require a black-and-white glossy photograph of the subject, preferably 5 x 7 inches. Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate, typed on good quality paper. Depending on the quality and quantity of material at hand, each issue is kept seasonal insofar as possible. General notes are arranged in phylogenetic sequence and an attempt is made to represent as many bird families as possible. To maintain balance further, geographic spread of subject matter and of authorship is sought. Thus a manuscript may be used if it (1) is seasonal, (2) pertains to a bird family or an area for which little or no other material is available, and (3) is authored by a person (or persons) not already represented in that particular issue. Preference naturally is given to members of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society.

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