

SOME CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT AUDUBON'S ARTWORK

BY GEORGE M. SUTTON

When, sixty years ago, I wrote Louis Agassiz Fuertes about my eagerness to draw birds well, I made a disparaging comment or two about Audubon. I do not recall my exact words. I was trying to say not that Audubon was hopelessly bad, but that Fuertes was extremely good, and I meant what I said. Today I feel that comparing the two men is pointless, if not in poor taste. Audubon was a towering genius. So, too, was Fuertes.

It is easy to find shortcomings in Audubon. His Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), Yellow-billed (or White-tailed) Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*), and Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*), all plantigrade species, are standing on their toes. His Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), though beautifully drawn, is pure fantasy: the great bird, headed upward with mouth open, wings partly spread, and foot clutching prey, dangles midair; it isn't even falling; there is no evidence of air pressure from any direction on its feathers. One of Audubon's Varied Thrushes (*Ixoreus naevius*) is so scrambled that its right leg, which should be on the far side of its body, appears to be on the near side. Grotesqueries of this sort validate to some extent W. B. Alexander's query, published in *Endeavor* some years ago, whether Audubon's representation of attitudes that "birds could not maintain long enough to be visible to the human eye" was not a "form of caricature" rather than "legitimate art."

Birds do assume strange attitudes now and then. A performing male Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), with wings flopping and legs dangling, is funny. No other word describes him quite so well, and Audubon was no caricaturist when he delineated the bird as he did. Displaying bustards, birds-of-paradise, storks, and boobies become ludicrous, almost monstrous. Even a cock Northern



UPLAND SANDPIPERS

Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), strutting with body plumage lifted and tail spread wide, is something of a troll, obliging the thoughtful observer to wonder what the creature will turn into next.

These two photographs of one of the New World's finest shorebirds, the Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*), prove (to my way of thinking) that Audubon could have been much wilder than he was in his depictions and still have been quite within the bounds of accuracy. The pictures were taken on 1 August 1974 at close range near a dirt road along the shoreline of Lake Hefner in central Oklahoma by John S. Shackford of Oklahoma City. What bird artist of today would dare to draw *Bartramia longicauda* in any of the three quaint "attitudes" shown here?

818 WEST BROOKS, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069 (DECEASED).

GENERAL NOTES

First Texas Panhandle record for Garganey. — While studying birds along the Canadian River approximately 3 miles below Lake Meredith's Sanford Dam in Hutchinson County, Texas, about 1530 on 22 November 1985, I noticed a strange duck among a group of Buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*) loitering about on a small pond. The crown of its grayish head appeared to be somewhat flattened, and a conspicuous white stripe tapered posteriorly from just above the bill rearward along the upper sides of the head to the nape. Before 1645, I saw it twice more, once on a cattail-choked pond near the dam and later on the stilling basin below it. The openness of the stilling basin permitted me to view the duck for several moments through my 64 × Questar telescope. There could be no mistaking the identification; it was an adult male Garganey (*Anas querquedula*).

By the time I reached other observers in Amarillo by telephone, it was nearly dark. The next morning, however, several of us searched unsuccessfully for the Garganey. Ironically, this happened to be the first day of duck season and the very rare anatid was not subsequently seen.

The possibility that this duck had escaped from captivity cannot be ruled out, of course, but several North American sightings of this Old World species have been made in recent years (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Checklist of North American birds, 6th ed., p. 78). The first Texas record was on 11 April 1985 when Andrew O'Neil discovered an adult male at a small pond near Riviera in Kleberg County, far south Texas; it remained until 17 May (see photo on p. 323 of Amer. Birds, Vol. 39, 1985). There are two records for Oklahoma, both west central, the first on 2 May 1979 in Roger Mills County (Ross, R., 1982, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 15:7), the second for Custer County on 15 May 1981 (Klett, E., 1982, Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 15:9-10). Both of these birds were drakes. Similarly, the first Kansas sightings were made in recent years. A single male visited Harvey County on 29 March 1981, and another that was well photographed in Sumner County remained from 21 April until 1 May 1982 (Thompson, M.C., W. Champeny, and J. Newton, 1983, Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Bull. 34:29-30). The present account represents the first record for the vast Panhandle of Texas and was reported in Amer. Birds 40:135, 1986. — Fern Cain, 406 W. Grand, Borger, Texas 79007, 28 July 1986.

Unusual concentration of Caspian Terns in Oklahoma City. — The weekend of 5-7 September 1986 was remarkable for the number and variety of rare birds which visited Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. Several species of charadriiform birds not often observed anywhere in Oklahoma were viewed by numerous competent observers.

At about 1100 on the morning of 5 September, three jaegers (thought by several experienced birders to be Parasitic Jaegers, *Stercorarius parasiticus*) were seen flying across the lake by John and Diane Newell and me. We watched in amazement as one of them pursued, captured, then leisurely devoured a Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). Later in the day, at about 1700, Jeff Webster and I sighted two Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*) near Gun Club Point, a promontory along the northeast shore of the lake.

The next day dawned gray and rainy. That afternoon, Webster and I found the jaegers again and John S. Shackford and Joseph A. Grzybowski also managed to see them later in the day. Shackford, too, was fortunate to witness one jaeger pursue and twice strike another swallow, knocking it to water. Then the larger bird descended to eat its prey while floating on the lake.

A cold front had just passed through the area on 7 September, bringing blustery cold and increased cloudiness. Several persons searched at length that day for the jaegers without success. I looked too, but saw little of interest except for a flock of Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*) numbering about 20. They had congregated at Prairie Dog Point, a spot at the southwest corner of the lake, during the late afternoon. At about 1900, I resolved to check the lake one last time before darkness descended. Driving directly to Gun Club Point, I was astonished to find an even larger concentration of Caspian Terns than I had seen earlier. I carefully counted at least 44 birds. Whether any of the terns which I had previously noted at Prairie Dog Point were present in this flock I cannot say. Also present at Gun Club Point was an adult Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), a species which usually does not appear at Lake Hefner until November.

I returned to the lake the following day, but most of the Caspian Terns had apparently departed during the night. However, I did discover two Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and one Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) at Prairie Dog Point.

Heretofore, the greatest number of Caspian Terns recorded in Oklahoma during fall migration was 18, seen 23 September 1969 by Anne and Bruce Reynolds, Polly Keating and Eleanor Sieg at Lake Yahola in Tulsa's Mohawk Park (Sutton, G.M., [1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). In spring, however, a flock of 32 seen by Carl D. Riggs at Lake Texoma in Marshall County on 10 May 1953 is the largest known (Sutton, [1982], *op. cit.*).—Mitchell Oliphant, 3116 N. Virginia, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73118, 15 March 1988.

Lewis' Woodpecker in Logan County, Oklahoma. — On 24 May 1987, I was told that a Lewis' Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) had been found that day at the residence of Joe and Marianne Ammann who live in Guthrie, Logan

County, Oklahoma. Their property in on Seward Road, about a mile west of Interstate Highway 35.

That next morning, I drove to Guthrie. The day was sunny, with a temperature of 64°F and a south wind of 10-15 mph. I was anxious to see this woodpecker, for I had frequently searched for it without success in the Black Mesa country at the western end of the Oklahoma Panhandle.

The Ammanns told me that the bird had been visiting their backyard, where they had erected several bird feeders. Widely separated houses that were more-or-less surrounded by scattered woodlands characterized their neighborhood. Oaks (*Quercus* spp.), American elms (*Ulmus americana*) and Eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) were common. One open area had formerly been part of a pear (*Pyrus communis*) orchard, and a few of the old trees were still standing. As we stood there, the Lewis' Woodpecker flew in, perched in a pear tree, and began pecking vigorously at the trunk. After a few minutes, it extracted and ate a white insect larvae approximately 2 cm in length.

This bird was probably an adult male as evidenced by its whitish-gray collar, gray breast, reddish-pink belly, and blackish back and wings. It was rather tame. I took several photos, but none was satisfactory for reproduction. Mrs. Ammann later informed me that the bird remained in the yard for two more days but was not seen again after 27 May.

The species irregularly breeds in Cimarron County, but elsewhere in Oklahoma there are few records for *Melanerpes lewis*. It was reported from Tulsa County in 1922, Adair County in 1943, Canadian County in 1954, Caddo County in 1956, Bryan County in 1960, Stephens County in 1973-74, and Comanche County in 1984 (Sutton, G.M., [1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman) and 1988. The last Comanche County sighting was made by Sam Orr during the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count of 8 January 1988 (pers. comm., Jack D. Tyler). However, this note represents the first record for Logan County. — Hubert R. Harris, 4907 North Willow, Bethany, Oklahoma 73008, 29 February 1988.

An albino hummingbird in Cleveland County, Oklahoma. — From 10 August to 7 September 1987, a partially albinistic hummingbird came to a feeder in my yard in Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma. During the course of one of these days, the tiny white hummer returned to feed 34 different times. Several persons made photographs of it. One of the best of these, taken by Pat Garrison of Norman, was published in the Norman Transcript.

This bird was noticeably larger than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) that sometimes accompanied it at the feeder and its plumage was not entirely white. When the bird perched I could see washes of tan on its wings and scapular areas, and the tips of some body feathers appeared to be tipped with buff. In addition, the middle rectrices showed some dark markings and the eyes and bill were jet black.

Bob E. and Jean Ragsdale, who live at 1537 Leslie Lane, also saw the

white hummingbird when it visited a feeder in their yard. Their house is approximately a quarter mile east of mine.

Albinism is more common among some families of birds than others. Gross (1965, *Bird-Banding* 36:67-71), listed only four species of hummingbirds for which albinism was known among 54 avian families and 1847 individuals. — William (Sam) Bass, 708 S. McGee St., Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 20 April 1988.

Rufous Hummingbird in Greer County, Oklahoma. — As I watched a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) at a feeder in my yard at Quartz Mountain State Park headquarters on the afternoon of 13 July 1987, I witnessed another hummingbird, unfamiliar to me, suddenly swoop in and chase it away. Quartz Mountain State Park encompasses Lake Altus and its surrounding peaks, ridges and boulder-piles of granite. The headquarters area is located 6 miles southeast of Granite in Greer County, southwestern Oklahoma, and the dense stands of oaks (*Quercus* spp.), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), hackberry (*Celtis reticulata*) and other native trees that fringe the bouldery uplands provide considerable shade to this area of the park.

My attention became focused on the strange bird by the bizarre whirring sound its wings produced. After several minutes, it returned to my yard, making several tentative approaches before it landed on the feeder. Because it remained in shadow, I had difficulty discerning colors, but could see that it sported a white bib on the chest, and that its belly and sides were dark.

After it had taken its fill, the unusual hummingbird retired to the lower limb of a nearby live oak (*Q. virginiana*). A second hummingbird attempting to feed shortly thereafter was immediately routed, and a spirited chase ensued. As the two swiftly twisted and turned across the yard, I noticed the bright rusty-orange back of the aggressive hummer. Afterwards, it returned to its perch in the oak, where I had a fine look at it in good light. Several additional diagnostic field marks were evident including the metallic copper gorget, buffy underparts and the dark tips of the tail feathers. This bird was a male Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*). Although it remained in the yard for several hours, alternately feeding from and defending the feeder from other hummingbirds, I never saw it again after 13 July.

This western species is a rare transient through Oklahoma. Scattered across the state are sight or specimen records for 12 counties, but in the southwest, sightings are known only from Beckham and Comanche counties (Wood, D.S., and G.D. Schnell, 1984, *Distributions of Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 88). McGee (1983, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 16:14-15) summarized records for Comanche County. Oklahoma records span the period from early in July almost to February, but virtually all are of late summer or fall migrants. — Victoria Mason, *Naturalist, Quartz Mountain State Park, Rt. 1, Box 40, Lone Wolf, Oklahoma 73655, 25 July 1987.*

Another Rufous Hummingbird record for Comanche County, Oklahoma. — From mid-April to mid-October, summer after summer, several Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) and probably a few Black-chinned Hummingbirds (*A. alexandri*) have visited the feeders in my yard in Moun-

tain Village near Meers, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma. In 1981, however, three hummingbirds that were neither Rubythroats nor Blackchins visited the feeders often enough to give me a good look at them. Each was strongly buffy on the sides and each had bright reddish brown on the tail and lower back. All three were, I believe, Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*).

The first of the three I saw at 0800 on 8 August. It was probably an adult female. Its sides were so bright they were almost rufous. The outer three pairs of tail feathers were rufous on the basal third, white at the tip, with black between white and rufous.

The following day (9 August) I saw this same bird again and also what was probably an adult male, the latter with bright orange gorget, buffy sides, green back, rufous nape, lower back and tail, but no white on the outer tail feathers. On 16 August, at 0800 and 1130, a bird at the feeders that looked much like this same male, for its gorget was bright orange, must have been subadult for its outer tail feathers were white-tipped. It was very pugnacious, fighting off every Rubythroat that came near the feeders.

On 22 August at 0800 I saw the female bird again. On 1 and 2 September the only Rufous Hummingbird that I saw was an adult male (no white in tail). I saw it well at 1600 and 1900 on 1 September. Rubythroats continued to visit the feeders in considerable numbers from that date on to mid-October.

I tried to photograph each of the Rufous Hummingbirds, but my efforts were unsuccessful. — Tina Kranenburg, 8 Sequoyah Drive, Mountain Village, Meers, Oklahoma 73558, 8 December 1981.

Possible Phainopepla sighting at Black Mesa State Park, Cimarron County, Oklahoma.—On the morning of 18 August 1987, I was observing birds in Black Mesa State Park, about 10 miles southeast of Kenton, Oklahoma, between 0630 and 1000. At 0900, as I stood at the boat-landing ramp on the south shore of Lake Carl Etling, watching an adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) being harried by Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) overhead, another bird flying by caught my attention. Using my 8×40 binocular, I followed it as it flew 100-150 yards westward across a narrow neck of the lake toward the group camp on the west side. There I lost sight of it behind one of the cabins. The bird appeared to be all black, except for white in the outer portion of each wing that flashed with every beat. There was also a noticeable irregularity of wingbeat as the bird struggled across a 20-25 mph northwest wind.

The bird in question seemed to be the size of a Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*), but its darkness and distinctly slender shape of body and tail were more suggestive of a male Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*). Although my prior experience with the Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*) was limited to a brief encounter with a pair in Nevada 20 years before, this was the first identification that came to mind because of the distinctive white wing patches in the otherwise all-black bird. I hurriedly drove around to the west side of Lake Etling, entered the group camp and searched in vain for the bird along the steep brushy slope of rocks rising behind the cabins. At one point, an unfamiliar callnote was heard twice from a thicket, but I could not discern the source. I considered that it might have come from a Brown Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*), as several were

skulking about that area. After searching northward along the slope for 30 minutes, then returning to my beginning point, I spotted a bird in flight that might have been the one seen earlier, but never saw it well before it flew northward out of sight. Upon returning to my car, I listened to calls of the Phainopepla on a cassette tape made from Roger Tory Peterson's record, A field guide to western bird songs. The unfamiliar calls heard along the slope behind the cabins were precisely those of the Phainopepla on the tape, serving to substantiate my visual identification. Unfortunately, no photograph of the bird or taped record of the calls were obtained, nor was another observer present.

Donald and Frances Vannoy discovered a female or immature male Phainopepla from Point-of-Rocks in Morton County, southwest Kansas on 10 September 1987. This place lies approximately 70 miles east-northeast of Black Mesa State Park (Amer. Birds 42:99, 1988).

There are five known records for the Panhandle of Texas. The most recent was a sighting by Rosemary Scott of a male bathing in Vega, Oldham County, on 26 August 1986 (Amer. Birds 41:112, 1987).

Phainopepla nitens has been on the hypothetical list for Oklahoma since a female was seen by Lyle L. Byfield and others in Grant County near Wakita in north central Oklahoma on 4 February 1962 (Baumgartner, F. M., 1962, Aud. Field Notes, 16:346). The species is described in the National Geographic Society's field guide to the birds of North America (1983) as being a rare postbreeding wanderer north and east of its usual breeding range in the southwestern United States. Details of this sighting have been submitted to the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee. While this second-ever observation for the state fulfills that description, it cannot remove the Phainopepla from a continued hypothetical status for Oklahoma.—W. Marvin Davis, 308 Lewis Lane, Oxford, Mississippi 38655, 8 September 1987.

Diurnal fall migration of Lark Buntings in the Oklahoma Panhandle.—

Before sunrise on the morning of 8 August 1987, I drove westward from Boise City toward Black Mesa State Park, 32 km (20 mi) to the northwest, in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. As dawn approached, I began to notice numerous flocks of Lark Buntings (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) that were flying up from the shoulders of the highway. I arrived at the state park about 0725 and began to notice other flocks, ranging in size from about 15 to approximately 70. However, these birds had not been flushed into flight, but rather were flying rapidly and steadily southward only 5 to 10 m (15 to 30 ft) above the ground. Initially, flocks appeared at intervals of 60 seconds or less, but by 0830 their pace had slowed considerably so that they were spaced 3 to 6 minutes apart. Sometime after dawn, a north wind had begun to provide the buntings with a strong tailwind. The flocks dipped and rose according to the topography and the height of the riparian tree growth in the park. Some birds in most of the flocks gave quiet callnotes as they passed. No flock was seen to alight during the 1½ hours I searched the lakeside for birds.

I left the park at 0900 and drove northwest toward Kenton on the unpaved road that crosses into the Willow Creek drainage to the west; a note made at the time indicates that I encountered Lark Buntings "continually." Upon regain-

ing the paved road, more flocks passed me in the first mile I drove westward, but then tapered off drastically and ceased altogether before resuming at 1030 when I stopped at the eastern end of the Black Mesa. I continued to see fewer flocks through the first 2 or 3 km (1 or 2 mi) after I crossed into Baca County, Colorado. There I took the Cottonwood Canyon loop described in A birder's guide to Eastern Colorado (Lane, J.A., and H.R. Holt, 1979, p. 67). This took me away from further sightings of Lark Buntings until I passed into the Comanche National Grassland several kilometers to the northeast. At about 1315, I saw no southward flying flocks, but numerous Lark Buntings flushed from roadsides or perched on fencewires and utility lines. In fact, I failed to observe any southbound flights throughout the remainder of the day as I drove north then west to Pueblo, Colorado, a distance of approximately 300 km (185 mi). Thus, this diurnal migration seems to have terminated by late morning or early afternoon.

Although I was surprised to witness such remarkable migratory activity for so early a date in August, Bent (1968, *Life histories of North American cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, finches, sparrows, and allies*, Part 2, Dover Publ., New York, p. 654) refers to Lark Buntings as fairly early migrants for which "commonly the southward migration begins in late July or early August." Regarding their status in Oklahoma, Tyler (1985, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 18:28) stated that they "begin to migrate southward as early as mid or late August." Bent's statement that many adults arrive on the wintering grounds while still molting agrees with my observations on 8 August. This was particularly evident in adult males.

In my experience, witnessing a clearly evident diurnal migration is an extremely rare event. Long-distant migrants, e.g., those travelling from arctic or temperate breeding grounds to tropical non-breeding areas, perform nocturnal migrations, whereas "most short-distance passerine migrants travelling chiefly within the Northern Temperate Zone, fly by day, often departing shortly before sunrise" and "move for only a few hours in a morning before stopping to feed, unless they are aerial feeders," (Campbell, B. and E. Lack, eds., 1985, *A dictionary of birds*, Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota, p. 349). This statement aptly describes the Lark Bunting migration that I observed. — W. Marvin Davis, 308 *Lewis Lane, Oxford, Mississippi 38655, 28 January 1988.*

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