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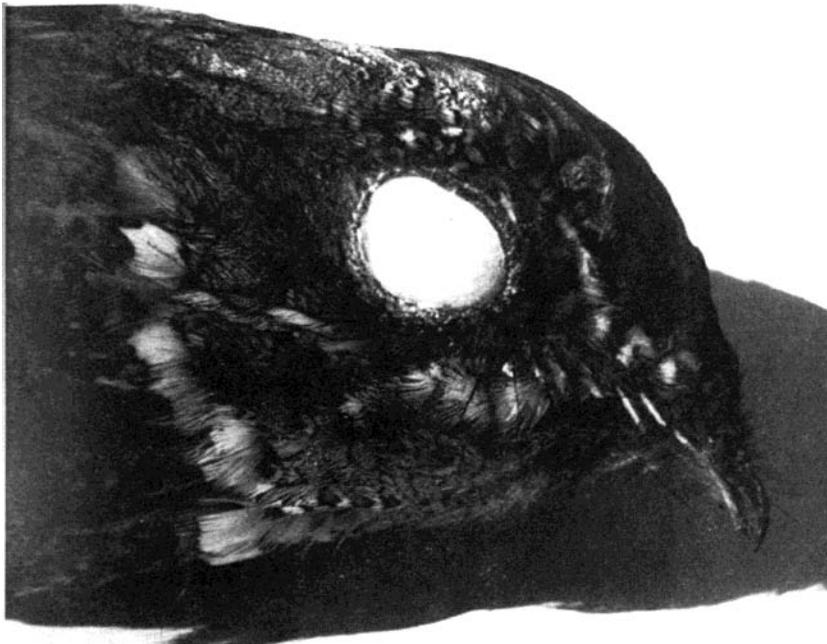
June, 1969

No. 2

A CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW IN POSTNUPTIAL MOLT

BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

ON 28 JULY 1954, while I was presenting a course in ornithology at the University of Oklahoma Biological Station (campus about two miles east of the village of Willis, Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma), two students told me of seeing a "whip-poor-will" not far from the campus and handed me some feathers they had picked up in the "thicket" from which they had flushed the bird. One feather was instantly recognizable as a rectrix from a Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*), a bird widely known as the whip-poor-will in Oklahoma.



Specimen taken near Willis, Marshall County, Oklahoma on 28 July 1954. Note sheathing at base of rictal bristles between eye and bill. Photograph by Paul F. Nighswonger.

Curious as to why we had not been hearing a Chuck-will's-widow evening after evening, I asked the students to take me to the spot at which they had seen the bird.

The "thicket" proved to be a tangle of shrubbery, vines, roots, and dead branches at the bottom of a deep erosion gully leading from a strip of pastureland through scattered woods to the Buncombe Creek Arm of Lake Texoma. I had cautioned my class to keep back from the edge of this gully lest the bank give way with them. Occasionally we had crossed the gully, but never had we really explored it.

Choosing a place of descent with care, the two students and I clambered down to the very bottom. The bed of the gully was dry. Masses of earth had recently fallen away, exposing shaggy clusters of roots, but firm, well shaded parts of the banks were green with moss, small ferns, and liverworts. Parts of trees that had toppled in from time to time were overgrown with poison ivy.

As we picked our way down the streambed, we came to an abrupt turn. Here the bank to our right was almost vertical, but at its base was a low, narrow shelf of fine earth strewn with feathers. Had my companions not insisted that their "whip-poor-will" had flown from this spot an hour or so earlier that very day, I would have assumed that some predator had made a kill there. A short way below the turn a Chuck-will's-widow flew up, giving a low *quert* as it made off. We did not see the bird alight; but I followed it down the gully, flushed it again, and shot it as it headed for an opening between the bank and a fallen tree. It proved to be an adult female in the midst of its late summer molt. Its wings were ragged, its new tail far from full-grown, and its rictal bristles short and noticeably sheathed at the base (see photograph). This sheathing was of special interest to me, since it so definitely proved that the bristles were true feathers rather than hairs.

Returning to the place at which we had first flushed the bird, we found eight rectrices, many remiges, and great numbers of smaller feathers. With the rectrix the students had given me, we now had all of the molted tail except for one feather. Evidently the bird had been coming to this place day after day for some time while undergoing the molt or the molt had taken place very rapidly. How widely the bird had ranged in obtaining food during the molting period we could not say, but presumably it had ceased calling after the molt had started.

On spreading the wings we found that the only unmolted primary on each was the outermost. The feathers in the middle of the crown were darker and browner (less gray) than those at either side of the crown, but there seemed to be no way of ascertaining that these dark brown feathers were all new or that the gray feathers were all old. Each of the several rictal bristles was short and sheathed at the base (see photograph), as if the old ones had dropped out simultaneously and were being replaced in the same way.

The specimen (GMS 12195) was not fat (weight 117.1 grams). The ovary measured 5.5 x 3 mm. The shortest of the ten incoming rectrices measured about 40 mm., the longest 109. The shortest two were neither the outermost pair nor the innermost. Each rectrix was heavily sheathed at the base.

STOVALL MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA,
NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 7 MARCH 1969.

THE CATTLE EGRET IN CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN G. NEWELL

THE CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) has thus far been formally reported from only three counties in Oklahoma—Alfalfa, Tulsa, and Cleveland (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 32). Its summering in Tulsa County in 1962 and its breeding there in 1963 and 1964 have been carefully documented by John S. Tomer (1967, *Wilson Bull.*, 79: 245).

In central Oklahoma the species was first noted in the spring of 1964, when V. J. Vacin saw one at Silver Lake, in Oklahoma County, in the extreme north-western part of Oklahoma City; this sighting was never reported, since the exact date was not recorded in any way. In the spring of 1968 one to five Cattle Egrets frequented fairly high, dry pastureland about one and one-half miles west of Lake Overholser, in Canadian County, just east of the city of Yukon. Various observers saw enough of them to raise hopes that the birds would join the large Oklahoma City heronry and nest, thus establishing a breeding record for central Oklahoma.

In 1968 the Oklahoma City heronry occupied a grove of oaks on the north side of Northwest Twenty-third Street just west of Rockwell Road. Here Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*), Common Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), Snowy Egrets (*Leucophoyx thula*), and Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) bred in considerable numbers. The herons have been forced to move every few years as the trees have been bulldozed out to make room for housing developments.

Until recently the pastureland visited by the Cattle Egrets in 1968 was inhabited by a rapidly expanding colony of prairie dogs. The rodents allegedly ate so much grass that the owners of the herd of Black Angus cattle pastured there saw to it that the "dogs" were eliminated by poison.

On 18 May I found a single Cattle Egret feeding with the cattle on a gentle slope in the pasture. The following day several observers checked the area both morning and evening, seeing three Cattle Egrets on each visit. On subsequent days for about a week from one to three birds were seen with the cattle. On one occasion Jane Turner and Mary Coleman, both of Midwest City, Oklahoma, followed the egrets to the Oklahoma City heronry, but when Jack S. Roberts visited the heronry on 22 May he did not find any Cattle Egrets there.

I last saw the Cattle Egrets on 30 May. On this occasion five birds were in

the pasture with the cattle. I was not able to get very close, but I could clearly see the buffy brown on the crest and back of each bird. I was not convinced that the egrets were fully adult, for the buffy brown seemed much less intense than that in illustrations available to me. At no time did I observe any sign of courtship or display. The birds seemed to ignore each other. They spent most of their time stalking insects near the cattle or at some distance from them. During the summer I visited the pasture and several other areas that appealed to me as likely habitat, but I did not see the Cattle Egrets again.

4129 NORTH EVEREST, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73111, 6 SEPTEMBER 1968.

NESTING OF HOUSE WREN IN TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY RUTH W. KIESS

ON 30 JUNE 1968 I saw a House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) in my yard at 2910 East 29th Street in Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma. On 2 July my husband and I observed what we presumed to be the same bird or its mate carrying nest material. That day we noticed a long piece of straw sticking out of a nestbox suspended about 10 ft. above ground from an overhang of the roof. On 4 July we saw two House Wrens in the yard.

On 22 July we observed a wren going into and out of the nestbox, but it was moving so quickly that we could not be sure that it was carrying food. On 26 July we ascertained that food was being carried — presumably by both parent birds; we heard young birds inside the nestbox; and we noticed that a House Wren was singing volubly in the yard. On 30 July we heard no singing but were loudly scolded by the wrens. During the first three days of August the young were still being fed in the nestbox. Shortly thereafter the brood fledged, though we did not witness their departure from the nestbox. On 7 August we saw a young bird with one of its parents in the yard.

At no time did we open the nestbox, so we did not ascertain how many eggs or young there were. From 7 to 16 August we saw no House Wren, either adult or young, in the yard. From 16 August to 3 September we were away from Tulsa on vacation. On our return we did not see a House Wren until 25 September, on which date we saw one in the yard. We saw one again the following day. Presumably these were migratory birds. When we cleaned out the nestbox we found neither eggshells nor remains of dead nestlings.

The House Wren is a well known bird in Tulsa County. It has been seen and heard singing from late March to late May in and near Tulsa, and seen again from mid-September to late October; but so far as I know the above-reported nesting is the first for the Tulsa area.

2910 EAST 29TH STREET, TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74114. 7 NOVEMBER 1968.

GENERAL NOTES

A Pigeon Hawk captures a Starling. — On the morning of 8 February 1968 an unusual bird-sound drew me to an east window of my house in Okmulgee, Okmulgee County, east-central Oklahoma. On the ground about ten feet from the house was an immature Pigeon Hawk or Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) with a live Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in its talons. The Starling, though crying out at intervals, seemed to be struggling very little. The falcon was obviously excited and wary. With each movement or cry of its victim it shifted its talons as if trying to find a more lethal hold. Presently it flew—somewhat laboriously and only a foot or so above ground—toward the backyard, carrying the Starling. Grabbing my binocular, I followed, expecting to find the two birds in a big tree across the alley; but as I rounded the corner of the garage I surprised them on the ground only a few feet away. The falcon quickly released its victim and took flight. The Starling righted itself, shook its feathers, and flew into a privet hedge near by, apparently little the worse for its brush with death.

At such close range the diagnostic marks of the Pigeon Hawk were easy to see. The long wings when folded reached almost to the end of the barred tail and had a decidedly pointed appearance when spread for flight. The top of the head, back, and wings were dark brown, the underparts and sides of the head boldly streaked, and the eye dark. I was surprised to see so small a bird of prey carrying a Starling.—Mary P. Williams, 1205 E. Tenth St., Okmulgee, Oklahoma 74447, 27 January 1969.

Span of breeding season of American Coot in Oklahoma. — Nine nestings of the American Coot (*Fulica americana*), six of them dating back more than fifty years, have been reported for Oklahoma (Nice, 1931, *Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 96; Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 166-67; Messerly, 1969, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.*, 2: 4-5). From these meagre data we know that the breeding cycle of the species has extended at least from mid-May (three nests with eggs observed on 15 May 1899 in Love County) to mid-July (two adults and two small young observed on 15 July 1954 in Cleveland County) in this part of the Southern Great Plains.

On 18 August 1967, late in the afternoon, Ron Cox and I observed an adult coot and one quail-sized, orange-headed chick in a roadside pothole just east of Boise City, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. We saw an adult again at the same pothole on the 19th and 20th, but not the chick. We searched through the thick marginal vegetation but did not find a nest.

According to the meticulous observations of Gullion (1954, *Auk*, 71: 392) the "head filoplumes" of young coots ten days old are "still orange," while heads of chicks 15 days old have a "hoary appearance." The young bird seen by us was therefore probably about two weeks old. Since the incubation period for *Fulica americana* is at least 22 days (Gullion, *loc. cit.*, p. 385), the egg from which our chick hatched must have been laid in mid-July. In the San Francisco Bay area of California, Gullion (p. 397) observed the successful hatching of second clutches after the rearing of first broods in both 1949 and 1950. While *Fulica americana* is not known to be two-brooded in Oklahoma, G. H. Ragsdale's sighting of a "nest with 6 eggs, young nearly grown and fledglings," all of them on 28 June 1889

(Nice, *op. cit.*), suggests that two-broodedness in this state may well be possible.

The natural potholes and playa depressions of the Oklahoma Panhandle and of adjacent areas offer suitable nest sites for *Fulica americana* only during "wet" years. Permanent nesting habitat may now be available, however, at impoundments whose water-level remains fairly constant. The dense stands of cattail (*Typha* spp.) at Lake Carl Eiling in Black Mesa State Park, in Cimarron County, themselves good proof of water-level constancy, provide an excellent nesting habitat for the coot. Here the species nested successfully in 1966 (Messerly, *loc. cit.*). Here J. D. Tyler, Ron Cox, and I saw several adult (or adult-sized) coots on 17 August 1968. Here J. Weldon, of the field force of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, has seen both adult and young coots on numerous occasions in mid-summer during recent years. — William A. Carter, *Department of Biology, East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma 74820, 10 September 1968.*

Black-chinned Hummingbird at Silver Lake, near Oklahoma City. — About 1 May 1959 an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) with malformed bill appeared at my Silver Lake banding station near Oklahoma City in Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. Though obviously attracted by a hummingbird-feeder, he was unable to stick his bill into the 1/8 in. wide feeder-mouth because his mandibles would not meet. His tongue, too, appeared to be damaged or misshapen, for at times it lolled out between his mandibles. When, a day or so later, he again came to the feeder, we offered him red sweetened water in a spoon. This he took eagerly, perching on a hand or finger when reaching for the liquid. Meanwhile, we had fastened an inch-wide plastic cup to the feeder's mouth. The feeder now had two mouths. The Black-chin adopted the wide mouth and defended it vigorously, forcing several Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*A. colubris*) — all of which had normal bills — to use the other mouth.

This Black chin became quite a pet. He followed Alma, my wife, or me around the corner of the house as if expecting us to feed him from the spoon. Often we did feed him in this way. On one occasion, when Alma was sitting in the yard wearing a white blouse marked with red dots, the Black-chin suddenly appeared and began poking at the spots with his bill. Occasionally we observed him working around flowers in the yard. He must have found insects and spiders enough to supply him with protein, for he spent the whole summer with us. We last saw him on 5 September 1959 (1959, *Audubon Field Notes*, 13: 439).

On 28 July 1965 I captured and banded an adult male Black-chin whose bill was normal. Unlike the many Ruby-throats that I had had occasion to handle, this bird spent little time jabbing his bill nervously through the half-inch mesh hardware cloth of the gathering cage, trying to escape; instead, he squatted quietly on the floor of the cage (1965, *Audubon Field Notes*, 19: 558).

On 5 July 1968 another Black-chin appeared at my banding station. He visited the feeders regularly for a month. The glistening band on his lower throat was hard to see. The purple reflection there was perceptible only when the sun struck it directly. We could easily have caught and banded this bird, but we decided against such a move for very few hummers that we have caught

have stayed with us and we wanted this one to stay. We last saw him on 5 August 1968.

On 13 August 1968 I caught a male hummingbird that I might not have tried to catch had I realized what he was. Indeed, I am not sure to this day what species this interesting bird represented. Only the lower half of his throat was bright, and the purple throughout this brilliant area had a reddish glint. I kept the bird in the gathering cage for half an hour. During this period of captivity he spent much of his time on the floor. We banded him, found that his exposed culmen measured 18 mm., and were about to tackle the delicate task of measuring the chord of his wing when he escaped. I continue to believe that this beautiful individual was a hybrid between a Black-chin and a Ruby-throat.

Quite possibly we have seen female Black-chins from time to time, and perhaps we have banded them, but we have not handled any female or immature hummingbird with an unusually long bill. — V. J. Vacin, *Route 2, Box 123, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73114, 24 September 1968.*

Early spring and late fall records for the Winter Wren in Oklahoma. — The Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) winters widely but sparsely throughout the main body of Oklahoma. There is only one record for the Panhandle—that of a single bird seen by W. E. Lewis at or near Gate, Beaver County, on 30 January 1927 (Nice, 1931, *The Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 135). The species is said to occur in the state “from October 13 to April 7” (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 407). That it may arrive from the north earlier than 13 October and linger later than 7 April is evident from the following sightings in and near Bartlesville, Washington County, in northeastern Oklahoma.

On the morning of 3 October 1968, after the arrival of a cold front the previous evening, Emma Messerly and I were observing birds in a partly wooded stretch of Turkey Creek bottomland along the edge of suburban Bartlesville. The area is crossed by several ravines, in one of which a stream sometimes flows. In tall weeds at the edge of heavy woods we flushed a wren that flew into the lowest branches of a tree close to the ground. The bird was so much smaller, darker, and shorter-tailed than the many House Wrens (*T. aedon*) we had been seeing thereabouts the previous week, that we knew our bird was a Winter Wren. When we approached for a closer look, it flew into the woods and out of sight.

We crossed a narrow grassy area and were about to enter another patch of woods when another Winter Wren flew up. This one lit in full sunlight a foot from the ground in a bushy tree. I approached to within about ten feet and clearly saw the dim line above the eye, indistinct eye-ring, heavily speckled underparts, and stubby tail. Alarmed by our close approach, the wren flew to the edge of the woods where we followed it as it flitted, always close to the ground, never far at a stretch, from one brushpile or tangle to another.

Later that morning, in a weed-patch 200 yards from the area in which we had seen the first two Winter Wrens, we found a third. This one flew about 15 feet into a bushy tree. I approached to within about five feet; well camou-

flaged by its dark colors, it was perched in a shady spot about six inches from the ground.

We returned to the same stretch of bottomland on 4 and 10 October. On 4 October we found no Winter Wren, though we did see several other interesting bird species. On 10 October, again after the arrival of a cold front during the night, we found one Winter Wren. This bird took refuge in some bushes.

On consulting the records of various bird observers in Bartlesville, and data filed by the recorder of the Bartlesville Audubon Society, we found that Mrs. Messerly had seen a bird she believed to be a Winter Wren on 3 October 1966 in the Turkey Creek bottomland near her house; that Mrs. V. S. Cronquist had seen one in a wooded ravine just east of Bartlesville on 13 April 1966; and that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Haas had seen one on 30 April 1966 in their heavily wooded backyard near Bartlesville (1966, *Audubon Field Notes*, 20: 524). The date of this last sighting is probably exceptional.—Sophia C. Mery, 345 S. E. Boston Ave., Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003, 15 January 1969.

Early nesting of the House Finch in Oklahoma.—The earliest date on record for the nesting of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) in Oklahoma is 13 May 1961; on that date George M. Sutton and I found a nest with three fresh eggs along Texakeet Creek a few miles southeast of the village of Kenton, Cimarron County (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 590). Another nest that I found that day, but that I have not reported until now, held four heavily incubated eggs. Each of these nests was about 4 ft. up in cholla cactus (*Opuntia imbricata*) growing in gently sloping, rather heavily grazed pastureland.

On 25 April 1968, members of my ornithology class, Charles W. Comer, and I watched upwards of a dozen House Finches in trees immediately back of the general store in Kenton. Subsequent search in patches of cholla cactus near the trees disclosed three House Finch nests, each about 4 ft. above ground. One nest was old. The two occupied nests held, respectively, four slightly incubated eggs and four fresh eggs. We flushed a female bird from each of the occupied nests.

The House Finch has not been found nesting anywhere in Oklahoma except in the Black Mesa country of northwestern Cimarron County. In that area the species obviously favors a cholla cactus nest-site, though in the summer of 1924 a pair in Kenton nested 7 ft. up in a black locust that was a bit over 8 ft. high and that was "surrounded by tall rose bushes" (Tate, 1925, *Condor*, 27: 176).—David F. Parmelee, *Department of Biology, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas 66801. 18 September 1968.*

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

The *Bulletin* is sent to all members of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society. Membership fee is \$5.00, sustaining, or \$2.00 regular. Checks made out to the society should be sent to the treasurer, Mrs. Ruth A. McNew, 114 S.E. 35th St. (P.O. Box 94224), Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73109. Editor of the *Bulletin* is Sophia C. Mery, 345 S.E. Boston, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003.