

BULLETIN OF THE OKLAHOMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 32

MARCH 1999

No. 1

Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 32:1-4, 1999

First record of the Great Black-backed Gull for Oklahoma

By JO LOYD AND MARTHA B. KAMP

At the Lake Keystone Dam on the Arkansas River 13 km west of Sand Springs, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, on the morning of 14 January 1997, we observed a large gull sitting on the rocks with a Herring (*Larus argentatus*) and several Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) gulls. This bulky gull was noticeably larger than the Herring and approximately twice the size of the Ring-billed Gulls. The white-headed appearance of the bird when sitting and flying was obvious. The head was slightly, and the hind neck heavily, streaked with brown. The large bill was entirely black (shiny) with a prominent gonydial angle. The eye was dark with a dark smudge in front and behind the eye; its sloping forehead was similar to that of a Herring Gull and not as rounded as that of a Ring-billed Gull. The legs were flesh colored.



Fig. 1. Great Black-backed Gull at Keystone Dam. Photograph by Steven H. Metz on 17 January 1997.

We noted a strong contrast between the mantle and the rest of the body plumage. The underparts were grayish white with brown streaking on the breast and along the sides of the belly. The back was dark with a checkered appearance. The tertials were brown with narrow whitish edges and had no apparent internal markings. The greater wing coverts were brown, edged with white, and their light internal markings gave a barred look. The primaries extended beyond the tail to a length about equal to that of the bill.

In flight the gull showed modest contrast between the mantle and the flight feathers of its broad wing. The primaries and the sub-terminal bar of the secondaries were uniformly dark and darker than the wing coverts, scapulars, and mantle. The tail appeared white with a dark sub-terminal band and a narrow white terminal band. There were dark spots almost in rows proximal to the sub-terminal band and some spots on the light undertail. The white of the tail continued on the upper tail coverts and rump and encroached onto the posterior border of the mantle. The underwing appeared two-toned with the secondaries lighter than the coverts and a faint light window on the inner primaries.

We identified this gull (Fig. 1) as a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) based on its size, white-headed appearance, light underparts, massive bill with accentuated gonydial angle, and the lack of internal markings on the tertials. We eliminated the first-winter Herring Gull based on the mantle's contrast with the paler body, the combination of white terminal and dark subterminal bands (the latter with a fractured proximal edge) on the tail, and the lack of prominent light windows in the primaries on the upper wing.

The gull was aggressive with the American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) and the other gulls that were fishing in the water being released through the generating turbines of the dam. On 16 January 1997 we were observing this gull when a first-winter Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*) appeared, floated on the river for a short time, and then flew to the rocks where the Great Black-backed Gull was eating a fish. A direct comparison showed that the Great Black-backed Gull was larger and bulkier bodied. The Great Black-backed Gull did not often mix with the Herring Gulls who in turn did not aggressively harass it for its fish.

Photographs were obtained by Kamp, Steven Metz, and Joseph Grzybowski on 14–17 January 1997. The bird was last reported on 11 February 1997. Based on the photographs and written description of the gull, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee accepted this record on 6 December 1997 as the first Oklahoma record of the Great Black-backed Gull. The committee recognized that the bird appeared slightly darker mantled and had more distinct tail bands than typical Great Black-backed Gulls, but felt that these characters fell within acceptable limits of individual variation as judged from published photographs (e.g. Grant 1986).

The Great Black-backed Gull is primarily a coastal species. In North America it ranges in eastern Labrador, southeast Quebec, the Maritime

Provinces, and along the Atlantic coast southward to North Carolina, regularly wandering to large rivers and lakes of the interior United States. It winters from Labrador south along the Atlantic seaboard to Florida and in the Great Lakes (Terres 1980, Good 1998).

Among neighboring states, there are no records of the Great Black-backed Gull for Arkansas (M. Parker, pers. comm.) or New Mexico (P. Snider, pers. comm.). In Colorado there were 12 accepted records through 1995, with one or two sightings a year since 1995 (six in 1996–97; B. Lisowsky, pers. comm.; our tabulation from *American Birds* and *Field Notes*). In Kansas, Thompson and Ely (1989) cite two records for the Great Black-backed Gull, both in Barton County in the central part of the state in 1973 and 1974. There are four south central Kansas records, all in Sedgewick County, in 1992–98; these records have been of either first- or second-year individuals except for one adult reported in 1998 (D. Rintoul, pers. comm.; our tabulation from *American Birds* and *Field Notes*). In Nebraska, there were two records of Great Black-backed Gulls in 1904 and 1952 (Bray et al. 1986). Since 1986 there have been ten documented records, possibly representing seven birds that were immatures and adults and in both summer and winter plumage. Seven records were from southwestern Nebraska and three from eastern Nebraska (R. Silcock, pers. comm.).

In Missouri, the Great Black-backed Gull is a casual transient and winter resident along the Mississippi River. The first state record was 1 January 1945 on the Mississippi River in Cape Girardeau County in southeastern Missouri. This was the only record in Missouri outside of the greater St. Louis area through 1992 (Robbins & Easterla 1992). The Great Black-backed Gull now occurs almost annually in small numbers along the Mississippi River in the St. Louis area, with at least 30 records since the late 1980s, although it is still considered accidental elsewhere in the state (B. Rowe, pers. comm.). First-winter birds are most commonly seen in Missouri. The Illinois River, which feeds into the Mississippi River, probably acts as a conduit for Great Black-backed Gulls from Lake Michigan (Rowe, pers. comm.). In Texas, there are 28 currently accepted records of the Great Black-backed Gull and five records under review by the Texas Bird Records Committee. All Texas records except one are coastal. The one interior record was in Marion County in northeastern Texas in the winter of 1992–93 (G. Lasley, pers. comm.).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For assistance in verifying regional occurrence of the Great Black-backed Gull, we thank James W. Arterburn, Donna Dittmann, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Pete Janzen, Greg Lasley, Bill Lisowsky, Max Parker, Dave Rintoul, Bill Rowe, Pat Snider, and Ross Silcock. For assistance with the manuscript, we thank Charles R. Brown, Joseph A. Grzybowski, and John S. Tomer. We are grateful to Steven H. Metz for use of his photograph.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bray, T. E., B. K. Padelford, and W. R. Silcock. 1986. The birds of Nebraska: a critically evaluated list. Published by the authors, Bellevue, Nebraska.
- Good, T. P. 1998. Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). In: The birds of North America (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.), No. 330. Acad. Nat. Sci., Philadelphia, and Am. Ornithol. Union, Washington, DC.
- Grant, P. G. 1986. Gulls, a guide to identification. Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota.
- Harrison, P. 1985. Seabirds, an identification guide. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Robbins, M. B., and D. A. Easterla. 1992. Birds of Missouri: their distribution and abundance. Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. The National Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. Knopf, New York.
- Thompson, M. C., and C. Ely. 1989. Birds in Kansas. Vol. 1. Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Kansas, Lawrence.

6736 EAST 28TH STREET, TULSA, OK. 74129 (JL); 6422 SOUTH INDIANAPOLIS PLACE, TULSA OK. 74136 (MBK). Received 20 February 1999, accepted 27 February 1999.

Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 32:4-5, 1999

First nesting record of the Tricolored Heron for Oklahoma

By SHANE T. FEIRER AND RON S. SHEPPERD

The Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) breeds primarily along the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico coastlines in estuaries, salt marshes, mangrove swamps, and river deltas (Frederick 1997). Since the mid to late 1970s, the Tricolored Heron has expanded its breeding range. Tricolored Herons have been reported breeding in western and north central Texas (Oberholser 1974, Runnels 1980), central Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1989), South Dakota (Skadsen 1986, Meeks et al. 1996), and North Dakota (Schmidt 1979). Prior to 1998, the Tricolored Heron had not been documented to breed in Oklahoma and had been recorded as only a "very rare" visitor in the nonbreeding season (Sutton 1967, Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992).

While studying the mixed-species heron rookery on Ralston Island, Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Alfalfa County, Oklahoma, during summer 1998, Feirer discovered a pair of Tricolored Herons and a nest with two eggs, situated 1.8 m high in a small mulberry tree. The nest was

monitored until 22 June when it was found destroyed by unknown causes. On 28 June, a second nesting attempt was discovered in a clump of salt cedar. This nest was situated 1.2 m high, and it contained 3 eggs. On 12 July, the first egg hatched, and by 15 July all three eggs had completed hatching. On 3 August, we banded three Tricolored Heron hatchlings with a numbered vinyl flag attached to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service metal band. On 30 August, three banded fledglings and two adult Tricolored Herons were observed flying at Ralston Island.

We thank J. Whittier and D. Woods for help with this study and R. Krey and D. M. Leslie, Jr. for making our work possible. Funding was provided by Region 2 of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, and the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (a cooperative venture by Oklahoma State University, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, U. S. G. S. Biological Resources Division, and the Wildlife Management Institute).

LITERATURE CITED

- Baumgartner, F. M., and A. M. Baumgartner. 1992. Oklahoma bird life. Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman.
- Frederick, P. C. 1997. Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*). In: The birds of North America (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.), No. 306. Acad. Nat. Sci., Philadelphia, and Am. Ornithol. Union, Washington, DC.
- Meeks, W. A., D. E. Naugle, R. R. Johnson, and K. F. Higgins. 1996. Interbreeding of a Tricolored Heron and a Snowy Egret in South Dakota. *Auk* 113:955-957.
- Oberholser, H. C. 1974. The bird life of Texas. Univ. Texas Press, Austin.
- Runnels, R. S. 1980. Louisiana Heron (*Hydranassa tricolor*) breeding in north-central Texas. *Bull. Texas Ornithol. Soc.* 13:23-24.
- Schmidt, R. 1979. First nesting record of a Louisiana Heron in North Dakota. *Prairie Nat.* 11:93-95.
- Skadsen, M. 1986. First South Dakota Tricolored Heron nest. *South Dakota Bird Notes* 19:4.
- Sutton, G. M. 1967. Oklahoma birds. Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman.
- Thompson, M. C. and C. Ely. 1989. Birds in Kansas. Vol. 1. Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Kansas, Lawrence.

OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE RESEARCH UNIT, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY, STILLWATER, OK. 74078 (STF); UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, SALT PLAINS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ROUTE 1, BOX 76, JET, OK. 73749 (RSS). Received 14 December 1998, accepted 11 January 1999.

NOTES

Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 32:6-7, 1999

Breeding record of the Tree Swallow in McCurtain County, Oklahoma.—On 25 May 1998, I observed a pair of Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) flying over a 1.2 ha pond, 9.5 km north of Eagletown, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. Several dead trees containing cavities stood in the water, and the swallows were entering and leaving a cavity 4.5 m above the water. Their frequent arrivals and departures suggested that they were feeding young. On 31 May and 8 June, I again observed two Tree Swallows entering and leaving the same cavity, and on each day, a swallow carried a fecal sac from the cavity. On 15 June, two fully feathered Tree Swallows in juvenal plumage were sitting in the entrance of the cavity being fed by their parents.

On 5 December 1998, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee accepted this record as the first breeding record of the Tree Swallow for McCurtain County (J. Grzybowski, pers. comm.). Through 1967, the Tree Swallow was considered an uncommon migrant in Oklahoma, with the nearest known nesting in Colorado and in the northeastern corner of Kansas (Sutton, G. M., *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1967). However, by 1992, records of several nestings on the eastern border of the state appeared to indicate a southward expansion of the Tree Swallow's breeding range (Baumgartner, F. M., and A. M. Baumgartner, *Oklahoma bird life*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1992). Recent nesting reports indicate a further southward expansion of this species in Oklahoma and adjoining states. By 1993, nesting had been documented in Cimmaron, Stephens, Sequoyah, Wagner, and Cherokee counties (Neeld, F., *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 26:40-41, 1993) and by 1997 in Delaware County (Long, M. P., and C. I. Long, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 30:21-23, 1997) and at the bayou in Fort Gibson in Muskogee County (J. McMahon, pers. comm.). By 1998, nesting also was known to have occurred in Nowata, Washington, Osage, Kay, Noble, Pawnee, Creek, and Okmulgee counties based on fieldwork by James Hoffman (pers. comm.).

Two recent nesting reports for Tree Swallows in southwestern Arkansas are known. Numerous nestings were observed in dead timber at Millwood Lake, Howard County, Arkansas, from 1988 to 1998 (C. Mills, pers. comm.). Nesting was also observed at DeQueen Lake, Sevier County, Arkansas, in 1996 (D. Arbour, pers. comm.). These Arkansas sites are approximately 60 km southeast and 20 km east of the McCurtain County breeding site, respectively. In northeastern Texas, Tree Swallow nestings were observed at Big Creek Lake, Delta County, in 1991, 1992, and 1994; at Lake Fork, Wood County, in 1991 and 1994; and at Martin Creek Lake, Rusk County, in 1997 and 1998 (D. Brotherton, pers. comm.). The relatively recent expansion of the Tree Swallow's breeding range into eastern Oklahoma, western Arkansas, and northeastern Texas may be related to

the abundance of dead timber that stands in the upper reaches of many of the reservoirs that were constructed in these areas in the 1950s. As this timber rots and falls, Tree Swallows may disappear as a nesting species in eastern Oklahoma.

I thank James Hoffman and James Arterburn for critical review of the manuscript.—BERLIN A. HECK, 109 Kaye Drive, Broken Bow, OK. 74728. Received 21 January 1999, accepted 27 February 1999.

Recent Literature

Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc. 32:7–8, 1999

BABY BIRD PORTRAITS BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON, WATER-COLORS IN THE FIELD MUSEUM. By Paul A. Johnsgard, forewords by Benjamin W. Williams and William R. Johnson. 1998. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 81 pp., 32 color plates. \$24.95.

This is a charming little book. Who can fail to be entranced by watercolors of baby birds, especially if painted by George Miksch Sutton? Nineteen species are depicted in 32 color plates. This includes an assortment of nestlings, fledgling, downy chicks, and a few adults. As is always true of Sutton's paintings, each little bird has its own personality and flair. Nearly half of the species included are grassland sparrows, with others being upland and wetland birds. Some of the illustrations are published here for the first time. Each plate is accompanied by a short essay discussing the natural history of the species illustrated, including a short bibliography. In the essays, Johnsgard includes information from Sutton's own ornithological studies, providing insight into both Sutton the ornithologist and Sutton the artist. Students of Sutton's life, science, and art will appreciate the information provided in the two forewords, the preface, and the section on Sutton's art and science. This includes material on Sutton's development as an artist and how the watercolors came to be in the possession of the Field Museum. Johnsgard writes in a comfortable, conversational style. The watercolors are reproduced very nicely. The format of the book is also attractive, with the text appearing on the left side and the plate on the right side. If you are a fan of Oklahoma ornithology, George Miksch Sutton, or are simply charmed by baby birds, this little book is for you.—MARY BOMBERGER BROWN

SWALLOW SUMMER. By Charles R. Brown. 1998. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. 371 pp., 24 black-and-white photographs. \$16.95.

This book is the saga of a field season spent collecting data from colonies of Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*). It offers the layperson a detailed and easily comprehended insight into the hard work that is required to make scientific discoveries. Although placed in bookstores

under the section of natural history, it could be classified as an adventure because the reader vicariously becomes a member of the research team for a season. The book is nicely organized in the form of a journal; the reader experiences the field season from the first day to the final day in chronological order.

Through each day's tale, the reader learns the techniques used in capturing the swallows, recording measurements, and observing the birds. The personalities of both the Cliff Swallows and the members of the research team become evident, and the inevitable conflicts between both team members and the birds themselves are revealed. Bird villains steal from neighbors, lay or transfer their eggs into neighboring nests, and generally torment each other. While the researchers do not resort to such behavior, they do have difficulties at times in dealing with the lack of amenities at the field sites and in working together. In addition, the team experiences the amusing interactions of would-be helpful and curious townsfolk. The joys of scientific research are relayed along with the inevitable trials of such a study. Brown and his collaborator/wife Mary deal with the fickle weather, the green field assistants, and the challenge of collecting data while maintaining an intense passion and love for both their research and the Cliff Swallows.

Another attractive aspect of the book is that as the season progresses, the reader gains the background information from the research of previous seasons. The history of this now seventeen-year project is fascinating. From the initial selection of the study animal and establishment of sites to the discoveries made over the years, the reader comes to appreciate just how much hard work is required to study birds in the field. Few books written by scientists offer such a frank and detailed behind-the-scenes view of research.

Further enhancements include photographs from the season, maps of the study area, and clever epigrams to open each chapter. *Swallow Summer* is ideal for those interested specifically in the study of birds but is also entertaining for anyone with an interest in natural history or science.—CHERYL G. ORMSTON

The Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society (ISSN 0474-0750) is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December, at Tulsa, Oklahoma. Editor, CHARLES R. BROWN, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK. 74104-3189; Editorial board, JAMES ARTERBURN, MARY BOMBERGER BROWN, VICKI BYRE, JEFFREY COX, JOSEPH GRZYBOWSKI, JAMES HOFFMAN, DOUGLAS MOCK, GARY SCHNELL, and JOHN TOMER. Subscription is by membership in the OOS: \$5 student, \$10 regular, \$15 family, \$15 or more sustaining, per year; life membership \$200. Questions regarding subscription, replacement copies, back issues, or payment of dues should be directed to: CLAUDIA GLASS, OOS Membership/Circulation Chairman, P. O. Box 2931, Claremore, OK. 74018.