

FIRST SUCCESSFUL NESTING OF INCA DOVE IN OKLAHOMA

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On 8 April 2005, I was notified by Ford Hendershot of an Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) nest at the home of Robert Goolsby in Idabel, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The nest was 1.2 m above the ground in an evergreen cleyera shrub (*Eurya ochracea*), where I observed an Inca Dove on the nest containing 2 eggs. I saw a dove and 2 unhatched eggs in the nest on 14 April. On 19 and 24 April, the nest held 2 nestlings (Fig. 1a), and on 2 May, the nest was empty. I contacted Goolsby to determine if he had more information. He had photographed the nest with 1 adult and 2 fully-feathered nestlings on 1 May about 1430 h and later that afternoon observed 1 of the fledglings flying weakly and attempting to land on the window ledge by the nest. On 5 May, I collected the nest (Fig. 1b) for the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma (UOMNH N320). The nest, which measured 113.4 mm x 91.0 mm, was constructed atop an old stick nest, probably of a Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) (G. Schnell, pers. comm. 2005). Its composition included horse hair, pine needles (*Pinus* sp.), and downy feathers, and the rim of the nest was lined with excrement (A. Person, pers. comm. 2005). The excrement around the rim, which is typical of an Inca Dove nest, "...binds the nest material and deepens the cup" (Mueller, A. J. 1992. Inca Dove. *The Birds of North America*, No. 28 [A. Poole, P. Stettenheim, and F.

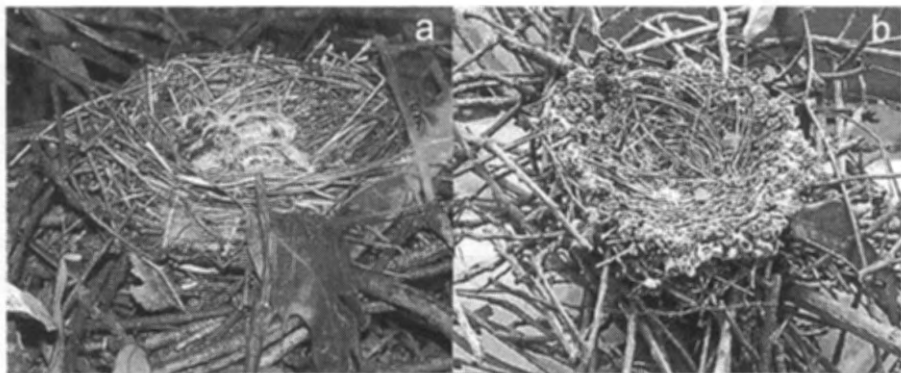


Fig. 1. a) Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) squabs in nest, 19 April 2005, Idabel, McCurtain Co., Oklahoma and b) Inca Dove nest collected on 5 May 2005, Idabel, McCurtain Co., Oklahoma nest was deposited in the University of Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (UOMNH N320). Photographs by Berlin Heck.

Gill, Eds.]. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.).

The first Inca Dove recorded in Oklahoma was in Kay County from December 1954 to March 1955 (Sutton, G. M. Oklahoma Birds. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman). That same year a female was observed and collected on 17 May in Cimarron County. In subsequent years, they have been observed erratically. Inca Doves have been recorded in 19 counties in Oklahoma, with most of the recent records being from McCurtain County in the southeastern region of the state. The 1992 edition of the Date Guide to the Occurrences of Birds in Oklahoma compiled by the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee listed Inca Doves as present, but no dates were listed (Grzybowski, J., J. Arterburn, W. Carter, J. Tomer, and D. Verser. 1992. Date guide to the occurrences of birds in Oklahoma. 2nd edition. Oklahoma Ornithological Society, Norman). The 2004 edition of this booklet lists the Inca Dove as a permanent resident in 5 of the 7 geographic regions of Oklahoma, except the Panhandle and northwestern regions.

The first record of attempted nesting of Inca Doves in Oklahoma was in Hugo, Choctaw County, 23 April 2000 (Heck, B. 2001. First nesting attempt of the Inca Dove for Oklahoma. Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society 34:4). The nest was not subsequently monitored. I observed another nesting attempt 8 May 2003, south of Haworth, McCurtain County, but a storm destroyed the nest a week later. Jim Harris of Wagoner, Wagoner County, observed an Inca Dove on a nest in 2004 but did not monitor it (J. Harris, pers. comm. 2005). Other attempted nestings have occurred in Jackson, Comanche, and Grady counties, and 2 young Inca Doves were videotaped being fed by adults in Jackson County on 9 April (Tyler, J. D. 1997. Birds of southwestern Oklahoma and north central Texas. Transcript Press, Norman, Oklahoma).

Museum specimens of Inca Doves and a nest from Oklahoma at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma are as follows: UOMNH 2114, female, Cimarron Co., Boise City (13 mi. N), 17 May 1955, collector: G. M. Sutton; UOMNH 7517, male, Harper Co., Rosston, 15 December 1973, collector: Laurance Dunn; UOMNH 6830 (skeleton), sex unknown, Cleveland Co., Norman, 20 December 1962, collector: F. A. Rinehart; UOMNH 22009 (skeleton), sex unknown, Cleveland Co., Norman, 1 June 2004, collector: G. D. Schnell; UOMNH N320 (nest), McCurtain Co., Idabel, 5 May 2005, collector: Berlin A. Heck. A museum specimen is located at Cameron University as follows: CUMZ 0607, sex unknown, Caddo County, Apache, 31 October 1975, collector: O. J. Felis.

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Virginia Rails Nesting in Tulsa County.—Nesting of Virginia Rails (*Rallus limicola*) in Tulsa County was confirmed in May 2005 at the Apache sewage ponds on the southwestern corner of the intersection of North 145 East Avenue and East Apache Street. These are the waste water ponds of a

large industrial plant located 3.9 km E and 2.4 km N of the Pine Street exit on U.S. Highway 169N.

The ponds had an overgrown, marsh-like habitat and are a stopover point for migratory waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds; it is a popular spot with birders during migration. The fenced, smaller, and shallower north pond is surrounded by willow trees, reeds, cattails and other emergent marsh vegetation with occasional areas of dry ground. Eighty-four percent of all Virginia Rails reports in the records of Tulsa Audubon Society are from this location (A. Lambert, Tulsa Audubon Society Recorder, pers. comm.).

The first 2005 observation of Virginia Rails at this location was 14 April by Terry L. Mitchell. Reports of the rails, Soras (*Porzana carolina*), and other shorebirds were made during the next 3 weeks. These reports led Paul Ribitzki, Patricia Seibert, Virginia Seibert, and Jo Loyd to the ponds on 5 May 2005. Ribitzki had arrived late afternoon and was joined by the Seiberts and Loyd around 1800 h. Surprisingly, considering the time of day and bright sunshine, in addition to the shorebirds, there were 4 Virginia Rails and 10 Soras picking their way along the shoreline. Around 1900 h, we were looking through our spotting scopes attempting to relocate a Least Bittern (*Izobrychus exilis*) that Ribitzki had observed earlier, when Loyd noticed 2 all black fuzzy chicks cross an open space in the reeds in the vicinity of both a Sora and a Virginia Rail. We all had a quick look before they jumped back into the reeds. We searched for an hour without seeing the chicks again. We considered them possibly Sora chicks but were unable to determine the identity of the chicks before we left at 2000 h.

After consulting with other birders and field guides, we expanded the possibilities to include Virginia Rail and American Coot (*Fulica americana*). All of us returned to the ponds in the ensuing days. Loyd revisited the ponds at 0700 h on 9 May 2005 and was able to photograph 6 of the chicks. The photos reveal the definitive field marks of Virginia Rail chicks: down long, thick and rather coarse, black with greenish gloss on back and bluish gloss on head, and light-colored bills banded with black (Baicich and Harrison 1997). Subsequent reports after the 5 May sighting listed different numbers and groups of chicks. Most reports indicate 1 group of 6–8 chicks with 2 adult rails and a second group at the other end of the reeds with 3–4 chicks following 1 adult which led us to conclude that there were probably 2 broods of rails.

There are very few nesting records of Virginia Rail in Oklahoma. Margaret Morse Nice (1931) mentioned eggs at Pond Creek (probably Washita County) on 13 June 1860; nests along the Cimarron River near Gate, Beaver County; at Ivanhoe Lake near Shattuck in Woodward County. In Tulsa, a female was collected with 11 eggs 27 April 1930. Another specimen collected in Tulsa in October 1956 was in partial juvenile plumage (Sutton 1967.) Sutton (1967) cited nesting of Virginia Rails in a marsh in Beaver County in 1930, and in the same location, a female was collected in 1956 that was “ready to lay eggs.” Sutton also mentioned adult and young seen in Salt

Plains National Wildlife Refuge (Alfalfa County) in July 1961. The Durant Fish Hatchery (Bryan County) had Virginia Rails in August 1963 that were “probably nesting” (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992:136). One other breeding record from Johnston County in 1974 (G. M. Sutton) was listed by the Baumgartners. In May 1993, a pair of Virginia Rails were assumed to be protecting young or eggs at Lake Carl Etling, Black Mesa State Park, Cimarron County (Shackford and Tyler 1994.) During the years of the Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas Project (1997–2001), “no breeding evidence for Virginia Rails was reported” (Reinking 2004:128–129).

This is the first reported breeding evidence of Virginia Rails for Tulsa County since the 1930 report. Hopefully, this indicates that this species is finding suitable breeding habitat in northeastern Oklahoma, and we can look forward to more nesting reports in the future.

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