

JABIRU STORK IN OKLAHOMA

BY EMILY SUE MCCONNELL AND JOEL P. MCCONNELL

AT about 0900 on the morning of 28 July 1973, while we were observing Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), and Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) in a marshy field just south of the town of Bixby, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, a heavy-bodied, long-legged, white bird ambled out from a group of trees. It was so very big that it made the Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets look small. Our binoculars brought the surprising creature, now in the open in bright sunshine and only a hundred yards away, into sharp focus. It had a thick, nearly foot-long bill that seemed to turn up at the end. Its legs were the same dark gray as the bill. Its naked looking head and neck were gray-black except for a noticeable red band at the base of the neck. The plumage of its wings and body was dingy white. It had to be a stork, we reasoned, but since its bill was not decurved and its wings were wholly without black, it could not be a Wood



JABIRU STORK

An immature bird photographed by Robert S. Farris on 4 August 1973 in a rain-soaked field just south of Bixby, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma. Note the huge bill, bold neck-band, and slightly mottled plumage.

Stork (*Mycteria americana*), a species known to visit Oklahoma occasionally.

A telephone call quickly brought Eleanor Sieg, Herbert Keating, his wife Polly, four telescopes (20- to 50-power), and three field guides. A sense of frustration gripped us all until Herbert Keating found the right picture on Plate 2 of "A field guide to the birds of Mexico and Central America" by L. Irby Davis (1972). Our bird was a Jabiru Stork (*Jabiru mycteria*), a species whose range extends normally from "southern Mexico through Central America and South America to Argentina" (Friedmann, Griscom, and Moore, 1950, Distributional check-list of the birds of Mexico, Pt. 1: 35).

The telescopes showed the white plumage of the bird to be tinged with brown, especially on the breast. They also made clear that there was dingy white plumage on the back of the head. We decided that the bird was immature, probably less than a year old. For an hour it remained within a space about two yards square; then, spreading its wide wings, it flew easily over a barbed wire fence into the adjoining field. For two more hours we watched it as it walked about, preened itself, stretched its long neck until it stood nearly five feet tall, then settled back into the typical "siesta" pose with foot drawn up and bill resting on breast.

Word spread quickly through the Tulsa Audubon Society and to bird observers in Bartlesville and Muskogee. The Jabiru was under observation several times a day from 28 July through 9 August; it was photographed repeatedly by six people and watched by at least 35 others from time to time. The highway close by became such a meeting place that local people joined the watch. The owner of the field said she had seen the big bird several days before we found it. One man said that he had first noticed it the day after a heavy rain.

The year 1973 was one of unusually severe and frequent rain storms in Oklahoma. According to U.S. Weather Bureau reports, Tulsa had a heavy rain on 14 July, but the heaviest rains fell from 23 to 25 July, when the meeting of a warm front from the south and a cold front from the west produced storm conditions — flash floods, gusty winds, lightning-caused fires — that were especially severe in southeastern Tulsa County. Twice as much rain as usual fell there in July, leaving certain pecan orchards, meadows, and tree-bordered cultivated fields 3 miles south of the Arkansas River — the area in which we found the Jabiru — with much casual water in the form of ponds, brimming ditches, and marshy places.

To this water-soaked area we returned on 29 July to observe the Jabiru. The bird's great size, seven-foot wingspread, long neck, and massive bill again impressed us. In the bright sunshine its white plumage fairly shone. It was feeding with egrets and other herons but seemed completely indifferent to them, walking along opening and closing its heavy mandibles rapidly while pushing them through the water, sometimes probing the bottom or the partly submerged

vegetation with them. We watched it catch a fish 8 or 10 inches long crosswise in its bill. The fish got away when the stork attempted to turn it for swallowing. With neck outstretched and bill open the great bird chased the fish in the shallow water — but in vain. We did, however, see it capture and swallow several somewhat smaller fish.

Only one step forward was required when the Jabiru launched itself into flight. Once off the ground, it rose abruptly. Its wingbeats were regular and not very rapid. The long neck, heavy bill, and long legs were conspicuous as it made off. It flew a hundred yards or so, circled, and returned, gliding down to a spot not far from that at which it had been feeding. When it flew off a second time, it vanished over the treetops. The consensus of those who had watched it flying was that there were no missing or clipped wing feathers or other indications of its having been in captivity.

For nine days the Jabiru was observed at this same place feeding, resting, and preening. Once it appeared to bathe by putting water on its feathers with its bill. At twilight, when all the herons flew away to roost, it continued to feed for a time then suddenly stopped, rested its bill on its breast, and went to sleep, standing there in the middle of the field where nothing could approach it without being observed. No one ever saw it in a tree or on a post.

On 5 August the Oklahoma City Zoo sent its Zoological Curator, Charles Wilson, to verify our identification and to capture the stork if possible. He and his wife Carole (in charge of feeding the five Jabirus then at the zoo) were amazed and excited by seeing this one in the wild in Oklahoma. After dark — there was a little moonlight — Charles Wilson and his brother Claude, who had come from Okmulgee, Oklahoma, to help, crept toward the bird with a net. No one knew for sure that the stork was asleep, though it remained motionless as the two men, keeping low, moved slowly forward. After about an hour and a half of watching through his 8 x 50 binocular, Richard Sherry of Tulsa reported that the bird was becoming nervous. Its would-be captors were now only about 12 yards away. The Jabiru, walking back and forth within an open area about two yards square, kept its head up and made a clacking noise with its bill. Then abruptly it flew up and away.

After being disturbed, the stork did not frequent this favorite spot any more, but the following evening John Tomer and his wife Pat discovered it in another wet field 4 miles due north, and on 7 August Bruce Reynolds and his wife Anne watched it there as, in a truly spectacular performance, it flew up, circled the the field, began to soar, rose higher and higher without moving its wings until almost out of sight, then returned to a lower level and flew off to the east. For two more days it visited this new field, though in so far as anyone could discover it did not sleep there. After 9 August it was not seen again.

The Oklahoma City Zoo got in touch with other zoos of the area to determine if the stork might have been "an escape." No one reported a lost Jabiru. Those who have seen or become interested in the Tulsa County bird are convinced that it was truly wild because first, it was in excellent condition, could fly well, and was quite capable of caring for itself; second, being a young bird, its wandering "out of range" in late summer was precisely what the young of many large wading birds customarily do after the breeding season; and third, unusual winds from the south in July might well have blown it farther and farther north. Finding sufficient food at various stops, it had survived though a long way from its normal habitat.

The Jabiru Stork is listed hypothetically in the AOU Check-list, the "record from Austin, Texas," published in 1867, being considered "unsatisfactory" (1957, p. 645). One valid record for the United States — of an immature bird seen on the King Ranch in Texas from 11 August to 8 September 1971 — has been reported (Haucke and Kiel, 1973, *Auk*, 90: 675). The 28 July to 9 August observations reported above are apparently the northernmost for *Jabiru mycteria* as well as the first for Oklahoma and the second for the United States.

6097 EAST 56th ST., TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74185, 31 JANUARY 1974.

GENERAL NOTES

Successful nesting of hummingbird in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.—According to Nice (1931, *Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 110), Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma birds*, p. 287), and data filed at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range the only hummingbird whose breeding has heretofore been reported for Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, is the Broad-tailed (*Selasphorus platycercus*). On 20 June 1912, a nest and two eggs of that species are said to have been "found on Marselus Bros. ranch" near Kenton (Tate, 1923, *Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci.*, 3: 45; Nice, *op. cit.*); but *S. platycercus* has not been seen by anyone in summer in Cimarron County since that year despite the considerable attention bird students have given the Black Mesa country, and careful observers are beginning to suspect that Tate misidentified the specimen "taken" by him (Nice, *op. cit.*), the female bird at the nest, and the three birds that he saw at or near Kenton respectively on 28 September 1922 (Tate, *loc. cit.*), 23 September 1924, and 15 October 1924 (Nice, *op. cit.*). In any event, the only Cimarron County hummingbird specimen of any species now available for study is a Black-chin (*Archilochus alexandri*), a male collected at the east end of the Black Mesa near Kenton on 15 May 1966 (Sutton, *op. cit.*, p. 287). The capture of this specimen (one of two males seen on that date) leads one to believe that the breeding hummingbird of the area is the Black-chin.

On 3 July 1971—a hot, sunny day with ambient mid-afternoon temperature of 95° F.—Laurance Regnier, whose house is 4 miles south of Kenton, showed me and my ornithology class a hummingbird nest in his yard. The nest, which was made almost entirely of straw-colored plant down (without lichens), was near the end of a small bare elm branch about 6 feet 8 inches from the ground in a well shaded spot a few rods from the house and about

the same distance from Texakeet Creek. While we were at the nest, which held two nearly naked nestlings, each about an inch long and dark slaty blue of skin, the female hummer flew about us excitedly. She was plain grayish white below, without any buff on the sides or flanks, so I felt sure that she was not a Broad-tail. She could, conceivably, have been a Ruby-throat (*A. colubris*), but the fact that the Ruby-throat has never been collected or even seen in the Oklahoma Panhandle rules out any likelihood of her having been that species. Neither Mr. Regnier nor his wife Carrie could recall having seen a male hummingbird of any species near their house—or anywhere in the area—that season.—Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biology, Cameron College, Lawton, Oklahoma 73501, 15 August, 1971.*

Specimen of Rufous Hummingbird from Washington County, Oklahoma.—On 23 August 1972 at 08:00—a clear, cool morning following 36 hours of westerly and northwesterly winds and the passage of two cool fronts with intermittent rain and cloudy weather—my husband Max and I observed a Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) in our back yard in Bartlesville, Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma. The bird was at a hummingbird feeder on a pole some 12 feet from a window. Not knowing where to obtain the syrup, it was exploring the apparatus when it was chased off by one of the six or so Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) that frequented the yard. At another feeder on a fence about 15 feet away, it finally found the feeding spout. It was perceptibly larger than any of the Ruby-throats. Its underparts were white save for the rufous sides and vague rufous band across the chest. Its tail was rufous at the base, and three outer pairs of feathers were white-tipped.

An immature male Ruby-throat, whose injured wing we had nursed for several days, accosted the Rufous. The two birds hovered, maneuvered, and sparred, often only inches apart, usually within a foot or so of the feeder. Difference in size and tail color was readily apparent. The Rufous finally alighted on a crepe myrtle twig close to the fence-feeder. After a short rest, it returned to the feeder and again was challenged. This time it flew to the back of the yard and perched on a telephone cable, where it sat for about five minutes, preening meticulously.

Off and on that afternoon I observed the bird as it fed about the yard. During one of its extended resting periods on a bare twig in a redbud tree I noticed one tiny iridescent orange-red feather in its throat. For a week the bird visited our feeders, preened on the telephone cables, guy wires, or clothesline, and sparred with the Ruby-throats.

On 30 August we collected it—the second specimen (UOMZ 7374) of *Selasphorus rufus* for Oklahoma. It proved to be a fairly fat adult female (weight 3.8 grams; culmen 17 mm.; wing 45.5). According to Ridgway (1911, U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 50, Pt. 5, p. 612), the “chin, throat and chest” of the adult female Rufous Hummingbird are “dull white, the throat usually with tips of some of the feathers metallic orange-red or scarlet.” The first Rufous Hummingbird specimen for the state, also a female (UOMZ 3724), was taken in Cleveland County, central Oklahoma, on 3 November 1959 (Sutton, Oklahoma birds, p. 288).—Sophia C. Mery, 345 S. E. Boston, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003, 3 September 1972.

Acadian Flycatcher near Stillwater, Oklahoma.—In mid-morning on 3 June 1972 (weather clear and warm; little wind) I observed an Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) in a grove of pecan trees in low-lying land along Cow Creek near Stillwater, Payne County, north-central Oklahoma. I knew at once that the bird was a small flycatcher of the genus *Empidonax* from the way in which it flitted about among the leaves. I identified it to species from its persistent, somewhat explosive *weezi-ick* callnote. It apparently had staked out and was defending a territory, but I did not see its mate. I watched it for about 15 minutes and moved on but continued to hear it calling from the trees.

Midsummer occurrence of *E. virescens* in Payne County has been reported only once heretofore: from 19 to 22 June 1959 Frederick M. Baumgartner saw and heard one several times at Lake Carl Blackwell, about 10 miles west of Stillwater; he believed that the bird "was probably nesting" (1959, Audubon Field Notes, 13: 440).—John Grula, *Route 2, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074, 1 October 1972.*

Acadian Flycatcher summering in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma: a re-identification.—At the request of George M. Sutton I recently examined several Oklahoma specimens of *Empidonax* flycatchers in an effort to identify them as Alder Flycatchers (*Empidonax alnorum*) or Willow Flycatchers (*E. traillii*), the two species recently recognized in the 32nd Supplement to the AOU Check-list of North American birds (1973, Auk, 90: 415-16). Among the specimens studied was one taken 5 August 1963 by J. L. Cracraft at the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, north-central Oklahoma. It had been identified as *E. traillii campestris* and so entered in the catalog of the National Museum of Natural History (USNM 479,649). The bird was the singing male mentioned by Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, pp. 343-44) that was observed repeatedly from 27 June to 5 August 1963 and that was thought possibly to have nested.

The plumage of the specimen is worn and molting, making color comparisons difficult. Moreover, because the primaries are in molt, it is impossible to determine the wing formula, a character (based on relative length of the primaries) that is vital in identifying certain species of *Empidonax*. The progressive, symmetrical nature of the primary molt, which is about one-third completed, indicates that the bird was undergoing its normal postnuptial molt, not merely replacing accidentally lost feathers, and this fact provides the needed clue to the bird's identity. The specimen proves to be neither member of the "Traill's Flycatcher" complex but rather an Acadian Flycatcher (*E. virescens*). The Acadian is the only eastern *Empidonax* that undergoes its postnuptial molt on the breeding ground before fall migration (Mengel, 1952, Auk, 69: 276), whereas birds of the "Traill's" complex have their postnuptial molt after the fall migration while they are in their winter quarters in the tropics (Dickey and van Rossem, 1938, Field Mus. Nat. Hist. Publ. Zool. Ser., 23: 377). Adults of one other North American *Empidonax*, the Hammond's Flycatcher (*E. hammondi*), molt before fall migration (Johnson, 1963, Proc. 13th Internat. Orn. Congr., pp. 871, 875). However, the broad bill of the Salt Plains refuge specimen immediately distinguishes it from *hammondi*.

Characters other than wing molt declare the Salt Plains specimen to be an Acadian Flycatcher. The sides of the head, which are relatively unworn, are light greenish gray. In addition, Dr. Sutton, who has examined the specimen and who concurs in this re-identification, notes (*in litt.*) that the bill is large and broad, more typically like that of *virescens* than of *traillii* or *alnorum*, and that the back-color is wrong for either *traillii* or *alnorum*.

In the field, *Empidonax* flycatchers are most readily identified by song. Unfortunately, no tape recording or verbal description was made of the vocalizations of the Salt Plains bird. On the specimen label the collector described its habitat as "swampy" — an adjective indicating a habitat similar to the "shady, more or less wet bottomland woods and . . . wooded slopes" (Sutton, *op. cit.*, p. 341) selected by the Acadian Flycatcher elsewhere in Oklahoma.

Re-identification of the Salt Plains specimen as *E. virescens* extends the possible breeding range of this eastern-Oklahoma summer resident about 120 miles westward in the northern part of the state. The Willow Flycatcher (*E. traillii*), an uncommon and local nesting species in Oklahoma, is probably restricted in its breeding to the area north and east of Tulsa.—John S. Weske, *National Fish and Wildlife Laboratory, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C. 20560, 1 March 1974.*

May an adult Canyon Wren become flightless during late summer molt?—On 3 September 1971, in a little canyon near the Laurance Regnier ranch house 4 miles south of Kenton, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, I heard a Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) singing brilliantly on a steep slope above me. Believing the bird to be a male, and wondering—as I often have—whether female Canyon Wrens ever sing, I climbed the slope, found the bird, and watched it as it moved about the big rocks not far from me. "Squeaking" it closer, I frightened it with an unintended arm movement and was surprised to see it scramble up an almost perpendicular rock-face and into a crevice, without flying at all. Presently it reappeared, making its way higher and higher, visible about a third of the time, and making no attempt (so far as I could see) to fly. Curious as to whether it could fly, I tried to frighten it by throwing rocks at it, completely lost it for awhile, then saw it peering over a rim of rock perhaps 50 feet above me. On collecting it, I found its wings to be very "ragged" and its body plumage in heavy molt. The more carefully I examined the specimen (adult male, UOMZ 7191) the more amazed I was with the fact that it had sung so brilliantly. I am not sure that it was incapable of flight; but its behavior strongly suggested that it was trying to avoid using its wings even as balancers.—George M. Sutton, *Stovall Museum of Science and History, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 12 February 1972.*

Late date for Orchard Oriole and cowbird it had fledged.—On 2 August 1972, in my yard at 1021 Walnut Road in Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma, I saw a fully adult male Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) feeding a young Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). So far as I could see, the oriole was not molting. I did not hear it singing, nor did I see its mate. The cowbird could fly, but it had not been out of the nest very long. The date is late not only for the oriole, a species known to leave its breeding ground early, but also for fledging of the cowbird (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, pp. 545, 558).—Mary Avolyn Johns, 1021 Walnut Road, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 15 August 1972.

Breeding of Lark Bunting in Garfield County, Oklahoma.—On 21 June 1972, while I was helping Joy Robertson with her National Breeding Bird Survey assignment, we happened upon a young bird that was sitting in a red shale roadbed 3 miles south and 2½ miles east of Waukomis, Garfield County, north-central Oklahoma. We could not identify the fledgling at first, but presently its parent, a female Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) alighted in a weed at the roadside. Looking about carefully, we found three more young birds. The only adult Lark Buntings that we saw all looked like females, but a passerby who lived in the area told us that he had seen boldly marked black-and-white birds thereabouts earlier in the season. Why we did not see at least one male in breeding feather is puzzling; according to Roberts (1936, Birds of Minnesota, 2: 707), the "complete postnuptial molt" of the Lark Bunting takes place "in late July and August."

Margaret M. Nice (1931, Birds of Oklahoma, p. 180), who called the Lark Bunting a "transient in western Oklahoma, breeding in Cimarron County," mentioned records for Cimarron, Texas, Woods, Woodward, Comanche, Jackson, and Tillman counties. Why she omitted Beaver County is not clear, for she and her husband had, in an earlier publication, stated that W. E. Lewis considered the Lark Bunting a "common migrant at Gate" (Nice and Nice, 1924, Birds of Oklahoma, p. 79). Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 603), who stated that the species ranged eastward "irregularly as far as Washington, Payne, Cleveland, and Comanche counties" in spring, considered the eastern and southern limits of breeding to be in Grant County, the county just north of Garfield; he mentioned L. L. Byfield's Grant County records for young out of the nest on 14 June 1964 and for a nest with fresh eggs on 22 June 1964 (young on 4 July). He gave no records of any sort for Garfield County.

On 3 July 1972, Mrs. Robertson and I again visited the area southeast of Waukomis, but we found no Lark Buntings there. I have, however, seen transient Lark Buntings near Enid in May on several occasions. On 16 May 1965 I saw several black-and-white males on the Drummond Flats just west of Drummond. Mrs. Robertson, too, has seen the species in Garfield County, as follows: several just north of Enid on 13 May 1964; flock of about 40 birds 7 miles north of Enid on 11 May 1967; a male just east of Douglas on 10 May 1969; she also saw a male just east of Marshall, Logan County, on 8 May 1969.—Florel Helema, 914 W. Illinois, Enid, Oklahoma 73701, 21 July 1972.

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