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OKLAHOMA RECORDS FOR THE BLACK RAIL

BY RONALD S. SULLIVAN

So very secretive is the Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) that it is not often seen even in areas where it is fairly common. It has long been considered a rare bird in Oklahoma. Nice (1931, Birds of Oklahoma, p. 85), who called it a "rare transient," mentioned two records — one of a bird "caught alive . . . after a heavy rain in the early fall of 1915" near Gate, Beaver County, at the eastern end of the Panhandle, by W. E. Lewis (1930, Wilson Bull., 42: 42), the other of a male (UOMZ old no. 1430) collected by C. E. Fleming at a pond called Mussel Shoals just north of Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma on 15 May 1924. The label for this specimen, which was preserved as a skin, does

BLACK RAIL

A young bird captured and photographed by Philip Clover at Puterbaugh Pond on the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma on 19 August 1971. Note the diagnostic white barring on the back feathers and the largely sheathed major wing quills.

not make clear whether the bird was shot, found dead, or captured alive.

Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 164), who expressed belief that the Black Rail might breed in Oklahoma, mentioned two sightings by E. W. Craven, each of a single bird at the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County, southeastern Oklahoma — one on 11 October 1951, the other on 16 September 1957.

Records mentioned recently by Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, p. 13) need clarification. On 4 May 1971, Mildred Hatch of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, observed an adult Black Rail for about five minutes along the Eagle Roost Nature Trail at Puterbaugh Pond on the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, north-central Oklahoma. On 19 August 1971, Philip Clover, a refuge employee, captured a young Black Rail while disking the cattails after Puterbaugh Pond had been drained. This bird was photographed and released. On 29 August 1973, I saw what appeared to me to be an adult Black Rail on the dike between Puterbaugh Pond and Mink Run Pond on the refuge.

The photograph taken on 19 August 1971 was sent to the U.S. National Museum where such authorities as Storrs S. Olson, Richard C. Banks, and John S. Weske agreed that the bird in the picture could not have been anything but a Black Rail. *Laterallus jamaicensis* may now be considered a breeding bird of Oklahoma. It is to be looked for in marshy areas.

On 22 September 1973, William Bartush (1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8:28), saw a Black Rail along the shore of Lake McMurtry in southeastern Noble County, north-central Oklahoma. Sutton (1974, *loc. cit.*) erred in citing this as a Payne County record.

SALT PLAINS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, JET, OKLAHOMA 73749, 4 AUGUST 1975.

A CHIMNEY SWIFT NEST IN A GARAGE

BY GARY R. ZAHM

Nowadays most Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) that nest in Oklahoma probably do so in chimneys. Some, however, nest regularly in "old wells" in Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma, and in 1964 one pair nested in a hollow maple along a busy street in Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 279). In 1971 a pair nested about 8 feet from the floor on the wall of an unused part of my two-car garage on the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County, southeastern Oklahoma. I observed these birds daily from early May until late summer, at which time they and their brood left, presumably for some large chimney or other roosting place at which a premigratory flock was gathering.

I do not know just when the two swifts started to roost in the garage, but I

often saw them clinging to the wall at night before the nest was started. Nest-building continued for several days in mid-May. Both the male and female gathered and brought in material. The nest was at the very spot the pair had occupied when roosting. After the first egg was laid the birds continued to add material to the nest for at least two days. This struck me as odd, but in his monographic paper on "The breeding behavior of the Chimney Swift," R. B. Fischer (1958, New York State Mus. and Sci. Serv. Bull. 368, Univ. State of New York, Albany, p. 79) states that egg-laying "begins when the . . . nest is approximately half finished." The completed clutch was of four eggs, but I did not visit the nest often enough to be sure just when these were laid or when incubation began. The sexes shared the duties of incubation, which seemed to be almost continuous. Each night during the incubation period one bird was on the nest, facing the wall, the other clinging to the wall close against the nest, but I had no way of knowing which sex was covering the eggs. During the day the incubating bird tolerated all sorts of noise and activity in the garage, but whenever I approached to within a few feet, it stretched its neck upward and "froze" in this position until I withdrew.

One egg hatched on or about 8 June, the other three within the following 48 hours. The young, though naked at first, were covered with spiny-looking

Young Chimney Swifts clinging to the wall of a garage on the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County, southeastern Oklahoma. Photographed on 4 July 1971 by Gary R. Zahm.

pin-feathers within about two weeks. At first their food cries were not noticeable, but within a few days the brood became vociferous when begging. Now any disturbance in the garage started an uproar of hunger cries that sometimes lasted a full minute or more. During their first week (perhaps longer) the young were brooded at night by one of the parents. At no time did the nest become soiled by droppings.

When they were fairly well feathered the young swifts left the nest — not to fly, but to cling to the wall. First only one climbed out, then the other three, all three at about the same time. For a day or so they clambered about, out of the nest part of the time, then back in it. During the last week of June they ventured well away from the nest, always clinging to the wall. On several occasions I found one or more of them fully 7 feet below the nest, only inches from the floor.

The smallest of the brood I found dead on the floor when it was about three weeks old. The others continued to develop rapidly. As I watched from day to day, I could see that their primary wing feathers were growing longer. As the birds matured they wandered less from the nest and from each other. During the first four days of July they crowded together so closely that they sometimes looked like a single bird with three heads.

When about a month old, the young swifts exercised their wings a great deal. Presently they were flying. I did not witness their first flight. Indeed, I now suspect that they had been flying for some time — and returning to the garage to roost each night — before I even knew they could fly. One of the brood killed itself flying into a telephone wire not far from the garage. The other two and their parents roosted together in the garage night after night for a week or so before they departed for good.

Swifts did not nest in the garage in the summer of 1972.

BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, SAN ANTONIO, NEW MEXICO 87832, 10 MARCH 1973.

A HUMMINGBIRD NEST IN GHOST HOLLOW

BY MILDRED RICKSTREW

Finding the nest of a hummingbird in Ghost Hollow, just northeast of Ripley, Payne County, north-central Oklahoma, was pure luck. The hollow is a favorite birding spot for my sister (Margaret Williamson) and me, but we seldom have seen a hummingbird there.

On 16 May 1973, while I was standing motionless hoping to observe a Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*) go to its nest on the opposite bank (see Rickstrew, 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8:3-5), a female hummingbird —presumably a Ruby-throat (*Archilochus colubris*)—settled on a tiny, lichen-covered nest, about the size of a walnut, directly in front of me. The nest was in a small bur oak that stood beside the road and hung over the creek; it was

attached to a small drooping limb at a fork just above eye-level. The nest and bird were conspicuous enough once I had seen them, but had the bird not flown to it I'd never have noticed the nest, for it looked like part of the limb.

My sister and I watched the nest from 16 May (when it probably contained eggs) until the young fledged on 21 June. On 5 June we used a mirror attached to a fishing pole trying to see the contents, but leaves above the nest blocked our view and the female hummingbird fought the mirror so hard that we feared she would injure herself or damage the nest. On 7 June we saw what appeared to be a small stick protruding from the nest. Had something disturbed the tiny structure? Binoculars proved the "stick" to be the slightly open beak of a young bird. Later that day we saw two "sticks" above the nest's rim.

On 12 June we sat in the car and watched the mother bird put her long bill down the throats of the young birds, thus feeding them by regurgitation. According to Bent (1940, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176, p. 342) "a considerable part of the . . . food consists of insects, chiefly those that come to the flowers the hummingbird visits."

Several bird-watchers aside from my sister and me enjoyed watching the mother hummingbird and her young during the final days of the fledging period. We last saw the young on 21 June. By that time they had grown so large that they could remain in the nest only by facing in opposite directions.

BOX 27, RIPLEY, OKLAHOMA 74062, 25 SEPTEMBER 1973.

GENERAL NOTES

Common Loon, Virginia Rail, and Marbled Godwit in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.—Early on the mild, overcast morning of 2 May 1975, several of my ornithology students and I heard the call of a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) at Lake Carl Etling in Black Mesa State Park, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma. A few minutes later the bird flew low overhead, allowing us to see it clearly. According to Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 5), the Common Loon has not heretofore been reported from Cimarron County.

As we explored the small cattail-choked stream below the dam, we twice flushed a long-billed rail about 7 or 8 inches long that we felt sure was a Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*). The darkness of its plumage suggested that it was immature, though the date was early for a full-fledged bird of the year. The Virginia Rail has not been reported from Cimarron County though it has bred in Beaver County at the eastern end of the Panhandle (Sutton, *op. cit.*, p. 161).

Three times we flushed a Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*), first at the north end of the lake, then twice along the west shore. We saw it clearly. No black or white showed in the tail, the wing linings were rich cinnamon-rufous, and the wings lacked the white stripe that is characteristic of the Hudsonian Godwit (*L. haemastica*). No godwit has thus far been reported from the Oklahoma Panhandle. The westernmost county from which the Marbled has been reported is Woods, in the northwestern part of the main body of the state (Sutton, 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, p. 17).—Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biological Sciences, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73501, 15 May 1975.*

Possible predation by Mississippi Kites on Chimney Swifts.—On 15 July 1975, I found the remains (three separate wings and several remiges) of at least two Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) under the nest tree of a pair of Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia misisippiensis*) in the Nichols Hills suburban area of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. The kite nest was one of five that I was observing. I never saw a kite taking or chasing a swift, though swifts were common in the area. The chasing and knocking to the ground of a swift by a kite in Lawton, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, has been reported (Waggener, 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8: 27) and the catching of Free-tailed Bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) by kites in Greer County, southwestern Oklahoma, has been described (Taylor, 1964, J. Mammal., 45: 300-301), but not one kite of 16 collected in the spring in 1936 and 1937 in Ellis County, west-central Oklahoma, held so much as a "trace of bird, mammal, or reptile" in its stomach (Sutton, 1939, Condor, 41:50), and most authors agree with Bent (1937, U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 167: 68), who states that birds "apparently are never molested" by kites.

On 15 July one almost-fledged kite was in the nest above the swift remains. It was being fed cicadas and grasshoppers and I never actually saw it being offered any other type of prey. Identification of the Chimney Swift remains was done with the help of skins in the Oklahoma State University museum.—Mark Ports, *2924 Lakeside Dr., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73120, 1 April 1976.*

Nest of Barn Owl in old well.—At a deserted farmhouse 2 3/4 miles north and ½ mile east of Eldorado, Jackson County, southwestern Oklahoma, is an old dry cistern or well about 15 feet deep in which Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) have nested for some time. Jimmy Tinsley, of Eldorado, first found them there several years ago, and John W. Ault III of Lawton, Oklahoma, has seen both old and young birds there each year since 1973. The well's top or entrance, a collar of cement about a foot high, is just wide enough for a man to enter. On 16 March 1976, Brad Carlton, of Oklahoma City, saw two owls in the well, both in the best of health so far as he could see.

Four days later (20 March 1976), Carlton led a party of 18 persons, among them David Foucel and myself, to the well, expecting to show us the owls and perhaps their eggs or young. We found the owls, to be sure, but both were dead. Aided by rope, Foucel made his way to the bottom of the well. What he found there, lying among disintegrating pellets, prey remains, molted feathers, and droppings, were the two dead owls, their five eggs, and the skeletons of two long-dead Virginia Opossums (*Didelphis virginiana*) that probably had fallen into the well and been unable to climb out. The dead owls, each on its back, were about 3 feet apart. The eggs were about midway between them, three badly broken. The two owls, two unbroken eggs, and 20 more or less complete skulls (aside from those of the opossums) were brought up out of the well by Foucel.

So far as we could tell, the owls had not been shot or clubbed to death. Perhaps they had died from eating poisoned rodents, for fields of wheat thereabouts had recently been sprayed. According to D. Scott Wood, who preserved the specimens' skeletons, the female, which was very fat, weighed 690 grams, the rather thin male 510 grams. The two eggs, prepared by George M. Sutton, each contained a fairly well developed embryo, one considerably the larger.

Of the 20 skulls, one was that of an immature Barn Owl. The other 19 were mammalian, as follows: 4 of Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), 5 of Plains Pocket Gopher (*Geomys bursarius*), 1 of Hispid Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus hispidus*), 5 of Eastern Woodrat (*Neotoma floridana*), and 4 of Hispid Cotton Rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*). According to Bent (1938, Bull. U. S. Natl. Mus. 170, Pt. 2, p. 147), "young rabbits" have been recorded as Barn Owl prey, but no mention is made in that summary paragraph of *adult* rabbits. Barton W. Evermann, quoted in A. K. Fisher's classic work, "often found

. . . portions of the large jackass hare (*Lepus californicus*)" in Barn Owl "burrows" in California (Fisher, 1893, The hawks and owls of the United States in their relation to agriculture, Govt. Printing Office, Washington, D. C., p. 134); but reports from other parts of the Barn Owl's continental North American range make clear that rodents smaller than adult rabbits are the ones usually caught. According to J. Keever Greer, who was kind enough to identify the mammal skulls above mentioned, all of the cottontail skulls were of fully adult animals, some or all of which might conceivably have been found dead by the owls along highways not far from the well.—Jack S. Roberts, *5816 Northwest 53rd St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73122, 25 March 1976.*

Blackburnian Warbler in southwestern Oklahoma.—According to Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 567), the Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) is a "transient in eastern Oklahoma" that has been seen "westward to Woods, Payne, Oklahoma, and Cleveland counties." I know of three records for southwestern Oklahoma. 1. On 6 May 1971, Audrey C. Halloran saw one (presumably a male) in her yard along Wolf Creek in the northwestern part of Lawton, Comanche County. 2. On 22 May 1971, several members of the Lawton-Fort Sill Bird Club and I saw an adult male flitting from branch to branch in willow and pecan trees along Blue Beaver Creek 5½ miles west of Lawton. Other trees lining the stream, which had continued to flow despite the year-long drought, included American elms and hackberries. The day was cloudy. A light rain fell that night. 3. On 14 May 1975, John W. Ault III observed an adult male at his home 3 miles east of Lawton.

According to the summary of records on file at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range, *Dendroica fusca* has not heretofore been reported from Comanche County or from any other part of southwestern Oklahoma.—Jack D. Tyler, *Department of Biology, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73501, 20 May 1975.*

Pine Warbler in Osage and Tulsa counties, Oklahoma.—On 27 May 1974 and again on 24 May 1975, I saw a Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*) in a strip of woods along Skull Creek Road just east of Hulah Reservoir in Osage County, north-central Oklahoma. The sightings puzzled me, for there were no pines in the area, the only large trees of the strip being 20-foot post oaks (*Quercus stellata*) under which grew smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), buckbrush (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), small sapling post oaks, and a few widely scattered red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*) 1-8 feet high. To the west of the strip the oak-covered slope led down to the reservoir; to the east lay a wide stretch of old pasture, north of which were more oaks.

The bird seen in 1974 was a singing male whose distinctive trilling I heard soon after parking my car. When I found the bird it was in the top of one of the tallest oaks of the strip. I noted at once its yellow breast, white belly, and white wingbars. As it flew to another oak, where it crept about among the branches, I noted the unstreaked olive back and white spots on the outer tail feathers. The bird seen in 1975 behaved in about the same way; it also was singing.

Does *Dendroica pinus* breed in Osage and Tulsa counties? The species usually inhabits pinelands and almost invariably nests in pines (Nice, 1931, Birds of Oklahoma, p. 160; Lowery, 1955, Louisiana birds, p. 443; Todd, 1940, Birds of western Pennsylvania, p. 531), though Nuttall (1832, A manual of the ornithology of the United States and of Canada, p. 389) found a nest in Massachusetts in a red cedar, and Howell (1932, Florida bird life, p. 406) mentions a nest found in Florida in a cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). Authors seem to agree that in migration Pine Warblers may be seen in almost any kind of woods (Bent, 1953, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 203: 408), a statement implying that where it is largely sedentary, as it is in Oklahoma, it inhabits pines exclusively. The bird (or birds) that Thomas Say saw in Osage County on 23 August 1820 (James, *in* Thwaites, Early western travels, 16: 253; Nice, *loc. cit.*) could have been migrating. The bird seen in Osage Hills State Park by J. L. Norman, O. W. Letson, and his wife Ethel on 30 April

1950 also could have been migrating, though the date is late. Two birds seen in Tulsa County, respectively on 1 May 1937 in a residential part of southeast Tulsa by J. L. Borden and his wife Marion, and on 29 April 1951 in Mohawk Park, Tulsa, by E. D. Markwell *et al.* probably were not migrating. But were they nesting? Not one of the Pine Warblers thus far reported from Osage and Tulsa counties was in a pine, nor were there pines in the immediate vicinity of the sightings.—Elizabeth C. Hicks, *815 S. Jennings, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003, 29 June 1975.*

Louisiana Waterthrush nest in Blaine County, Oklahoma.—On 28 April 1972, while several persons in attendance at an Oklahoma Academy of Science meeting were casually exploring a narrow woodland brook in Roman Nose State Park, 7 miles north of Watonga, Blaine County, west-central Oklahoma, I flushed a Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*) from a nest containing five eggs. The nest was about 7 feet above the streambed and 2½ feet below ground-level among the roots of an old stump that protruded from a vertical bank. The eggs looked fresh, though I did not take one out to examine it closely; among them was no egg of the cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). I had no opportunity to visit the nest further, but William A. Carter, who was in our party, went to it again on 29 and 30 April, finding in it on those dates only the five waterthrush eggs. On 21 May, when it contained a few eggshell fragments, it was collected by Jack D. Tyler for the Museum of Zoology at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma.

According to data filed at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range, this is the first Louisiana Waterthrush nest *with eggs* ever to have been seen in Oklahoma, and it is also the first to have been seen in Oklahoma in April. A nest in Payne County that held young old enough to be heard begging for food on 21 May 1973 was never actually seen; that nest was under construction as early as 23 April (Rickstrew, 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 8: 4). Egg-laying probably took place there before the end of April, for the incubation period is said to be "about 14 days" (Bent, 1953, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 203, p. 496), and nestlings far enough along in development to be heard begging probably were about eight days old (see Hann, 1937, Wilson Bull., 49: 178). Another early Oklahoma nest, found in Caddo County by Jean W. Graber, held "four well developed young" on 13 May 1955 (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 515). At that nest egg-laying probably took place during the third week of April.—Robert L. Ziegler, *Department of Biology, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73501, 1 June 1975.*

Common Redpoll in central Oklahoma.—On 8 January 1976 a Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) visited the feeder in our backyard in Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma. We clearly saw the red of the crown-patch and the black chin. There was no pink on the breast, nor was the rump noticeably white. Among the other birds that we saw in the yard that day were many American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*), several Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*), and a Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*). The coming of the shrike caused the birds at the feeder to scatter; its victim was a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). We saw the redpoll again on 10 January (briefly) and 12 January (many times). The weather from 10 to 12 January was, generally speaking, mild, but the air temperature had dropped to 6° F. on 7 January and to 3° F. on 8 January. There had been no snow since late December 1975, and not much had fallen then.—Hubert Frings and Mable Frings, *514 College Ave., Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 28 January 1976.*

FROM THE EDITOR: Appreciation is hereby expressed to the following: J. Keever Greer, for identifying Barn Owl prey remains and checking all mammal names for accuracy; John S. Weske for consulting obscure literature in Washington, D.C.; Marge Farwell, for delivering copy to the Transcript Press; Mitchell Codding and Judy Milam, for typing.

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