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N.M.O.S. Announcement: 1980 Annual Meeting

By John P. Hubbard

Spring is still a long way away, but in the attempt to keep our membership better informed, we have decided that the announcement of the Annual Meeting should appear in the last issue of each year's Bulletin. Hence, we are pleased to announce that the 1980 meeting will be in Farmington on the weekend of April 12. This will be the Society's first such gathering in San Juan County, and the date is later than usual in order to improve birding prospects. At least one field trip will be offered, along with one or more evening events. More details will be announced in the next Bulletin, but you should mark your 1980 calendar now. Anyone wanting to give a presentation should contact me as soon as possible. Papers on birds of New Mexico are preferred, but we also welcome presentations on the birdlife of other areas as well.

Summer Birds of the Hobbs Area of New Mexico

By Hart R. Schwarz

During the course of my several years of residency in Hobbs, I have found the avifauna to be interesting and more varied than one might think. The migrational seasons are the most productive as far as numbers of species and individuals are concerned, but winter and summer also yield many birds. Good places to see birds include the Hobbs Country Club, Ocotillo Golf Course and nearby military airfield, Prairie Haven Cemetery and adjacent mesquite shrubland, Green Meadow Lake, and the campus of New Mexico Junior College. The following 40 species summer and probably all breed in the area (A abundant; C common; F fairly common; U uncommon; and R rare):

Mississippi Kite (U); Swainson Hawk (F); American Kestrel (R); Scaled Quail (C); American Coot (F); Killdeer (C); Rock Dove (C); Mourning Dove (A); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (U); Roadrunner (F); Burrowing Owl (F); Black-chinned Hummingbird (F); Ladder-backed Woodpecker (F); Western Kingbird (A); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (C); Ash-throated Flycatcher (F); Horned Lark (U); Barn Swallow (F); Blue Jay (U); White-necked Raven (C); Cactus Wren (F); Rock Wren (CR); Northern Mockingbird (C); Curve-billed Thrasher (U); Loggerhead Shrike (U); Common Starling (F); House Sparrow (C); Eastern Meadowlark (C); Western Meadowlark (C); Red-winged Blackbird (C); Great-tailed Grackle (F); Brown-headed Cowbird (F); Orchard Oriole (R); Northern Oriole (C); Pyrrhuloxia (U); Blue Grosbeak (F); House Finch (C); Lesser Goldfinch (F); Lark Sparrow (A); Cassin Sparrow (A).

The Status of the Cardinal in New Mexico

By John P. Hubbard

It has been said that Europeans envy Americans our red birds, and there is no question that the Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) would be a striking addition to any avifauna. In New Mexico, this species is a regular occupant of the extreme southwest, as well as a vagrant farther eastward and northward (Hubbard, 1978b). However, even in its limited range in our state, it appears from present data that the Cardinal is rather a recent arrival in New Mexico. This paper will present the facts and other information to explain this conclusion.

The first record of the Cardinal attributed to New Mexico is ascribed to T. C. Henry, who was stationed in Dona Ana County in the period 1854 to 1858 (Bailey, 1928). This record is based on a male specimen reported by Baird (1858) and attributed to Ft. Thorne, which was near the present town of Hatch. Although the specimen had indeed been collected by Henry and made available to Baird, there is considerable doubt that it came from New Mexico. Henry had, in fact, come to New Mexico from Kansas (Bailey, 1928), and almost certainly he collected specimens there and en route to New Mexico. As was often the case in those days, his specimens were probably poorly or not at all labeled, so that localities had to be reconstructed from other information. In the case of the Cardinal specimen, I suspect that Baird assumed the collecting locality to have been Ft. Thorne on the basis that Henry was stationed there for the longest time.

I believe that Baird was incorrect in his assessments of the origin of this specimen, and more likely it came from farther east--as appears to have been the case with several other "New Mexico" specimens that he cited from Henry's collection, including a Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopos pileatus*), Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), and White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). Henry (1855, 1859) never mentioned any of these species from New Mexico, and almost certainly he would have done so--especially in the case of the Cardinal.

Given the probability that the Cardinal was not known in New Mexico in the 1850's, the next date on record for the species in the state is 1899 (Bailey, 1928). According to that source, a Capt. Higginson took one near Carlsbad on 20 June, although the specimen cannot now be located and may have been lost or destroyed. The next record is from the opposite corner of southern New Mexico, that being a male--"one only...seen..." (Phillips, 1968)--taken at Redrock in the Gila Valley by E. A. Goldman on 1 October 1908. R. T. Kellogg was to find the species in the same area as well, talking a male there on 14 December 1917 and finding some two dozen birds there on 8 May 1922 (data

Cincinnati Mus. Nat. Hist.). Thus, It appears that by the last date, the Cardinal had become a well-established resident of the Redrock area. In this conjunction, it is notable that such visitors to the area as Henshaw in 1873, Stephens in 1876, and Barrell in 1890 (Bailey, 1928) did not report or collect the species, suggesting that it was absent in the Gila Valley in those earlier years. By 1933 the Cardinal had certainly reached northward in the Gila Valley to Cliff, where Allan Brooks took several on 6 and 18 March (specimens Mus. Vertebrate Zoology). At present, the Gila Valley is the metropolis for the Cardinal in New Mexico, and the species extends northward there to the Turkey Creek area.

Other parts of the Cardinal's range in southwestern New Mexico seem to have been occupied later than the Gila Valley, based on the evidence at hand. The first records for Guadalupe Canyon appear to be those of Allan R. Phillips (ms.) and his associates, on 12-17 March and 8-9 July 1947. It is certain that Mearns did not record the bird there in 1892-93, nor apparently did anyone else prior to 1947 (Phillips et al., 1964). Farther north, in the Glenwood area of the San Francisco Valley, the Cardinal was apparently absent during visits by such workers as Barrell in 1389 and the Baileys in 1906 (Bailey, 1928), and A. W. Twomey--who made extensive collections there in 1939 (Carnegie Mus. Nat. History). It was probably in the 1940's or 1950's before the species appeared there--where it now ranges upriver to the vicinity of the U.S. 180 bridge. More recently, the Cardinal appears to have become resident in Hidalgo County along Animas and adjacent Double Adobe creeks, where I first found several on 7-9 June 1976.

Cardinals also occur at times elsewhere in southwestern New Mexico, but to date no additional populations appear to have become established outside of the areas mentioned above. Records include: 1 seen at San Simon Cienega by A. Phillips (ms.) 31 Dec. 1956; 1 at Silver City by D. A. Zimmerman on 24 Nov. 1958 (Audubon Field Notes 13:55, 1959)--plus 1 there by C. L. Snider in winter 1966-67 (NMOS Field Notes); singles seen by me 6 miles south of White Signal on 12 Dec. 1961 and at Mangas Springs 24 May 1961 (Hubbard, ms.), plus 1 at Carrizalillo Spring 25 May 1973; 1 at Rodeo seen by R. Scholes 12 Mar.-1 Apr. 1976; and 1 at Hatchet Ranch--east of the Big Hatchet Mts.--seen by Bruce Hayward et al, on 21 Jan. 1979 (NMOS Field Notes). Only one of the extralimital records involved a specimen, that being the bird, a female (Delaware Mus. Nat. History), from Carrizalillo Spring. It represents the Arizona race, *C. c. superbus*--which is resident in southwesternmost New Mexico--this being the easternmost specimen that I know of the taxon.

Aside from the dubious 1850's specimen, specific records of the Cardinal in the Rio Grande Valley appear to date from 1961, when a male was reported at Albuquerque by J. L. Sands on 13 November (Aud. Field Notes 16:65, 1962). There are subsequent records at that locality--perhaps of the same bird--by Sands and others on 23 Dec. 1961 (Aud. Field Notes 16:264-265, 1962) and in May and Dec. 1963, Jan-Dec. 1964, Mar. 1966, and Apr. 1968 (NMOS Field Notes). A male was also reported at Tome, Valencia Co., by R. Lewis on 6-9 Sept. 1968, and another at Bosque del Apache NWR by R. L. Teuber on 13 Sept. 1975 (NMOS Field Notes). The only Rio Grande specimen, and the only record farther south, is of a female collected by R. J. Raitt near Berino, Dona Ana Co. on 21 Dec. 1971 (NMSU Dept. of Biology). This bird has been identified by R. C. Laybourne as the Mexican Pacific Coast race, *C. c. affinis*, and although it shows no sign of having been captive, it almost certainly was--perhaps in the cagebird trade in nearby Juarez.

In the Pecos Valley, there are several records since the 1899 occurrence, as follows, 1 at Roswell seen by R. J. Fleetwood et al. on 3 Jan. 1954 (A.F.N.

8:203, 1954), 1 at Carlsbad (flew into a window) by B. Harris in Apr. 1962, 1 at Loving seen by R. C. Brummett in Apr. 1964, 1 at Bitter Lake N.W.R. seen by D. Boggs 28-30 May 1974, and 1 at Santa Rosa seen by M. Castillo on 3 May 1977 (N.M.O.S.F.N.). Farther east, Ligon (1961) comments that the species is "very rare in the...extreme southeastern corner of the State (San Simon Ranch and Jal," but he gives no exact record. The only specific record that I know of from east of the Pecos is of a male seen by P. B. Sullivan at Portales on 16 Mar. 1972 (N.M.O.S.F.N.).

The evidence presented here suggests that the Cardinal has become a resident of New Mexico only within the 20th century, invading the area from Arizona. In the latter State the species also appears to be a rather recent arrival, having been recorded there beginning mainly in the latter quarter of the 19th century (Phillips et al., 1964; Phillips, 1968). Some range expansion may also have occurred in adjacent regions, indicating that the species has been subject to a general expansion in the various parts of the Southwest in historic times.

One should always look for causes in expansions or other changes in the range or status of species, and the Cardinal in New Mexico is no exception. However, I do not perceive any readily identifiable factor(s) associated with the expansion of this species into the State. For example, the preferred habitat in New Mexico appears to be the dense floodplain shrublands of mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*), seep-willow (*Baccharis glutinosa*), and similar plants, all of which appear to have long been present and abundant in such areas as the Gila Valley. This situation contrasts with that in the Pyrrhuloxia (*C. sinuatus*), a shrubland species, the expansion of which appears to have benefited notably from the spread of mesquite from floodplains into upland areas (Oberholser, 1974; Hubbard, 1978a).

Another interesting aspect involving the Cardinal in New Mexico is its general non-overlap, at least as a resident species, with the related Pyrrhuloxia. Thus, Guadalupe Canyon and the Animas, Gila, and San Francisco valleys are strongholds for the Cardinal, while the Pyrrhuloxia is only a rare visitant to these areas. The latter's range instead lies mainly to the east, plus to some degree in the uplands of Hidalgo County. The nearest places in which the two species overlap extensively as residents appear to be in Texas (Oberholser, 1974) and Arizona (Phillips et al., 1964).

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Kestrel Preys on Ladder-backed Woodpecker

By John Egbert

An overnight, four-inch snowfall on 5 February 1979 may have triggered bird-hunting in a female Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). The victim, a female Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) was observed "peeking" during this otherwise calm winter morning. This sharp call may have drawn attention to the bird along this section of a desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) and cholla (*Opuntia spinosior*) strewn wash.

Certainly the Kestrel discovered the black-and-white woodpecker and successfully drove it from the base of a desert willow to the wet, snow-covered ground. This "prettiest and jauntiest of our hawks," as Coues (1874) described it, behaved consistently with a previously used subspecific name, *phaelaena*, "a devouring monster." The woodpecker was at once subdued, killed, and immediately carried off to be eaten. The prey gave no apparent fight, unlike a Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) that escaped a Kestrel in the barnyard of a neighbor, despite the predator's physical attack.

Bird hunting is a known behavior in this smallest of North American falcons. Without the availability of insects in early February, and concomitant freezing temperatures, small mammals and birds present themselves as potential prey items. Frank Beebe (1974) notes that Kestrels are known to turn suddenly on birds that only recently considered it safe to sit on the same fence or forage freely in their presence. Perhaps this Ladder-backed Woodpecker did not sense any change in the atmosphere brought about by snow and cold weather, relative to this little falcon's behavior.

Kestrels were described by Francis Allen (IN Bent 1938) to eat small snakes "like humans eat bananas, top down," and "to pull Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) from their nests." Peterson (1955) indicates that, of the 427 Kestrels that he examined, 416 had insects and small mammals in their stomachs, while 69 had bird remains. No data is given as to collection dates, but one suspects primarily spring to fall entries.

Beebe (1974) states that "under adverse conditions, however brief...Kestrels regularly pursue, capture, and kill other birds varying in size from kinglets (*Regulus* spp.)...up to shorebirds...." It should thus be of no surprise that

this observer witnessed this kill.

Relative to Allen's (IN Bent, 1938) remarks of feeding behavior, I only saw the Kestrel kill the bird, carry it across the wash to a large desert willow, and eat the head, except for the bill. The bill was somehow left secured to a twig by virtue of having been "tied on" by a string of flesh. The remainder of the carcass was flown out of sight, following the seven minutes it took the Kestrel to eat the head, piece by piece.

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New Edition of Carlsbad Caverns National Park Checklist

By Steve West

The latest in a series of checklists to the birds of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Eddy County has now been issued. This is the eighth edition (plus one supplement) since the first one in December 1937, and it covers 273 species of birds.

The new checklist is lacking nesting and ecological information, but this should be rectified in the next version. Nesting records in the past have often not been reported, unless they were unusual. In our desire to make the next revision more complete, I would appreciate any additions and suggestions anyone can offer: I am especially interested in gathering breeding information. Those interested in obtaining a copy of the checklist may do so by sending 25¢ to Carlsbad Caverns Natural History Association, 3225 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220.

Notes and News

Field Notes Index (1968-1977)

An index to the Field Notes for the period 1968 through 1977 has been printed and mailed out to current members of the N.M.O.S. Additional copies may be obtained by writing to the Secretary. The cost per set is \$1.00, which includes mailing.

Check-list Debt

The Society has now liquidated the printing debt for publication of the Revised check-list of the birds of New Mexico. We are grateful to the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society and to Jim Travis for their help in financing this publication.

Field Check-list and Breeding Record Cards

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