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CONTENTS

SITE GUIDE: LAS VEGAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE. Pat Insley and Christopher Rustay

IN MEMORIAM: BOYD McLEOD

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Christmas Bird Counts

Sightings of Color Banded Shrikes Requested

Editor 's Note.

NMOS Officers for 1988

SITE GUIDE: LAS VEGAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PAT INSLEY

525 Agua Fria Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501

CHRISTOPHER RUSTAY

202 Anita Place, Santa Fe, NM 87501

Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is largely overlooked as a birding area in New Mexico. However, owing to its strategic location both at the edge of the Great Plains and the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the refuge attracts a wide variety of birds. The lakes and associated grasslands on the refuge are the easiest habitats to access and provide the best birding.

To reach the refuge, take I-25 to the town of Las Vegas (105 miles south of Raton; 65 miles east of Santa Fe). Leave the interstate at the second exit, whether you are approaching town from the north or south, and drive east on NM 65/104 toward Tucumcari. About one mile east of I-25, a marked right turn will lead you toward the refuge. Check the fields to the left for Horned Larks year round, and for Long-billed Curlews during migration. As you continue along this road, you will drive through a small amount of farmland, which in late spring and early fall can be filled with Lark Buntings. When the road turns sharply to the left, you will see a farmhouse on the right and a line of trees beyond the farmhouse. Stop just beyond the house and walk along this treeline, which is a very good migrant trap for flycatchers and warblers. Large flocks of Yellow-headed, Brewer's, and Red-winged Blackbirds are sometimes found in the adjacent fields. Franklin's Gulls may also be in these fields in the spring.

The refuge is located just beyond this row of trees, after the road makes a sharp turn to the right. If Dickcissels are in the general area in the summer, this curve is the best place to find them. The refuge contains about nine lakes (depending on the amount of water available). Usually, only four of these lakes are open for public viewing, including MacAllister Lake (which is actually state owned). Sundays in November, however, are an exception to the rule, for during that month another road (which starts at the refuge headquarters) is open through the refuge.

The first pond is excellent for the close—viewing of a number of ducks. Depending on the water level, this pond can also be good for shorebirds. During the summer, you may want to stop on the right just beyond this pond to listen for Grasshopper Sparrows.

The refuge headquarters is located about 1/2 mile beyond the first pond. The headquarters is open 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday; however, bird lists are available at the gate even if you happen to be there on a weekend. Just to the right of the headquarters is a group of trees that sometimes plays host to a roosting owl.

Beyond the headquarters are fields. In the summer, if you drive slowly along these fields, you will probably hear Vesper Sparrows; during migration, you should find Vesper as well as Chipping, Clay-colored, Lark, Savannah, and White—crowned Sparrows. American Tree Sparrow can be found here in winter. Several stands of cottonwoods (some dead) are found along the road as well as further afield. Check these stands carefully for Bald Eagles in the winter and for Golden Eagles and American Kestrels year round.

Next on the route (to your left) is an overlook for Crane Lake. One of the larger lakes on the refuge, Crane Lake often hosts Ring-billed Gulls and Franklin's Gulls in migration, as well as an occasional California Gull. Common Loons and Tundra Swans occasionally pass through in late fall and late winter. In the fall, this is the best area for viewing Sandhill Cranes. Wilson's Phalaropes can be found during migration, usually in the southwest corner of the lake. Also during migration, Crane Lake can be "top heavy" with six species of swallows.

Just beyond the Crane Lake overlook, on your right, is Middle Marsh. Good views of waterfowl may be obtained here also. Canada Geese breed here, as do Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Great-tailed Grackles. Great Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons have nested in the reeds as well. During the summer, check the fields around Middle Marsh for White-faced Ibises. The Greater White-fronted Goose, among other goose species, may be here from late fall through early spring.

After passing Middle Marsh, the road begins to descend slightly. During the summer, check the stand of Russian olives at the bottom of the hill for Yellow Warblers and Blue Grosbeaks. After climbing again, the paved road will end and a dirt road will curve to the right and continue on to MacAllister Lake. At the curve, check the dead tree on the left for a Swainson's Hawk, which may be found here in the summer. [CAUTION: The dirt road leading to MacAllister Lake may be impassable, except by four-wheel drive vehicles with high clearance, if there has been recent precipitation.]

The entrance to MacAllister Lake is just after a group of shrubs growing on the righthand side of the road. Check these shrubs, as well as the trees on the south side of the lake, for Lesser Goldfinches in summer, American Tree Sparrows in winter, and a variety of woodpeckers year round. Common Yellowthroats, other warblers, and Willow Flycatchers are possible here during migration. The lakeshore (water level permitting) can host a number of migrant shorebirds, including Killdeers and Semipalmated Plovers, both yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpipers, Willets, and Least, Baird's, and Stilt Sandpipers. The lake itself has a constant population of American Coots. In summer, Clark's Grebes grace its waters, while during migration it is the best spot on the refuge for Black and Forester's Terns as well as for an occasional Horned Grebe. Common Goldeneyes have sometimes been found here in winter. [NOTE: Fishing and hunting are permitted on the refuge here, during appropriate seasons.]

If you prefer, you may continue on along the dirt road, which will eventually lead back to the farmhouse near the refuge entrance. The area traversed is largely grassland, where there is a chance for Prairie Falcons at any time of year and, during migration, for Long-billed Curlews and Water Pipits.

Overall, Las Vegas NWR can be quite productive for the visiting birder. Among the rarer birds listed as having occurred on the refuge are the Barrow's Goldeneye, White-rumped Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Veery, Ovenbird, and Baird's Sparrow.

* * *

BOYD BROWN McLEOD

22 May 1921 — 22 April 1988

Boyd McLeod, the founder and first president of the New Mexico Ornithological Society, passed away on 22 April 1988. He is survived by his daughters, Roxie McLeod and Sue John McLeod, both of Albuquerque, and Margaret Bennett of Ukiah, CA; grandchildred, Charlotte Bennett of Ashland, OR, Aileen Bennett of Santa Rosa, CA, and Joshua J. Bennett of Ukiah, CA; sisters, Margaret Ferris and Billie Illes, both of Dallas, TX; and one niece and one nephew. Boyd was a resident of Albuquerque for 39 years and, in addition to his services to the New Mexico Ornithological Society, was the founder and former president of The McLeod Printing Co., past president of the New Mexico Chapter of Printing Industry of America, and a member of the First Unitarian Church.

The family suggests that memorial contributions could be made to the New Mexico Ornithological Society, 1612 Kentucky NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110. Checks should be made payable to NMOS and will be placed into a special Memorial Fund.

SIGHTINGS OF COLOR BANDED SHRIKES REQUESTED

In Canada, the Loggerhead Shrike is classed as “threatened” and research on the species is in progress. Two large data gaps are the lack of information on where Loggerhead Shrikes that nest in Canada spend the winter and what are their routes of migration. In an effort to find out more about those aspects for shrikes breeding in western Canada, over 1,000 nestlings were color banded in 1988. Birds in Manitoba received red bands, those in Saskatchewan east of 106 longitude received blue bands, while those west of 106 received yellow bands. Alberta shrikes were given white bands.

The Canadian Wildlife Service is very much interested in receiving reports of observations of color banded shrikes. They are particularly interested in the place and date of the observation and the band color. To date, there have been only six recoveries on the winter range of metal bands from Loggerhead Shrikes banded in western Canada, so even one additional report would be important.

If you happen to see a color banded shrike, please inform: Edmund S. Telfer, Canadian Wildlife Service, 2nd floor-4999, 98 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6B 2X3, Canada.

EDITOR’S NOTE

The NMOS Bulletin is published four times a year; subscription is by membership in the NMOS. The Bulletin serves two primary purposes: 1) to publish articles of scientific merit concerning the distribution, abundance, status, behavior, and ecology of the avifauna of New Mexico and its contiguous regions; and 2) to publish news and announcements deemed of interest to the New Mexico ornithological community. The Bulletin invites contribution of articles and announcements. Submitted articles are subject to editing and will be refereed by the Editor and at least one other reviewer. Published articles are noted in major abstracting services (e.g., the AOU’s “Recent Ornithological Literature” section of *The Auk*). Articles and announcements for

the NMOS Bulletin should be submitted to the Editor, Dr. Sartor O. Williams III, Rt. 9, **Box 89-DR, Santa Fe, NM 87505.**

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