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Volume 6 1978 Number 2

PROGRAM SET FOR ANNUAL MEETING

The meeting will be held at Portales on the campus of Eastern New Mexico University from 7 to 9 April 1978. The following is the present scheduling of events:

- 7 April, 7 - 9:00pm: Open house at the Museum of Natural History.
- 8 April, 8:30am - 5:00pm: Registration in the Department of Biology.
9:00 - 9:30am: Slide show.
9:30 - 10:15am: Business, including elections.
10:30 - 12noon: "Ornithological Studies in Eastern New Mexico - Spring Arrivals" (*J. R. Travis*).
"Breeding Bird Surveys" (*C. G. Schmitt*).
"Migration" (*J. P. Hubbard*).
1:30 - 4:00pm: Afternoon paper session.
"A Comparison of the Avifaunas of the Alamo Huecos/Big Hatchet and the Animas Mountains" (*B. J. Hayward*).
"The Status of the Costa Hummingbird: Recent Trends Along the U.S. - Mexican Border" (*W. H. Baltosser*).
"A Summary of 30 Years of Christmas Counts in New Mexico" (*R. Wahl*).
"Seasonal Food Habits of Lesser Prairie Chickens in Chaves County" (*C. Davis*).
"Recent Status Report on Elephant Butte Marsh" (*C. A. Hundertmark*).

- "Chickadee Flock Foraging and Learning Behavior" (T. C. Marr).
 "Cone Selection Behavior in Nutcrackers" (D. Cole).
 4:00 - 5:00pm: N.M.O.S. Slidefest - bring 5-10 of your favorite slides of birds or their habitats to be shown with your commentary.
 7:30 - 9:00pm: "The Great White Bird" - a color movie on Whooping Cranes by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

9 April, dawn to noon (details at meeting) - field trips to:
 Lesser Prairie Chicken Display Grounds
 Boone's Draw Migrant Oasis
 Prairie Research Area

There are various other activities available in the Portales area, including tours of the E.N.M.U. campus and visiting nearby Oasis State Park.

ACCOMODATIONS

Dunes Motel (Roswell Highway) 505-356-6668	single \$12.51 double \$16.68
Hillcrest Motel (Roswell Highway) 505-356-6626	single \$10.00 double \$12.00
Plains Inn (218 W. 3rd) 505-35608517	single \$12.50 double \$15.00
Sands Motel (1130 W. 1st) 505-356-4424	single \$11.00 double \$16.00

(add about \$2.00 to single or double rate for each additional person)

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION

President.....Bruce J. Hayward
 Vice-President...Ralph J. Raitt
 Secretary.....Charles A. Hundertmark
 Treasurer.....James L. Sands
 Director.....William H. Baltosser
 Director.....John P. Hubbard
 Director.....James R. Travis

This slate has been nominated by a committee consisting of Ralph Raitt, Charles Davis and Bill Principe.

N.M.O.S. PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

Various of our New Mexico Ornithological Society Publications will be available for sale at the Annual Meeting, to include the following:

- Summer Birds of the San Juan Valley, New Mexico. C. Gregory Schmitt;
 N.M.O.S. Publ. No. 4. Price \$1.50 (membership discount now expired)
 Breeding Birds of Elephant Butte Marsh. Charles A. Hundertmark;

N.M.O.S. Publ. No. 5. Price \$1.35 (membership discount -1 copy only - 85¢ through December 1978)

Revised Check-list of the Birds of New Mexico. John P. Hubbard;
N.M.O.S. Publ. No. 6. Price \$2.50 (membership discount -1 copy only - \$1.50 through March 1979).

SUMMER RECORDS OF ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS IN NEW MEXICO

By Bruce J. Hayward

This past year I have been working on a biotic survey of the Big Hatchet and Alamo Hueco mountains of Hidalgo County. One objective of the study was to inventory the breeding birds of the area. On 7 July 1976, I was at Dog Spring, a fine place for birds, a mile north of the Mexican border, and was amazed to see a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*). At Dog Spring is a small cattail marsh surrounded by cottonwoods and willows, and the area seems to be a suitable place for this species to nest. However I knew of no New Mexico breeding records, at least in our area of the State. On the other hand, the species has been increasing in numbers recently, and I had seen them in May in various areas, including Silver City and at the north end of the Big Hatchets.

I examined the NMOS Field Notes for the period from 1968 to the present to see how many records of this species there are for the State. I was surprised to see them mentioned in most of the issues--nearly always in spring. May seems to be a good month for Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, but the records extend into early June as well. In addition, there are late June and early July records of males seen around the State, i.e., singles in Pleasanton on 1 July, between 19 and 22 July at La Cueva, and on 13 July in Silver City. Obviously, mine was not the only July record.

What is the story on these summer males? John Hubbard thinks that most are summer vagrants, but other possibilities exist. Could they be surplus birds that haven't found mates? Have we looked hard enough for nesting Rose-breasted Grosbeaks? How many other species of birds might do this? In our study area I can think of perhaps four other species that might show occurrences such as this. What this means, of course, is that you must be careful about establishing a breeding list based merely on the presence of males.

In the fall, the males molt into plumages that are easily confused with autumn Black-headed Grosbeaks (*P. melanocephalus*)...so fall records are not many. There is an August record for Bitter Lake NWR, plus September records for Cedar Crest and Boone's Draw (mist-netted birds). There is even a mid-November record from Pleasanton. Birds don't always fall into neat patterns of behavior and this makes bird-watching that much more interesting. I shall surely be looking harder at Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in the future.

AMERICAN BIRDS AND N.M.O.S. FIELD NOTES REPORTS DUE DATES

A reminder to contributors to *American Birds* and *N.M.O.S. Field Notes* that the schedule for submission of records is ten (10) days after the close of each reporting period. The periods are:

winter: December - February
spring: March - May
breeding: June - July

fall: August - November

A more detailed listing was published in N.M.O.S. Bulletin 5(2):20. 1977. Christmas Count dates are very useful for these reports, and most of you have already provided us with copies of your 1977 counts-- which are much appreciated.

THE STATUS OF THE MERLIN IN NEW MEXICO

By John P. Hubbard

The Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), also known as the Pigeon Hawk, has long been known as a visitant to New Mexico--being recorded at least as early as the winter of 1882-83 at Santa Fe. In early years there were comparatively few records; for example, Bailey (1928) listed fewer than a score of specific records, while Ligon (1961) added little new to the record. In recent years there have been many more records, and it seems worthwhile to summarize what is now known in some detail. In addition to dates, numbers, and places of occurrence, a review will also be presented of the status of the various races of Merlin that occur in New Mexico.

In my review of specimens and published sight records, I have accumulated about 175 records of Merlins in New Mexico for the period autumn 1882 through spring 1977. Surely there are reports that I have overlooked, plus unpublished records that are not readily available to me. However, the data at hand are sufficient to convey a general appreciation of the status of this species in the state. If readers have records that are not thought to be included here, I would appreciate receiving them.

Since Merlins were first recorded in New Mexico in the winter of 1882-83, there have been records in 17 of the succeeding 91 winters. The early record is rather spotty, with gaps of up to eight winters between records, e.g., none between 1893-94 and 1902-03 or 1906-07 and 1915-16. However, beginning in 1946-47, the species has been reported almost annually (23 of 27 winters). Beginning in 1958-59 there are records for each of the 19 winters except 1968-69, when none seems to have been reported. All things considered, the fewer records of earlier decades probably reflect a paucity of observers, rather than a change in the status of the species in the state. Consequently, it seems reasonable to regard the Merlin as a regular winter visitant to the state over at least the last century and probably through historic times.

The numbers of Merlins recorded in any winter varies widely, from as low as one (21 winters) to as high as 15 or 16 (3 winters). The average in the 18 winters of occurrence has been 3.7 birds, but more years (36) have fallen below the average than have exceeded it (12). Interestingly, super-average numbers occur even in the earlier period, although most such instances are recent, i.e.:

1915-1916	6 birds	1969-1970	7 birds
1956-1957	4+	1971-1972	11 (or 12)
1958-1959	4	1972-1973	14
1960-1961	12	1974-1975	12
1962-1963	15	1975-1976	15
1963-1964	4	1976-1977	16

The figures suggest that the numbers of Merlins in New Mexico fluctuate from year-to-year. For example, in the last 15 winters--a period of rather intense observation beginning in 1962-63--the numbers have varied as follows:

15-4-2-1-2-0-1-7-2-11(or 12)-14-2-12-15-16. Thus, 1962-63 was very high, 1963-64 was average, 1961-65 through 1968-69 were low, 1969-70 was moderately high, 1971-72 and 1972-73 were very high, 1973-74 was low, and 1974-75 through 1976-77 were very high. No obvious cycle of numbers is apparent, but annual fluctuations do appear to be real.

The earliest verified autumn record is 18 September (Rio Arriba Co.) and the latest is 19 March (Grant Co.), and this span of dates encompasses almost all of the sight reports from the state. The two records that fall well outside this range are so unusual to be questionable, i.e., 1 August 1901 in Rio Arriba Co. (Bailey, 1928) and 18 April 1972 in Chaves Co, (*N.M.O.S. Field Notes*),

The monthly distribution of records is as follows:

August	1 (reliable?)	December	79
September	4	January	21
October	17	February	18
November	20	March	12
		April	1 (reliable?)

The preponderance of December records is due to increased observation in regard to Christmas Counts. Nonetheless, one can see that the bulk of our records is in the colder months from October through March.

Merlins have been recorded in 22 of our 32 counties, as follows (number of records in parentheses):

San Juan	10	Santa Fe	10	Socorro	12
Rio Arriba	5	Mora	1	Chaves	32
Taos	1	San Miguel	33	Grant	23
Union	5	Valencia	3	Hidalgo	2
McKinley	3	Bernalillo	8	Luna	3
Sandoval	2	Torrance	2	Doña Ana	3
Los Alamos	2	Catron	2	Otero	3
				Eddy	1

From these records (also see Figure 1), the inference that can be drawn is that the Merlin occurs statewide except in the eastern plains--where apparently rare or unknown. Areas of most frequent occurrence coincide largely with well-birded areas (e.g., Farmington, Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Socorro, Roswell, and Silver City). Not all well-birded areas show high numbers of records (e.g., Las Cruces, Carlsbad), which suggests that some sections or habitat types are less attractive than others. In general, most records appear to be from open woodlands, especially in riparian and pinyon-juniper types.

New Mexico is visited by more than one subspecies of Merlin, depending on how many races one recognizes. The most frequently verified race is the pale *richardsonii* the so-called Prairie Province form (also breeds in the northern U.S. Rocky Mountains). I have seen 16 specimens (4 ad. males, 5 im. males, 7 females) from five counties (see Figure 1), taken between 13 October and 1 March. Next most numerous is *bendirei*, a moderately dark form of the western boreal forest--and a race that has been lumped by some workers (e.g. Brown and Amadon, 1969; Temple, Auk 89:325-358, 1972) with the eastern boreal *columbarius*. I have seen 8 *bendirei* (1 im. male, 7 females) from New Mexico, taken in five counties between 15 October and 14 February. Four typical *columbarius* specimens (1 ad. male, 1 im. male, 2 females) are represented

from four counties, taken between 18 September and 19 March. In addition, Finley (Condor 46:206, 1944) reports a single specimen of *suckleyi*--the humid Pacific Coast race--from Rio Arriba Co., taken on 26 December 1943. Finally, I have seen one *bendirei* X *richardsonii* and two *bendirei* X *columbarius* specimens from the state, all from Grant Co. in the period 30 September-19 October. From these data, it appears that most Merlins that visit the state come essentially from north of us, with a few from farther east and very rarely farther west.

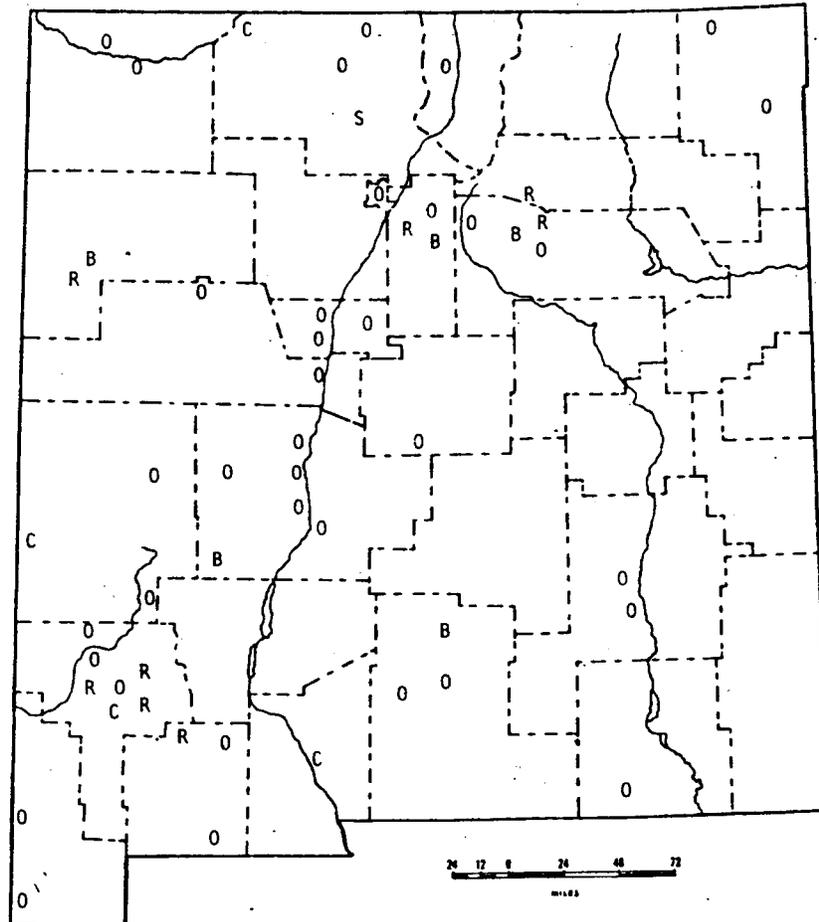


FIGURE 1

Occurrences of Merlins in New Mexico

B=*bendirei* specimen; C=*columbarius* specimen; R=*richardsonii* specimen; S=*suckleyi* specimen; open circle=sight record.

Sight records of Merlins can add to the understanding of the proportions of races visiting the state, provided birds are seen well and observers understand what needs to be noted in the field. The race *richardsonii* is notably paler than *bendirei*, *columbarius*, and *suckleyi*, and class for class can be separated in the field. Adult males are notably pearl gray above (versus medium gray to blackish in the others), while the ventral streaking is both narrower and lighter than that of other races. Immature males and females of *richardsonii* are pale brownish above and have narrow light ventral streaking, while these two classes are dark brown above and are more heavily and darkly streaked below in the other forms. Some *richardsonii* immatures and females actually resemble Prairie Falcons (*F. mexicanus*), but the Merlin

lacks the "moustache" as well as being smaller. Other races of the Merlin are more apt to recall the Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*), which is also "moustached" and is larger as in the Prairie Falcon. Observers who see Merlins well can report them as being either a pale or dark race, in addition to identifying them as either males or immatures/females.

I wish to acknowledge the help of C. Gregory Schmitt in compiling records of Merlins from New Mexico. I also thank the curators of various collections for allowing me access to specimens of Merlins for the state, i.e., Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, Louisiana State University, Museum of Comparative Zoology (Harvard University), Museum of Southwestern Biology (University of New Mexico), Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (University of California), U. S. National Museum of Natural History, and the University of Michigan.

NOTES AND NEWS

The N.M.O.S. would like to thank the following for services to the Society: Col. Henry M. Zeller for serving a stint as Secretary, and Dr. A. (Tony) Gennaro for inviting us to Portales and for making arrangements for our meeting.

We understand that Mary Russell has improved to the point of being taken by relatives to California. We wish her our best and a full and speedy recovery.

Alan Nelson informs us that the Four Corners Bird Club's "Birds of San Juan County, New Mexico", a check-list in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife format, has been revised (1976) and is available at 10¢ per copy plus postage. Write Alan at 106 W. 33rd St., Farmington 87401.

It is not too early to be thinking of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Surveys. Those of you who wish to repeat, relinquish, or take on running a route should contact John Hubbard, 2016 Valle Rio, Santa Fe 87501; 505-988-5918-home, 827-2438-office, on your desires as soon as possible. It is requested that no route be run prior to 1 June this year, so as to eliminate as many migrants from the surveys as possible.

We have received word that there will be spring counts at Farmington, Espanola, Roswell, Gila Valley, and Alamogordo. Our information on dates is too fragmentary to repeat here, so we recommend that you contact local birders about any count in which you may have interest. We urge everyone with ornithological news, such as these spring counts, to advise us of it in time to include it in the *Bulletin*. In this way word can be spread more widely to those who would like to participate in such activities.

The *Revised Check-list of the Birds of New Mexico* is now in press and should be available for sale at the Annual Meeting. The text is 120 pages and 2000 copies are being printed. Claudia Hubbard did the typing and much editing, and the Society acknowledges her valuable contributions.