

BIRDS OF A SURVIVING AREA OF ORIGINAL PRAIRIE LAND IN EASTERN NEBRASKA

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About nine miles northwest of Lincoln, in Lancaster County, is a half section of typical upland prairie, one of the few areas of unbroken prairie sod of any considerable size remaining in eastern Nebraska. The topography of this prairie area is distinctly rolling, and consists of a series of drift hills, usually with broad tops and gentle slopes, and all covered with prairie sod. The general elevation is about 1,200 feet, and the highest hill is about 140 feet. The soil is a fine textured silt loam (Carrington) of glacial origin, with no evidences of erosion. The three larger ravines that cut into and have their origin on the prairie are of but moderate depth, and their beginnings are shallow and carpeted with prairie grass. The vegetation is typically of the tall grass type, with blue-stem grasses predominating. On the driest parts of the ridges occur also certain grasses typical of the western plains. In addition, the usual prairie herbaceous vegetation occurs, and as the ravines progress toward their outlets, shrubs and plum thickets occur. Farther down small trees are growing, and still farther down the trees become quite large. These larger trees are chiefly boxelder, cottonwood and willow. Certain woodland herbaceous plants also occur in the larger ravines. The tract is in a primeval condition, the vegetation having been practically untouched except for haying operations early each fall.

The writer was engaged in ecological studies on this prairie from March 10 to October 25, 1928; March 14 to May 26, 1929; February 23 to May 30, 1930; and January 23 to May 31, 1931. During these periods a list was kept of the birds that were observed on this tract. Many of the birds listed inhabit the wooded ravines almost exclusively, except while flying across the prairie from one ravine to another. Other species use this natural cover for nesting and protection, but go out on the prairie to feed upon insects or small rodents. Still others spend much or all of their time on the prairie, nesting or feeding there. In the compilation of this list of 86 species the writer had the assistance of Messrs. Edson Fichter, Leroy M. Gates, George E. Hudson and Harold C. Jones, and their invaluable help is here acknowledged. Mr. Hudson has also permitted the use of some notes made by him in the fall of 1932 (October 29 and November 19) and Mr. Fichter of some notes made by him during 1938 (March 18 to April 24 and September 24 to October 29).

American Bittern—Seen at intervals in a sparsely wooded, low prairie ravine, April 12 to May 4, 1930.

Northern Sharp-shinned Hawk—One was clearly seen perched in a tree in one of the ravines on May 17, 1931.

Red-tailed Hawk (subsp.)—One seen on March 14 and a pair in a tree on May 17, 1931. The male of this pair later soared so that its distinguishing marks could plainly be seen.

Swainson Hawk—On March 14 and May 17, 1931, this hawk was seen soaring over the prairie and along the ravines.

American Rough-legged Hawk—Hudson saw three on the prairie on October 29, 1932.

Marsh Hawk—A pair was seen on every visit to the prairie in various years, between January 23 to October 29. They were usually seen either flying or in the top of a high tree in the ravine. On May 2, 1930, a female was flushed from an open ravine, filled with weeds. It gave several sharp cries, flying off and coming back repeatedly, while the male soared high above the ground. A nest was found, built of dry grass and raised several inches above the level of the surrounding soil. In it were five soiled white to pale blue, nearly round eggs. On May 26 following, this nest contained seven eggs.

Sparrow Hawk (subsp.)—Seen on April 30 and May 1, 1930, flying over the trees in the ravines, or perched on rocks on the prairie.

Eastern Bob-white—These birds may have been around the prairie ravines at other seasons, but they were only seen between September 13 and December 1.

Ring-necked Common Pheasant—Winters near the prairie ravines. Several were seen from January 23 to May 5, and again on October 29 and November 19, feeding on the prairie or among the shrubs in the ravines.

American Herring Gull—During different years between April 13 and May 30, these birds were seen flying over the prairie.

Ring-billed Gull—One was seen on May 24, 1931, flying over the open prairie ravines.

Franklin Gull—A few were seen flying around over the prairie on May 19, 1930.

Western Mourning Dove—This bird was commonly to be seen resting in trees in the ravines, sitting on the prairie grass or flying about in small groups.

Eastern Yellow-billed Cuckoo—On May 31, 1931, one was seen in one of the more densely wooded prairie ravines.

American Barn Owl—Observed April 13, 1929, and May 24, 1931, among the trees in the ravines or flying from tree to tree.

Nebraska Screech Owl—One was seen at various times between May 10 and September 6. On August 30, 1928, one was flushed from a tree, in the middle of the day, closely followed by several crows.

Great Horned Owl (subsp.)—Hudson saw one of these owls in a tree on October 29, 1932.

Western Burrowing Owl—Fichter saw this species at the entrance to some skunk dens near a hill top on April 4 and 24, 1938.

Long-eared Owl—Fichter saw one roosting in a tree in a ravine on September 24, 1938. A pair was observed by him roosting regularly in a plum-dogwood thicket in a ravine from March 18 to 27, 1939.

Northern Short-eared Owl—Seen April 13 and May 1, 1930, in a wooded ravine and on the prairie.

Chimney Swift—Seen on May 24, 1931, when flying over the prairie a short distance above the ground.

Northern Yellow-shafted Flicker—Almost always seen in the ravines, and not on the prairie itself, from February 23 to May 31. Hudson observed several on October 29, 1932.

Common Red-shafted Flicker—On March 28, 1929, two were seen feeding on the prairie.

Eastern Red-headed Woodpecker—Another bird of the wooded ravines, noted from March 24 to August 6.

Eastern Hairy Woodpecker—Noted February 1, 1931, in a hole in a dead tree in a wooded ravine. Also October 29 and November 19, 1932 (Hudson).

Northern Downy Woodpecker—These were seen repeatedly between February 1 and May 31, in wooded ravines. Also same dates as above.

Eastern Kingbird—Seen in small trees or bushes in the more open prairie ravines, May 2 to August 16.

Arkansas Kingbird—Seen on bushes in the more open ravines, May 5 to May 31.

Northern Crested Flycatcher—One heard in a more thickly wooded ravine on May 26, 1929.

Eastern Phoebe—From March 9 to May 31 in different years, near a large culvert at the prairie's edge.

Least Flycatcher—On May 17, 1931, their call sounded from every part of the prairie ravines. One was noted also on May 24, 1931.

Olive-sided Flycatcher (subsp.)—Seen on May 24, 1931, in a wooded ravine..

Saskatchewan Horned Lark—Seen from January 23 to May 4, flying over the prairie or feeding upon it. Some were seen in the ravines, but most of them were in the open.

Common Bank Swallow—Seen flying over the prairie from April 14 to May 4.

Rough-winged Swallow—The only ones seen were on May 24, 1931.

Barn Swallow—Noted from April 5 to October 4.

Northern Purple Martin—On May 4, 1930, a few were seen flying over the prairie.

Northern Blue Jay—Found only in the wooded ravines, or flying over the prairie from one ravine to another, April 30 to May 31. Hudson reported seeing them on October 29, 1932.

American Magpie—In the trees in the ravines on October 29, 1938 (Fichter).

Eastern Crow—Found in the ravines at all times of the year, as well as flying around above it. In the morning very often a dozen or more would be found feeding out on the prairie itself.

Black-capped Chickadee (subsp.)—The calls of this bird were heard from the various ravines during the winter and early spring, and also in the fall.

Tufted Titmouse—On April 6, 1930, one was seen in a wooded ravine running through the prairie.

Western House Wren—In sparsely wooded ravines, pairs of these

birds were seen and heard from April 26 to May 31. One pair had a nest in a boxelder tree.

Catbird—Both seen and heard in the more open parts of the ravines from May 17 to September 6.

Eastern Brown Thrasher—Sometimes flying over the prairie, but usually found in the lower branches of some tree or bush in the ravines, from April 12 to August 16.

Eastern Robin—Only a few are to be found on the prairie or in its wooded ravines. They were seen between March 14 and April 13, but always on the wing, either flying across the prairie or toward one of the wooded ravines.

Olive backed Swainson Thrush—About five were seen on May 24, 1931, in a dense thicket in a ravine.

Eastern Common Bluebird—A bird of the ravines, or feeding near them, noted from March 17 to May 31.

American Common Pipit—Noted in 1938 by Fichter on September 24, October 8 (specimen taken), 15 (present in great numbers) and 29.

Red-eyed Vireo—On May 17, 1931, one was both heard and seen in a thicket of a ravine.

Northern Bell Vireo—These birds, with their distinctive song, were quite common in all of the wooded ravines on both May 24 and 31, 1931.

Yellow Warbler (subsp.)—In three springs, from April 30 to May 31, these birds were seen and heard in the denser portions of the ravines.

Eastern Myrtle Warbler—Noted by Fichter in a plum-dogwood thicket in a ravine on April 25, 1938.

Black-poll Warbler—One was seen among some trees on May 26, 1929.

Maryland Yellow-throat (subsp.)—Usually found in the more open parts of the ravines and close to the ground. Noted in three springs, from May 4 to May 31.

Chat (subsp.)—The varied calls and whistles of this bird were heard from the wooded ravines on May 26, 1929, and May 17, 24 and 31, 1931.

American Redstart—Found in the more wooded parts of the ravines on May 21, 1929, and May 31, 1931.

English House Sparrow—These birds were seldom seen on the prairie. They were abundant along a road bordering the prairie, and in a near-by field, but they were seen for only a few yards inside the prairie itself.

Bobolink—The only time this bird was seen was on May 24, 1931.

Eastern Common Meadowlark—From March 30 on, this bird was frequently heard from the lower parts of the prairie.

Western Meadowlark—From all parts of the prairie, but not in the ravines, this species was heard singing from March 10 until August 2.

Red-winged Blackbird (subsp.)—From March 23 until May 24 these birds were frequently seen in the ravines or flying over the prairie.

Orchard Oriole—Both sexes seen in the ravines on May 24 and 31.

Baltimore Oriole—A male was seen on May 26 and 29 in the wooded ravines.

Bronzed Grackle—From March 30 until May 31 these birds were frequently seen flying over the prairie.

Eastern Cowbird—Seen in different years from April 19 (1929) to May 31 (1931) in sparsely wooded ravines..

Eastern Cardinal—Quite numerous among the more thickly wooded ravines. Noted from January 23 to August 1.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak—One was seen in a ravine on May 17, 1931.

Western Blue Grosbeak—On May 5, 1929, a male was seen sitting on a small tree in a ravine.

Indigo Bunting—One seen in a wooded ravine on May 26, 1929.

Lazuli Bunting—Hudson saw a male singing in a tree in one of the ravines on May 29, 1929.

Dickeissel—Usually sitting on a small tree or bush in a more or less open ravine, these birds were seen commonly from May 10 (1928) to August 2 (1928).

American Goldfinch (subsp.)—Another ravine dweller, seen between February 23 (1930) and July 26 (1928).

Red-eyed Eastern Towhee—Seen in the more open parts of the prairie ravines, between April 6 (1931) and August 30 (1928).

Western Grasshopper Sparrow—Usually first noticed when flushed out of the prairie grass and then by their faint song. The earliest record was on March 5, 1929, and the latest September 27, 1928. They nest in the prairie grass, but their nests are very difficult to find.

Vesper Sparrow (subsp.)—Found on the prairie bordering the ravines, from April 14 (1929) to May 17 (1928).

Lark Sparrow (subsp.)—Seen on prairie from April 13, 1930, to May 24, 1931.

Eastern Slate-colored Junco—The only one seen was on April 6, 1930, in some small trees. Hudson reports them common on November 19, 1932.

Eastern Chipping Sparrow—From April 8 (1930) to May 17 (1931) in trees in the ravines.

Clay-colored Sparrow—Seen and one was collected on May 5, 1929, by Hudson.

Field Sparrow (subsp.)—From April 5 to May 31, 1931, usually sitting on a tree branch extending out over the prairie.

Harris Sparrow—Found in the thickets in the ravines from February 23 (1930) until May 24 (1931). Hudson reports them again on October 29 and November 19, 1932, when they were common.

Eastern White-crowned Sparrow—One was seen sitting on a prairie weed on May 4, 1930.

White-throated Sparrow—A few were seen and heard May 17, 1931, in one of the wooded ravines.

Tree Sparrow (subsp.)—Seen from January 23 (1931) until April 6 (1930) among the bushes or feeding in the grass near the thickets. Seen again November 19, 1932, by Hudson.

Song Sparrow (subsp.)—Seen in the bushy ravines from February 23 (1930) to May 2 (1929).

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