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Notes on the Bird Life in the Mississippi Valley

By JAMES HODGES

Perhaps one of the most neglected areas in Iowa ornithology is in the Mississippi Valley region. Though it is of great importance and rich in bird life the scarcity of active observers is nothing more than amazing. With the possible exception of Dubuque the remainder of the Valley remains unknown. I think that a review of this region may encourage others to commence investigations in this region. Since the Mississippi River borders all of the counties waterfowl can be observed in good numbers during the migration as the case with all aquatic species such as the gulls and terns. Small sloughs, pot-holes, marshes, and back-waters abound everywhere it is a mecca for the waders and shore-birds. The largest stands of timber are found in the bottom lands and along the streams and lakes that attract the tree nesting birds with the addition of hundreds of miles of rolling prairies and its host of ground nesting species.

The purpose of this paper is to place on record some of the more rare or uncommon birds observed during the last few years, the majority of the records, however, are from the present years field work.

Holboell's Grebe *Colymbus grisegena holboelli*

A spring migrant observed by Richard Schaefer and myself on April 4, 1948, a little east of Nobis Slough in Scott County.

Horned Grebe *Colymbus auritus*

One found by Donald Davison and his son in Fruitland, Muscatine County, on April 17, 1948.

Man-o'-war-bird *Fregata magnificens*

It was my good fortune on April 1, 1946 to observe this species at Davenport, Scott County. I was coming out of a small stand of timber and happened to look up in the air to see coming toward me the most majestic and graceful bird that I had ever seen. It was heading north at 7:45 a.m. and I had perfect conditions under which to see it. The bird was flying at about 300 feet altitude. The flight was smooth and effortless with its beautiful contoured wings slowly beating the air. It was flying sideways instead of straight ahead as most birds do. It was several miles from the Mississippi River which borders the south side of the county but I believe that the bird was following the course of this river. The plumage of

the bird was white suggesting an immature bird. The body of the birds was very small compared to the size of its wings and tail. The tail was long and dagger like which completed the identification. The text books relate that the tail is forked but from the distance that I saw the bird the tail was shaped much more like a dagger. It has been over two years since I made this observation but I have hesitated publishing it as I thought the veracity of the record might be questioned but after considerable deliberation on my part I think the record should be considered valid. It could be mistaken for no other species that is found in the state of Iowa, in fact no other bird could compare with it in size and beauty of flight. According to A. C. Bent (Life History of North American Petrels and Pelicans and their allies, 1922), "The Man-o'-war-bird is not a migratory species and is practically a resident throughout the year in the general vicinity of its breeding range. But between nesting seasons it is apt to wander far from home and has often been noted or taken in the most unexpected places, even in the interior of the continent." Philip A. DuMont (A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa) recorded this species as accidental. He listed four other records for Iowa. This record for Scott County makes the fifth known occurrence of this oceanic species in Iowa.

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Found nesting at Nobis Slough, Scott County, on July 1, 1948. Rather uncommon as a nesting bird.

American Scoter *Oidemia americana*

On February 15, 1948 Richard Schaefer and the author found three birds in an open portion of the Mississippi River adjacent to Credit Island in Scott County. They were two males and one female. In a letter from Philip A. DuMont I have been informed that this species is quite rare and published records few. I have been told, however, by several duck hunters that they have taken this bird a few times but they too consider it quite uncommon. It evidently occurs more often than suspected as is probably the case with a good many other birds that are listed as "rare."

Pigeon Hawk *Falco columbarius* subsp.

When returning from a field trip at Credit Island, Scott County, Richard Schaefer, Norwood Hazard, Rodney Hart, and the author observed two birds of this species on April 24, 1948. This bird may not be so rare but certainly very little is known as to its status and distribution plus the several subspecies that are found here.

Woodcock *Philohela minor*

On June 20, 1948 Richard Schaefer and the author found this bird nesting at Nobis Slough, Scott County. This is the first published record of the nesting of this bird since 1906.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*

This is one of the very few birds that has definitely been on a decline for the last few years. When at one time they were a common summer resident they are uncommon now. Though this may be a local condition I have found it to be true in Jackson, Clinton, Scott, Muscatine, and Louisa Counties.

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Though this bird is not rare during the nesting season it is far from being common in Scott County. I have noticed, however, that in the next two adjacent counties, Muscatine and Louisa, this bird is quite common. It seems strange that the same is not true for Scott County.

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*

This form of the meadowlark is rapidly spreading over Scott County though it does not as yet equal the eastern bird in number. In the 1906 list of the birds of Scott County Burtis H. Wilson does not record it but only the Eastern Meadowlark. I have only found a few scattered breeding pair until three years ago when I decided increase was noted and which has continued up to the present time. Perhaps that in the future the Western Meadowlark will equal or even surpass the Eastern Meadowlark.

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