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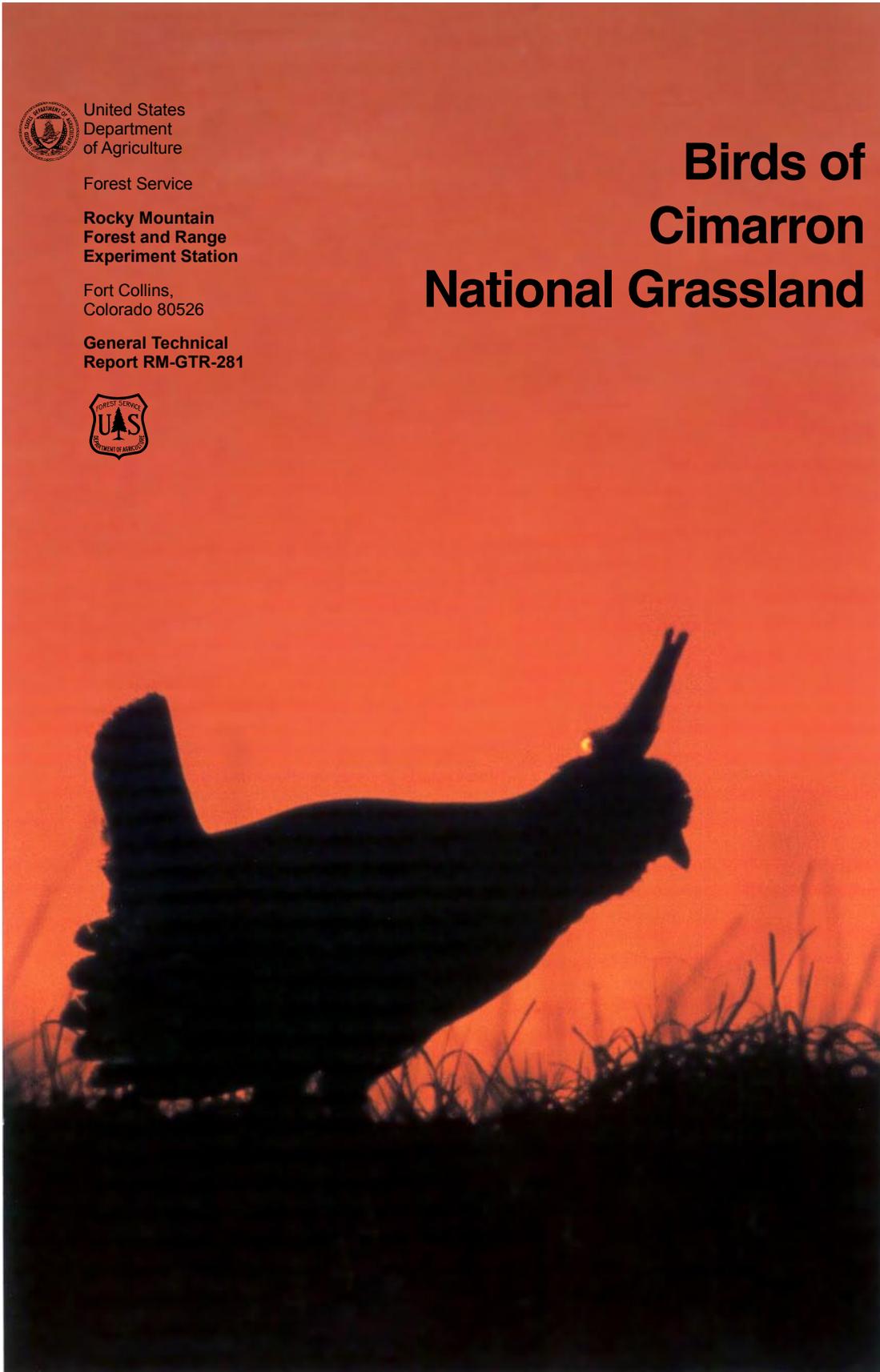
**Rocky Mountain  
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**General Technical  
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# Birds of Cimarron National Grassland



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### **Abstract**

Bird records for the Cimarron National Grassland were collected from literature searches and unpublished field notes submitted by cooperators. Almost 14,000 bird records were compiled in a data file. Based on these data, the status of each bird species reported to have occurred on the Cimarron National Grassland was established. In addition to the species accounts, the history of the area, current management practices, habitat types, and locations for finding birds are discussed.

**Keywords:** grasslands, shortgrass prairie, Great Plains, riparian areas, bird watching

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**Cover photo: Male Lesser Prairie-Chicken.** Photo courtesy of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

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## **Birds of Cimarron National Grassland**

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## Preface

A shared passion for birds connects people who are almost as diverse as the birds they pursue. This almost inexplicable passion recognizes no boundaries in terms of age, gender, race, religion, and profession. On any given day, a plumber and a playwright, a neurosurgeon and a grandmotherly housewife, a senator and an ornithologist may prowl the same ground in pursuit of the personally unique satisfactions derived from finding birds. Quite expectably, not all people share identical motivations for finding birds; but perhaps more surprisingly, the same people who will split the finest filoplume on issues of species or subspecies identification largely ignore or summarily dismiss questions about what distinguishes birders from birdwatchers from ornithologists. But because very different personal perspectives motivate people's bird interests, very real needs for open communication and shared knowledge exist.

This document combines under one cover three different but inextricably entwined aspects of the human interest in birds. Each is covered as a separate part of the book.

Parts 1 and 2 detail the *academic interest* in birds. Because birds cross human-made political and natural geographic boundaries, they become particularly useful for evaluating the interactions between people and the natural world. Basic research of the natural and life histories of birds improves our ability to establish the policies that govern our use of natural resources.

Parts 3 and 4 address *recreational interests* in birds, generally known as birding. They present an annotated checklist of the species known to have occurred on Cimarron National Grassland (NG) in historic times and site guides for finding birds on Cimarron NG.

Part 5 presents the basic *management issues* involving the consequences of people's interest in birds. Recreational birders not only spend money that contributes to local and regional economies, but they also exert impacts on public facilities that must be maintained. Impacts demand administrative attention and managerial resources.

By approaching the birds of the Cimarron NG from these three angles, the authors, editors, researchers, and managers who contributed to this document's publication hope that academia, recreationists, and managers will discover aspects to birds that they overlooked before. By considering the needs of the other groups, each group may realize opportunities for contributing their individual knowledge to enrich our collective understanding of birds and to improve our management of the resources that affect our birds and ourselves.

# Birds of Cimarron National Grassland

## Introduction

Ornithologists and birders usually give most of their attention to coasts, mountain ranges, and other outstanding physiographic regions. Some urban areas, because of the large number of observers, also have been thoroughly studied. But what about the land in between? An article in *Birding* titled "North America's Underbirded Regions" identified the Great Plains, and western Kansas in particular, as one of "...North America's undiscovered, seriously under-birded, or under-appreciated areas with good birding potential..." (Lehman 1995). The book you hold is about the birds of Cimarron National Grassland (NG), a federally managed tract of land in a relatively unknown region.

Birders coming to Cimarron NG will be rewarded with more than just birds. The High Plains landscape can powerfully affect birders who take the binoculars from their eyes and feel, as much as see, the expansiveness of the grasslands. Majestic anvil-shaped thunderheads (some containing as much energy as a nuclear bomb) build before your eyes. Sweeping across the horizon, they drag a curtain of blue-gray rain beneath them. Slivers of lightning tear through the dark pedestal of the thunderhead. Fair-weather cumuli push their shadows across the landscape, beckoning wayfarers to join them. Sunsets hang like a stage backdrop over the subtle and understated landscapes. Walt Whitman described such sunsets in this poem:

### A Prairie Sunset

Shot gold, maroon, and violet,  
dazzling silver, emerald, fawn,  
The earth's whole amplitude and

Nature's multiform power consign'd  
for once to colors;

The light, the general air possess'd by  
them – colors till now

unknown,

No limit, confine – not the Western  
sky alone – the high meridian –

North, South all,

Pure luminous color fighting the  
silent shadows to the last.

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*  
(1888)

William Least Heat-Moon in *Blue Highways* wrote about the plains making people feel small and uneasy:

"The true West differs from the East in one great, pervasive, influential, and awesome way: space ... It's that apparent emptiness which makes matter look alone, exiled, and unconnected. Those spaces diminish man and reduce his blindness to the immensity of the universe; they push him toward a greater reliance on himself, and, at the same time, to a greater awareness of others and what they do. But, as space diminishes man and his constructions in a material fashion, it also – paradoxically – makes them more noticeable. Things show up out here. No one, not even the sojourner can escape the expanses. You can't get away from them by rolling up the safety-glass and speeding through, because the terrible distances eat up the speed ... Still, drivers race along; but when you get down to it, they are people uneasy about space."

Kansas State forester-poet, Fred Atchison, captured the feeling that the Kansas plains landscape evoked in him:

### Security

The vastness of the prairie would be  
overwhelming  
were it not for a canopy of blue sky  
pinned neatly along the horizon  
by grain elevators.

Walt Whitman, in a poem called "The Prairie States," referred to this region as "...A newer garden of creation." In *Specimen Days* he wrote eloquently and at length about grasslands.

"My days and nights, as I travel here — what an exhilaration! — not the air alone, and the sense of vastness, but every local sight and feature. Everywhere something characteristic — the cactuses, pinks, buffalograss, wild sage — the receding perspective, and the far circle-line of the horizon all times of the day, especially forenoon — the clear, pure cool, rarefied nutriment for the lungs, previously quite unknown — the black patches and streaks left by surface cooling conflagrations — the deep plough'd furrow of the 'fire-guard' — slanting snow-racks built all along to shield the railroad from winter drifts — the prairie dogs and the herds of antelope — the curious 'dry rivers' — occasionally a dug out or corral... — ever the herds of cattle and the cowboys ('cowpunchers') to me a strangely interesting class, bright-eyed as hawks, with their swarthy complexions and their broad-brimm'd hats — apparently always on horseback, with loose arms slightly raised and swing as they ride..."

"Then as to scenery (giving my own thought and feeling), while I know the standard claim is that Yosemite, Niagara Falls, and Upper Yellowstone and the like afford the greatest natural shows, I am not sure that the prairie and plains, while less stunning at first sight, last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all

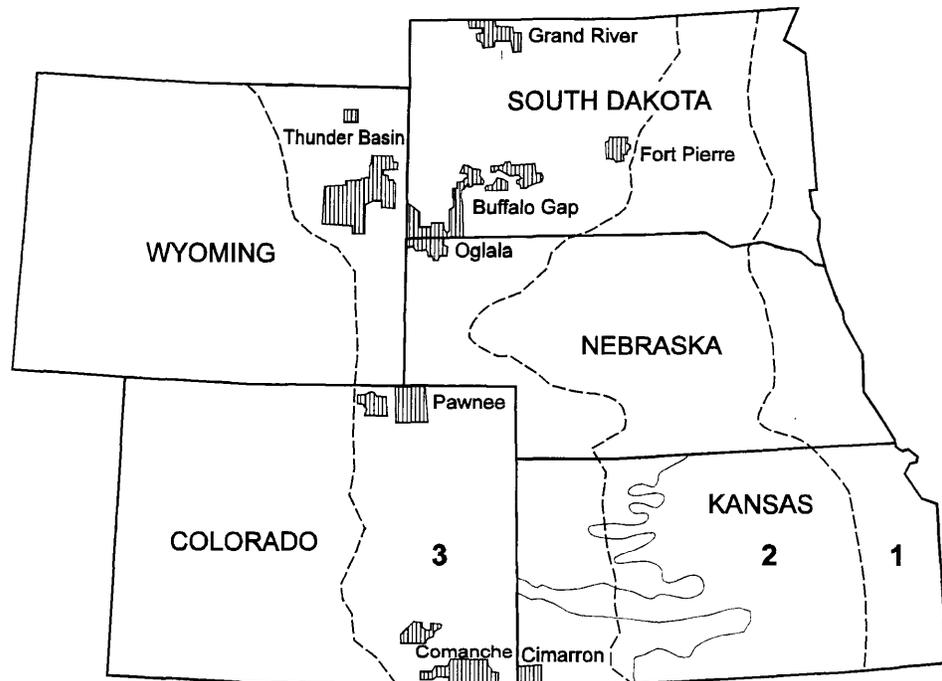
the rest, and make North America's characteristic landscape.

"Indeed through the whole of this journey, with all its shows and varieties, what impress'd me, and will longest remain with me, are these same prairies. Day after day, and night after night, o my eyes, to all my senses — the esthetic one most of all — they silently and broadly unfolded. Even their simplest statistics are sublime."

Few Americans have shared Whitman's appreciation of prairies and plains. Over the years the plains have been called deserts, empty oceans, and blank pages in a book, among other less complimentary names. Most Americans today ignore them from 35,000 feet or as they speed by them on straight, empty roads, their eyes fixed on the horizon, their minds fixed on mountains or cities. Earlier generations feared grasslands. Crossing the grasslands was like crossing a desert or an ocean. Grasslands presented an obstacle—an ordeal to overcome to reach a better destination. When travelers gathered their nerve, they set out, often expecting the worst along what, at best, would be a dreadfully monotonous journey. Eventually, people had to be enticed to settle the plains with government incentives or tricked into settling there by unscrupulous land dealers and railroad barons. Sellers Archer and Clarence Bunch in *The American Grass Book*, said, "The children of the American Revolution hesitated forty years at the western edges of the forest because they didn't trust the grasslands." How unlike the attitude of the Maasai who live on the grasslands of East Africa. Terry Tempest Williams in an article titled "In the Country of Grasses" quotes a Maasai elder who said, "Grasses are also trustworthy. When a boy is beaten for an inappropriate act, the boy falls to the ground and clutches a handful of grass. His elder takes this gesture as a sign of humility. The child remembers where the source of his power lies."

Aldo Leopold explained our society's apathy toward grasslands: "Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language." Anyone can appreciate pretty mountain lakes and waterfalls. But, just as with complex and abstract styles of art, music, and poetry that require effort for their audiences to perceive full meaning and value, grassland audiences

must seek understanding and sensitivity to appreciate their beauty fully. The authors hope this book will encourage readers to put forth the effort to experience and understand the beauty of Cimarron NG, particularly the most colorful and animated part of the scenery—the birds. If they do, they might just find themselves clutching the grass and not letting go.



-  National Grasslands
-  High Plains
-  Ecoregions
  - 1 - Prairie Parkland Province
  - 2 - Great Plains Steppe Province
  - 3 - Great Plains - Palouse Dry Steppe Province

*Distribution of National Grasslands, ecoregions, and the Kansas High Plains across five states of the Great Plains.*

## **Part 1**

# **Geography, Administrative Roles, and Users of Cimarron National Grassland<sup>1</sup>**

Cimarron NG covers 108,175 acres of prairie and other vegetation types in Morton and Stevens Counties, Kansas. The USDA Forest Service manages the land, its resources, and their uses. Located in the extreme southwestern corner of Kansas, Cimarron NG is associated with the Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2) of the Forest Service (see map). Region 2 also administers the Grand River, Buffalo Gap, and Fort Pierre National Grasslands of South Dakota; Ogalala National Grassland of Nebraska; Thunder Basin National Grassland of Wyoming; Pawnee and Comanche National Grasslands of Colorado; and numerous National Forests in the five-state region.

Although Cimarron NG is one of eight Ranger Districts of the Pike and San Isabel National Forest, its management differs from mountain districts. The distinct nature, ecology, and history of grassland environments plus the legislation establishing National Grasslands each demand management unique from forest management. National Grasslands were established during the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s when extreme drought, unsustainable farming, and dust storms devastated a five-state area of the Great Plains (West 1990). Morton County, Kansas, was identified as one of the most seriously damaged counties in the Dust Bowl with 78.4 percent of its total acres altered by wind and weather erosion (Hartman and MacDonald 1988).

The Dust Bowl required immediate government intervention. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 was approved by

the 75th Congress to "create the Farmer's Home Corporation, to promote more secure occupancy of farms and farm homes, to correct economic instability resulting from some present forms of farm tenancy, and for other purposes." Title III of the act authorized the federal government to purchase or otherwise acquire submarginal farmlands, referred to as Land Utilization Projects. Under this act, the Resettlement Administration started buying the worst of the Dust Bowl area in Morton County; by 1939, 107,000 acres had been purchased.

The Soil Conservation Service, since renamed the "Natural Resources Conservation Service," administered Land Utilization Projects until 1954, when authority over about 3.85 million acres was transferred to the Forest Service. The remainder of the original 11 million acres of Project lands was transferred to other federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1960 Project lands managed by the Forest Service were designated as National Grasslands by the Secretary of Agriculture (West 1990); and those 108,175 acres in Morton and Stevens Counties were named "Cimarron National Grassland."

## **Current Administration and Use of National Grasslands**

The National Grasslands comprise 3.85 million acres or about two percent of the land base managed by the Forest Service. Cimarron NG is one of 20 National Grasslands in 12 different states and seven regions of the Forest Service, and it is one of 17 National Grasslands located in the Great Plains of the United States. The National Grasslands are currently managed under

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<sup>1</sup> Lead author for Part 1 is Deborah M. Finch, Project Leader with the Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Albuquerque, NM.



*Dust storms such as this one bearing down on a Kansas farm prompted the legislation that created the National Grasslands. So long as the wind blows, the threat of these kind of dust storms still exists. Photo courtesy of Morton County Historical Society.*

authority of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to "develop a program of land conservation and land utilization, in order thereby to correct maladjustment in land use." By regulation the National Grasslands are "to demonstrate sound and practical principles of land use for the areas in which they are located." Characteristics shared in common among National Grasslands include their management authority, the importance of agriculture to local economies, energy and mineral development, intermingled land ownership patterns, dominance of grasslands, and management by grazing associations.

Under the Bankhead-Jones mandate, the Cimarron Ranger District permits 120 ranchers to graze 5,000 cattle between 1 May and 31 October. To manage pastures and cattle movement, 496 miles of fence, 33 wells, and 125 windmills are maintained by district personnel and range rid-

ers provided by ranchers. With the enforcement of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, the Forest Service has also had the flexibility to manage National Grasslands to include nonagricultural uses such as mineral development, recreation, conservation, research, and cultural heritage exhibits. Contributing to the local and regional economy, 23 developed oil/gas fields, 425 oil/gas facilities and about 300 miles of gas pipeline are now present on Cimarron NG.

Recreational opportunities include fishing, hunting, picnicking, camping, hiking, botanizing, birding, wildlife-viewing, photography, and history investigations. Eleven ponds, several hiking trails along the Cimarron River, off-road vehicle trails, two picnic areas with playgrounds, and a new campground are available for year round use. Crossing Cimarron are 23 miles of the Sante Fe Trail, the longest segment with public access. Visitors are welcome to

retrace the steps of the trail pioneers on the parallel "Companion Trail."

Cimarron NG has one Research Natural Area where scientists can study ecosystem dynamics in an undisturbed setting. Research on livestock use and rangeland health of the grassland has provided an important source of information to land managers, ranchers, and scientists in Kansas and other prairie states. With growing scientific and public interest in cultural resources, prairie ecosystems, and wildlife conservation, additional research studies throughout the Grassland have focused on human history, archaeology, fossils, soils, plant communities, big game, prairie dogs, endangered species, swift fox, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, other gamebirds, raptors, songbirds, and reptiles.

Grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains are recognized as important reservoirs for biological diversity (Samson and Knopf 1994) and for populations of threatened, endangered, and declining bird populations (Finch 1992, Knopf 1992, Saab et al. 1995, Dobkin 1994). With the advent in the 1980s and 1990s of bird conservation programs such as the National Waterfowl Management Plan (focusing on recovering waterfowl habitats and populations), the Playa Lake Joint Venture (focusing on conserving playas of the southern plains for waterfowl migration), and Partners in Flight (focusing on conserving populations and habitats of Neotropical migratory landbirds, Finch and Stangel 1993), attention to the National Grasslands as important habitats for studying and conserving bird populations has greatly increased.

### **The Role of Bird Conservation on National Grasslands**

Recently, organizations such as the National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Biological Service,

the Forest Service, and various state game and fish agencies have worked together to increase efforts to protect prairie wildlife, including threatened and endangered species and migratory birds that use National Grasslands for breeding, wintering, and migration. Regulatory acts that legislate the conservation of species, habitats, and biological diversity on lands managed by the National Forest System of the USDA Forest Service are already in place. Federal legislation on environmental protection that applies to National Grasslands includes the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

As part of a Forest Service regional assessment of biological diversity, Finch (1992) combined and discussed the literature on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species in the five states of the Rocky Mountain Region. This review evaluated and ranked vulnerable bird species and other wildlife in forest and grassland ecosystems, including Cimarron NG. Additional literature reviews on grassland birds of the Great Plains were stimulated by the Partners in Flight program implemented in 1991 by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, and numerous other organizations (Finch 1991, Finch and Stangel 1993, Martin and Finch 1995). In response to the management needs identified by Partners in Flight, the Northern Region of the Forest Service contracted production of a conservation and management review, *Neotropical Migrants in the Northern Rockies and Great Plains* (Dobkin 1994). This book offers a strong scientific basis for managing and conserving birds in grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains. To manage migratory birds and their habitats more effectively, along with managing other uses such as livestock grazing and mineral development, Finch et al. (1993) recommended that bird conservation be integrated into Forest Service plans for ecosystem management.



*Cattle graze the shortgrass prairie near the Cimarron River. Photo by Ted Cable.*

To highlight increasing multi-organizational studies and concerns for grassland birds, the Association of Field Ornithologists and the Sutton Avian Research Center in cooperation with numerous other organizations, including the Forest Service, hosted the "International Conference and Training Workshop on Conservation and Ecology of Grassland Birds" held 26-28 October 1995 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The product of this meeting, now in press as a special supplement to the *Journal of Field Ornithology*, will provide extensive information on conservation and management of grassland birds on private properties and public lands such as Cimarron NG.

To meet these growing needs and values, many districts now inventory bird species and populations on National Grasslands and offer bird species checklists to the birder and recreationist. Cimarron NG

offers a free pamphlet titled "Birds of the Cimarron National Grassland" (Hartman and MacDonald 1988). Further, Cimarron NG actively develops habitat improvement projects and partnerships with numerous state, federal, and private groups to benefit a wide variety of game and nongame birds. Strong efforts have also been made by the Cimarron Ranger District to identify and advertise values and opportunities for birding, gamebird hunting, and other recreational activities on Cimarron (Hartman and MacDonald 1988). Such efforts have helped to generate a broader appeal for, and public interest in, National Grasslands and similar prairie ecosystems. This book results from the increasing interest in managing National Grasslands for multiple uses, including bird conservation, recreational birding, and gamebird hunting.

## Part 2

# Characteristics of Cimarron National Grassland

### Naming the Cimarron Landscape

A unique combination of traits — size, shape, sounds, appearance, behaviors, seasonality, geographic distribution, habitat needs — makes each species what it is. No two species precisely share the same combination. Each unique combination of traits, therefore, prepares each bird species to live life its own way. Birding is based on people recognizing differences in traits that distinguish the species. Good birders realize that each species has its place, and the best birding results from understanding a given place and how birds fit into it.

Perhaps Cimarron NG appeals to birders because despite its superficial monotony it is such a complicated place to understand.

Cimarron is and has been described or defined in many different ways. It is a tract of public land administered by the federal government. It is a distant corner of Kansas. It is a nook of North American Great Plains and of Kansas High Plains. Cimarron can be defined by its soil, by its climate, or by any other standards a person may choose. Certainly, it has been defined by its plant community. It is prairie, particularly shortgrass prairie; but into this milieu of descriptive names comes the new term “steppe” to challenge our notions of prairie. Confusion thrives in such tangled messes of names. To understand birds and birding of Cimarron NG, one must first make sense of the area’s many descriptive terms. This effort is no more difficult than distinguishing a little green bird as a flycatcher, a kinglet, a vireo, or a warbler.

The terms “plains” and “prairie” repeatedly appear in references to Cimarron. Too often, they are interchanged as if

they were synonymous. They aren’t. “Plain” refers to the physical character of the land, and “prairie” refers to the plant community that covers the land. Because a plain might be covered by tundra or forest or some plant community other than a prairie, and because the two terms refer to different attributes of the landscape, they are not interchangeable.

Cimarron NG lies in the western half, just south of center, in the Great Plains. The term is used as a plural because it is not just one vast plain. Rather, it is a series of plains interrupted by features such as the Black Hills, the Nebraska Sand Hills, and so on. Kansas sits squarely within the Great Plains; but far from being uniform in character, its landscape shows remarkable diversity. The Kansas Geological Survey has recognized 11 major “physiographic provinces” across the state. The High Plains province covers nearly a third of Kansas, interdigitating with the Smoky Hills province like interlocking fingers. South of the Arkansas River Lowlands province, the High Plains streak eastward, stopping just short of Wichita. Cimarron NG is part of this High Plains province.

Prairie dominates the Great Plains, but the prairie also reveals diversity. Botanists, plant ecologists, and geographers have long recognized three distinct prairie types. They have traditionally been named tallgrass, midgrass, and shortgrass prairies, though drawing lines to indicate their position on a map always proves difficult. Birds reveal the distinctions. Upland Sandpipers and Greater Prairie-Chickens are birds of the tallgrass prairie, but Mountain Plovers and Lesser Prairie-Chickens inhabit the shortgrass prairie. However, birding is challenging at least in part because birds do not respect the many dotted

lines that people would draw upon the land. The mobility that wings give to the birds allow them to cross the lines and show up in places where people might not ordinarily expect them. Beyond being mobile, birds also show some flexibility in lifestyle. Even minor alterations to the landscape allow birds to settle into areas they previously ignored or avoided.

Before summarizing the characteristics of Cimarron NG, we need to consider a new name for the region — “steppe.” Actually, it is an old name dating back several hundred years but only recently applied meaningfully to the North American landscape.

People have doubtlessly been naming discrete landscape areas since they began communicating. However, landscape names became a more scholarly pursuit when Baron von Humboldt began mapping and naming plant communities almost two centuries ago. In 1890 Clinton Hart Merriam defined and described North American life zones in a practical way. His work was replaced by a “biotic province” system in the 1940s. The 1970s brought a global reclassification identifying “biogeographical provinces.” Then, in 1980, Robert Bailey of the USDA Forest Service published a map and descriptive book on “ecoregions.”

The idea behind ecoregions is to improve our ability to manage our use of natural resources, particularly wildlife resources. Traditionally, wildlife management involved species on which the American public placed premium value. Game species took the lion’s share of attention because people were willing to pay money to trap, hunt, or fish for them. Species such as the Whooping Crane, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon earned public sympathy because of their stature or perceived magnificence. The Endangered Species Act mandated that people consider all species, but the cost has proved excessive. We simply cannot afford the cost of protecting one species at a time.

An alternative known as “ecosystem management” has emerged. The idea is that by protecting an entire ecosystem, the

species that depend on that ecosystem will survive. Not everyone agrees on the definition of an ecosystem. Bailey’s ecoregion work addresses the problem by defining ecoregions based on climate, topography, and plant community. And just as birds are divided into orders, families, genera, and species according to a protocol of taxonomy, so are Bailey’s ecoregions. His system divides North America into four domains, which separate into divisions, into provinces, into sections. Cimarron NG lies within the Dry Domain, Temperate Steppe Division, Great Plains-Palouse Dry Steppe Province. In this system prairie is characterized by grasses that grow more than three feet high, are crowded together so very little bare soil is exposed, and with very few if any woody plants. Steppe is distinguished by grasses shorter than three feet tall, much bare soil, and many woody plants. What used to be called “shortgrass prairie” is now known as “steppe.” Cimarron NG displays all the steppe characteristics. Bailey chose the name “steppe” to standardize ecoregion types on a global scale. Standardizing the names of ecoregions makes the foundation for defining the ecosystems that comprise those regions. “Shortgrass prairie” is a term unique to the United States, but the community type is not. In 1995 Bailey published a revision of his earlier work and included a world map of ecoregions. His system is relatively new and has not yet trickled into the popular natural history literature despite its elegant simplicity. Ironically, birders quickly accept new bird names but only slowly adopt name changes in related disciplines. As the public debate about ecosystem management matures, the ecoregion concept will become more prominent and the terms will become more familiar. (For more information about ecoregions and ecoregion geography, see Bailey 1996.)

Skilled birders immediately recognize the implications of ecoregion maps. The most kinds of birds will be found where two or more ecoregions converge. These areas represent blending zones where

species uniquely adapted to a specific ecoregion will mingle with species adapted to adjacent ecoregions. Cimarron NG enjoys

a particularly diverse birdlife because four ecoregion provinces contribute species to the area.

Set in this landscape context, the details of Cimarron NG should be more meaningful and useful.

## Describing the Cimarron Landscape

In a grossly simplified, but useful, view of things, weather is the day-to-day condition of the atmosphere, climate is weather extended through time, climate determines plant communities, and plant communities determine animal distribution. Each of the factors, in its own way, contributes to the complexion of bird diversity on Cimarron NG.

## Climate

Morton County is in a semiarid area. The average annual precipitation for a 62-year period at Richfield is 16.6 inches. However, the precipitation extremes during this period — from a high of 32.83 to a low of 7.09 inches per year — are more significant than the average annual precipitation. The longest successive period of below-normal rainfall was from 1931 through 1940; a period of 10 years that averaged 11.17 inches annually. The longest successive period of above normal rainfall was from 1927 through 1930, a period of four years that averaged 20.43 inches annually. Frequent and severe droughts make this area hazardous for crop production. About three-fourths of the annual precipitation occurs from April through September. This coincides closely with the growth period of the warm season grasses such as sand bluestem (*Andropogon hallii*), blue grama (*Bouteloua*



*Point of Rocks Ranch, early 1900s, which shows the stone corrals made necessary by a scarcity of wood. Note the absence of trees along the Cimarron River behind the ranch buildings. Photo courtesy of Morton County Historical Society.*

*gracilis*), sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*), and other important grasses of the region. Snowfall averages 18 inches per year, and the ground has a snow cover about 20 days per year; but snow is not an important water source overall because it is usually accompanied by high winds so that much of it drifts into valleys and gullies.

Sunshine and high winds are the two climatic factors that are the most impressive. Dodge City weather records show that the sun shines 70 percent of the time, or 256 days each year. Records at the same station show the average wind velocity to be 15 m.p.h. This wind causes the high rate of evaporation and transpiration (water loss from plants) and presents a wind erosion hazard on land not protected by permanent vegetation.

The relatively high elevation, 3,150 to 3,700 feet, the low humidity, and the constant air movement give this area a pleasant summer climate, especially during the night.

## Wildlife Habitat

When the federal government acquired Morton County land in the 1930s, more than 96 percent of it lacked vegetation. Only about 4,000 of the 108,000 acres had plants. The entire area was reseeded aerially and by hand with seed mixes thought to approximate the vegetation that existed prior to the land being cleared for farming. Today, four major types of plant communities exist on or around Cimarron NG. They include riparian, shortgrass prairie, sage-yucca prairie, and croplands. Plants in the prairie areas are representative of the xeric-adapted floras of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Many of the plants found in this area are at the extreme northeastern edge of their ranges. Ports (1979) and Schwilling (1991) studied the vegetation and breeding birds in these four habitats. The following habitat summaries are based on their work. All Latin and English names of plants are taken from *Flora of the Great Plains*, edited by T.M. Barkley.



Riparian woodland of the Cimarron River as seen from Point of Rocks. Photo by Ted Cable.

## Riparian Areas

“Cottonwood trees grow in all the valleys; suddenly there is something between you and the sun. The trees lean at odd angles, like flowers in a vase. In the summers, windrows of cottonwood-seed down cover the ground. Big cottonwoods have bark as ridged as a tractor tire, and the buffalo used to love to rub against it. In the shedding season, the river bottoms would be ankle deep in buffalo hair.”

—Ian Frazier, *Great Plains* (1989)

The Cimarron River, although usually dry, is the most distinctive characteristic of the natural landscape, both visually and ecologically. During the summer, the dark silver-green of the cottonwood leaves contrasts with the softer grass greens. In fall riparian woodlands become a shimmering gold stream flowing through the russet grasses. And, after a snowfall the leafless woody vegetation forms a smoky-gray slice across the blanket of snow.

The woody riparian vegetation consists primarily of cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), salt cedar (*Tamarix sp.*), and sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*). This plant community type provides the most important breeding bird habitat in Morton County in terms of species diversity and density. The most abundant breeding birds in this habitat are Mourning Dove, Western Kingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Northern Mockingbird, and Orchard Oriole. Because the riparian community provides the greatest species richness, birders have concentrated their efforts at river crossings and along the roads paralleling the river.

The river also defines the boundaries of other plant communities. North of the river, shortgrass prairie dominates the nearly level uplands. South of the river, sand dunes formed from sand blown from the ancient Cimarron River support a sagebrush-yucca plant community.

Prior to settlement no riparian woodlands occurred in the county. In fact, early photographs show not a single tree along the banks; but they do clearly show a treeless river and farms with stone walls for fences, presumably because trees were not available for fenceposts. The combined effect of uncontrolled fires and intense grazing, first by bison and other native grazers and later by uncontrolled cattle grazing, doubtlessly contributed to the treeless riparian community. The bison and cattle would find the most lush vegetation near the water. If a tree did try to become established, it would be eaten while still a seedling. Even today, most stretches of the Cimarron River outside of the National Grassland are grazed and treeless. After the government purchased the land and began to control grazing, cottonwoods became established along the river. These cottonwoods became established during times of flooding and therefore established shallow roots. Now, with the lowering of the water table due to irrigation many of these trees are dying, especially in the eastern sections of the county. The shallow roots cannot reach the lower water tables, particularly during the summer when corn is being irrigated in the county. This seasonal draw-down shocks and weakens the trees. So, although most of trees are less than 40 years old, the mortality is high in this community.

A treeless riparian community means that woodland birds would not have historically inhabited the area. Species such as Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Blue Jay arrived since settlement days. Ecologically, the river now serves as an east-west corridor for woodland birds.

Riparian woodlands also exist along the North Fork of the Cimarron as it crosses northern Morton County. The woodlands here contain a much greater variety of tree species compared to the woodlands along the main channel of the Cimarron River.

The area around Middle Spring is now wooded, too. As along the Cimarron, no

trees historically grew at this site because of fires and grazing. Like an African watering hole, the site attracted herds of bison and cattle. The vegetation around the water was probably severely trampled by the grazing and drinking animals and later by the Santa Fe Trail travelers. One account states that one time 300 wagons (180 government, 120 traders), 1,500 yoke of cattle, and 500 beef cattle all stopped at Middle Spring at the same time. It is obvious why trees would have had a difficult time getting established there.

### Shortgrass Prairie (Steppe)

“I came to understand that the prairies are nothing but grass, as the sea is nothing but water, that most prairie life is within the place: under the stems, beneath the turf, under the stones. The prairie is not a topography that shows its all but rather a

vastly exposed place of concealment ... where the splendid lies within the plain cover.”

— William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairieErth* (1991)

About 150 million acres of shortgrass prairie once blanketed the western Great Plains in the rainshadow of the Rocky Mountains (Freeman and Lauver 1991). In Kansas, shortgrass prairie is found in the western quarter of the state, mostly above 3,000 feet elevation on slopes or breaks that farmers find difficult to cultivate (Freeman and Lauver 1991). Virtually, all of the shortgrass prairie left in Kansas is grazed by cattle. The shortgrass prairie habitat is characterized by buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*) and blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*). These sod-forming grasses resist drought and tolerate repeated grazing. They go dormant repeatedly but green up immediately after rains, looking like a blue-green pool table. On Cimarron NG the



*Tree cholla is a huge cactus and a favorite nesting area of Curved-billed Thrashers. Photo by Ted Cable.*

shortgrass prairie occurs on the flat uplands north of the Cimarron River.

Wildflowers add color to this habitat after spring rains. Western wallflower (*Erysimum asperum*), ground-plum (*Astragalus crassicaarpus*), silky prairie-clover (*Dalea villosa*), milkweed (*Asclepias* sp.), common evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*), and white beardtongue (*Penstemon albidus*), all are common on the shortgrass prairie. Shrubs, which bloom in late summer or fall, include snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* sp.), and four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) among others (Freeman and Lauver 1991). Trees are almost nonexistent, except around home sites or reliable sources of water.

Cacti also thrive in this habitat, particularly if the sites are disturbed. Nine species of cacti occur on the High Plains of Kansas. Prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia* sp.) with flat pads are the most common type of cactus. Tree cholla (*Opuntia imbricata*), with a bushy form, also occurs on the Grassland. The later species is often used as a nesting site for Curve-billed Thrashers. Because tree cholla does not spread readily, Forest Service biologists are considering transplanting more specimens from the adjacent Comanche NG in Colorado where the plant is common.

Cacti add wonder and beauty to the landscape with amazing adaptations to conserve water and their conspicuous and brightly colored flowers. They also serve as pointed reminders of prairie walkers to stay alert. Fred Atchison wrote about the "Lonely Cactus":

Spines of the cactus  
Make a close relationship  
Very unlikely.

Although this plant community supports a low diversity of birds during the breeding season, it has a very high density of a few breeding birds, notably Grasshopper Sparrows and Western Meadowlarks. Other common nesting species include Cassin's Sparrows, Mourning Doves, Horned Larks, Lark Sparrows, and

Western Kingbirds. Recently, Mountain Plovers have been found nesting in this community. Relatively few birds use the shortgrass prairie as a foraging area, possibly because the incessant wind keeps flying insects scarce.

### Sagebrush-Yucca Prairie

"The earth laughs in flowers."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sagebrush-yucca prairie is found on sand hills and dunes south of the Cimarron River. During the last Ice Age, the predominant northwest winds blew sand from the river channel and deposited it in dunes parallel to the south side of the river. This phenomenon of sand dunes south of major river drainages exists throughout the southern Great Plains. The plant community on these sandy soils is also known as sandsage prairie. It is characterized by sagebrush (*Artemisia fiffifolia*), plains yucca (*Yucca glauca*), sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), and grasses such as sand bluestem, sandreed, little bluestem, dropseed (*Sporobolus crptandrus*), and sand lovegrass (*Eragrostis trichodes*). Like the shortgrass prairie, this plant community can come alive with wildflowers after rains. Wild begonia (*Rumex venosus*), field goosefoot (*Chenopodiaceaes* sp.), annual eriogonum (*Eriogonum anuum*), sweet sand verbena (*Abronia fragans*), sand milkweed (*Asclepias arenaria*), western fleabane (*Erigeron bellidiastrum*), and silky prairie-clover are some forbs that bloom in this habitat.

Most sand dunes in this region of Kansas are 20-40 feet tall, but some reach 80 feet (Freeman and Lauver 1992). Vegetation in this community is generally sparse and patchy, exposing much bare ground. It is very susceptible to wind erosion if drought, fire, or grazing damages the vegetation. Agricultural uses were limited to grazing because the soil was so fragile and the slopes associated with the dunes made cultivation difficult. However, in recent decades much sagebrush-yucca prairie has been converted to irrigated croplands.

Sagebrush, a three-foot shrub, is the most characteristic plant of this community. It is a beautiful gray-green, aromatic plant made famous in western books, songs, and movies. Native Americans burned this plant as an incense to attract good influences. Yucca is an evergreen with sharp, spike-like leaves radiating from a common base and a tall (2-5 feet) stalk of flowers. It is also known as soapweed because its roots were used to make soap. Native Americans made a drink made from young yucca flower shoots to make them brave and strong. In spite of the utility and beauty of these two plants, some modern range managers do not think highly of these two species. They consider them undesirable species because they compete with the more desirable grasses. In the 1970s and earlier, range managers of the Cimarron NG aerially sprayed areas to eradicate sagebrush and yucca. This practice was stopped by current Forest Service managers when it became apparent that spraying caused a drastic decline in bird species that depend upon sagebrush for shade and shelter. It also became apparent that grass was not regenerating even without the sage because the seed sources and soil had blown away. Evidence of the spraying is still visible – the sage and yucca have not yet returned to some sprayed areas and instead of grass only sunflowers and noxious weeds grow.

The Cassin's Sparrow qualifies as the most abundant bird in sagebrush-yucca prairie. This community is further distinguished because the Brewer's Sparrow and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, two highly sought species, nest here. The Brewer's Sparrow in particular seems to require abundant mature sagebrush. The occurrence of other species, such as Sage Thrasher, may directly depend on the status of sagebrush. Other common breeding birds in the sagebrush-yucca prairie are similar to those found in the shortgrass prairie. Unlike shortgrass prairie where few birds forage, many bird species forage in the sagebrush-yucca.

## Croplands

“All flesh is grass,  
and all the goodliness thereof is as  
the flower of the field:  
the grass withereth, the flower fadeth:  
because the spirit of the Lord bloweth  
upon it: surely the people is grass.”

—Isaiah 40: 6-7

Morton County is truly a county of grass, much of which is converted to human flesh. Cattle graze on the native grasslands, turning grass to beef. Most of the rest of the county is wheat, milo, and corn, all grasses produced ultimately for human consumption. Although the total varies from year to year, about 292,000 acres of cropland are farmed in the county. About 121,500 acres are in milo, 94,000 acres in wheat, and 8,000 acres are in irrigated corn. Sometimes, cropland is left as bare ground without a standing crop. A few birds are attracted to the bare soil to feed on insects and seeds. The most abundant breeding bird in the cropland community is the Horned Lark, followed by the House Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Lark Bunting, and Mourning Dove. The Long-billed Curlew, Chihuahuan Ravens, and recently Mountain Plovers have been found nesting in this habitat. In winter, thousands of longspurs and dozens of raptors often can be found in these agricultural areas.

## Other Communities

Marshes once existed in low spots along the river and throughout the region. Today, these sites are completely dry, leaving no trace of their former wetlands. The Forest Service has constructed nine ponds that provide limited habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and herons. Because the Cimarron River seldom has water in it, these ponds support species that otherwise would not occur on Cimarron NG.

The surrounding towns and farmsteads make up another Community type. The breeding birds are mostly typical urban

birds such as House Finches, House Sparrows, American Robins, and Northern Mockingbirds, although Curve-billed Thrashers have been known to nest in some Elkhart neighborhoods.

Urban habitat becomes much more interesting during migration and in winter. Elkhart represents an island of trees and shrubs that attract migrants and wintering species. Bird feeders, especially hummingbird feeders, concentrate the birds. During migration, the birdlife in town rivals that of more "natural" habitats. Some of the most interesting birds ever seen in Morton County have been found in the alleys of Elkhart, giving a new meaning to the term "trash bird!"

Outside of town and away from the river corridor grow a few (less than 100) widely scattered individual trees. These mark the site of long-abandoned homesteads. Often the hackberry or elm that the settlers may have brought with them is the only sign that people once lived there. To perpetuate these living monuments, the Forest Service has fenced a few trees, the canopies of which have been killed by storm damage. This prevents cattle from grazing on the new shoots being sent up from the still viable roots. In 1995 every Grassland tree away from the river was searched for raptor nests. Virtually every tree had a bird's nest in it. In all, 18 trees held nesting Swainson's Hawks and three hosted nesting Ferruginous Hawks. Black-billed Magpies, Loggerhead Shrikes, and other songbirds also frequently use these isolated trees. The Forest Service intends to plant new trees at some of the raptor nest sites when the existing trees die.

### Wildlife

Cimarron NG supports a diversity of other wildlife besides birds and plants. Insects, arachnids, and other invertebrates have not been thoroughly studied even though they form vital links in regional food chains. Amphibians, reptiles, and mammals have not been exhaustively stud-

ied either; but because these groups contain vastly fewer species, they are easier to document. Table 1 presents all 31 amphibians and reptiles known to occur on or adjoining Cimarron NG. Table 2 presents the 41 species of mammals recorded on or near the Grassland. Much work remains for anyone to understand the mammals of Cimarron. Since publication of *Mammals of Kansas* in 1981, many taxonomic changes have taken place. For example, the spotted skunk has been separated into two species, eastern (*Spilogale putorius*) and western (*Spilogale gracilis*). Range maps published in *Mammals of Colorado* (1995) suggest both species may occur at Cimarron. Other mammals, including shrews, bats, rodents, the mink, and the mountain lion, might inhabit or migrate through the area as well. The Cimarron mammal list (table 2) does not include extirpated species such as black-footed ferret, gray wolf, grizzly bear, or American bison. Nor does it include the wayward moose that became a celebrity as it wandered from Minnesota southward across the Great Plains, right through Morton County, Kansas! The list does include elk. A native species to Cimarron country, and indeed much of the Great Plains, the elk was extirpated more than a century ago. Working cooperatively, the Forest Service and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks brought elk back to the Cimarron region. Through several successful translocations, the local elk population grew to about 150 animals. Elk, however, feed on grass and hay intended for livestock; so the herd has been reduced through hunting to about 50 animals.

Amphibians, reptiles, and mammals form intricate relationships with birds. Snakes and rodents eat birds' eggs, and hawks and owls consume rodents and snakes. When populations of rodent-eating birds decline, a study of small mammals may produce more answers than a study of the birds themselves. The slowly unfolding story of Cimarron NG birds will best be told when we understand the region's other wildlife as well as we know its birds.

Table 1. Amphibians and Reptiles of Cimarron National Grassland. Adapted from Collins and Collins (1991) and Tennant (1985).

<b>Class: Amphibia - Amphibians</b>	<b>Class: Reptilia - Turtles, Lizards, Snakes</b>
<b>Order: Caudata - Salamanders, Newts</b>	<b>Order: Testudines - Turtles</b>
Family: Ambystomatidae - Mole Salamanders Tiger Salamander <i>Ambystoma tigrinum mavortium</i>	Family: Kinosternidae - Mud and Musk Turtles Yellow Mud Turtle <i>Kinosternon flavescens flavescens</i>
<b>Order: Anura - Frogs and Toads</b>	Family: Chelydridae - Snapping Turtles Common Snapping Turtle <i>Chelydra serpentina serpentina</i>
Family: Pelobatidae - Spadefoots Plains Spadefoot <i>Scaphiopus bombifrons</i>	Family: Emydidae - Turtles Ornate Box Turtle <i>Terrapene ornata ornata</i> Western Painted Turtle <i>Chrysemys picta bellii</i>
Family: Bufonidae - Toads Great Plains Toad <i>Bufo cognatus</i> Western Green Toad <i>Bufo debilis insidiator</i> Red-spotted Toad <i>Bufo punctatus</i> Woodhouse's Toad <i>Bufo woodhousii woodhousii</i>	<b>Order: Squamata - Lizards, Snakes</b>
Family: Hylidae - Treefrogs Blanchard's Cricket Frog <i>Acris crepitans blanchardi</i>	<b>Suborder: Sauria - Lizards</b>
Family: Ranidae - Frogs Plains Leopard Frog <i>Rana blairi</i> Bullfrog <i>Rana catesbeiana</i>	Family: Iguanidae - Iguanas Northern Earless Lizard <i>Holbrookia maculata maculata</i> Eastern Fence Lizard <i>Sceloporus undulatus garmani</i> Texas Horned Lizard <i>Phrynosoma cornutum</i>
	Family: Teiidae - Whiptails Six-lined Racerunner <i>Cnemidophorus sexlineatus viridis</i>
	Family: Scincidae - Skinks Great Plains Skink <i>Eumeces obsoletus</i>
	<b>Suborder: Serpentes - Snakes</b>
	Family: Leptotyphlopidae - Blind Snakes New Mexico Blind Snake <i>Leptotyphlops dulcis dissectus</i>
	Family: Colubridae - Colubrids Plains Blackhead Snake <i>Tantilla nigriceps tumiceps</i> Eastern Hognose Snake <i>Heterodon platyrhinos</i> Plains Hognose Snake <i>Heterodon nasicus nasicus</i> Western Plains Garter Snake <i>Thamnophis radix haydenii</i> Checkered Garter Snake <i>Thamnophis marcianus marcianus</i> Bullsnake <i>Pituophis melanoleucus sayi</i> Kansas Glossy Snake <i>Arizona elegans elegans</i> Central Plains Milk Snake <i>Lampropeltis triangulum gentilis</i> Western Coachwhip <i>Masticophis flagellum testaceus</i> Eastern Yellowbelly Race <i>Coluber constrictor flaviventris</i> Texas Longnose Snake <i>Rhinocheilus lecontei tessellatus</i>
	Family: Viperidae - Vipers Prairie Rattlesnake <i>Crotalus viridis viridis</i>

Table 2. Mammals of Cimarron National Grassland. Four sources were used to compile this list: (1) Mammals of Kansas; (2) Mammals of Colorado; (3) "Checklist of Amphibians, Mammals, Reptiles, and Fishes of Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands"; (4) personal observations. Sequence and taxonomy follow Mammals of Colorado.

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<p><b>Order: Marsupialia - Marsupials</b>            Family: Didelphidae - Opossums                Virginia Opossum <i>Didelphis marsupialis</i></p> <p><b>Order: Insectivora - Insectivores</b>            Family: Soricidae - Shrews                Least Shrew <i>Cryptotis parva</i>            Family: Talpidae - Moles                Eastern Mole <i>Scalopus aquaticus</i></p> <p><b>Order: Chiroptera - Bats</b>            Vespertilionidae - Bats                Little Brown Myotis <i>Myotis lucifugus</i>                Hoary Bat <i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>                Silver-haired Bat <i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>            Molossididae - Free-tailed Bats                Brazilian Free-tailed Bat                    <i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>                Big Free-tailed Bat <i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i></p> <p><b>Order: Lagomorpha - Lagomorphs</b>            Family: Leporidae - Hares, Cottontails                Desert Cottontail <i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>                Eastern Cottontail <i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>                Black-tailed Jackrabbit <i>Lepus californicus</i></p> <p><b>Order: Rodentia - Rodents</b>            Family: Sciuridae - Squirrels                Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel                    <i>Spermophilus tridecemlineatus</i>                Spotted Ground Squirrel                    <i>Spermophilus spilosoma</i>                Black-tailed Prairie Dog                    <i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>            Family: Geomyidae - Pocket Gophers                Plains Pocket Gopher <i>Geomys bursarius</i>            Family: Heteromyidae - Pocket Mice                Plains Pocket Mouse                    <i>Perognathus flavescens</i>                Silky Pocket Mouse <i>Perognathus flavus</i>                Hispid Pocket Mouse <i>Chaetodipus hispidus</i>                Ord's Kangaroo Rat <i>Dipodomys ordii</i>            Family: Castoridae - Beavers                Beaver <i>Castor canadensis</i></p>	<p>Family: Muridae - Mice                Western Harvest Mouse                    <i>Reithrodontomys megalotis</i>                Plains Harvest Mouse                    <i>Reithrodontomys montanus</i>                White-footed Mouse <i>Peromyscus leucopus</i>                Deer Mouse <i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i>                Northern Grasshopper Mouse                    <i>Onychomys leucogaster</i>                Hispid Cotton Rat <i>Sigmodon hispidus</i>                White-throated Woodrat <i>Neotoma albigula</i>                Eastern Woodrat <i>Neotoma floridana</i>                Mexican Woodrat <i>Neotoma mexicana</i>                Southern Plains Woodrat                    <i>Neotoma micropus</i>                Muskrat <i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>                House Mouse <i>Mus musculus</i>                Norway Rat <i>Rattus norvegicus</i>            Family: Erethizontidae - Porcupine                Porcupine <i>Erethizon dorsatum</i></p> <p><b>Order: Carnivora - Carnivores</b>            Family: Canidae - Dogs                Coyote <i>Canis latrans</i>                Swift Fox <i>Vulpes velox</i>                Red Fox <i>Vulpes fulva</i>                Gray Fox <i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>            Family: Procyonidae - Raccoons                Raccoon <i>Procyon lotor</i>            Family: Mustelidae - Weasels                Long-tailed Weasel <i>Mustela frenata</i>                Badger <i>Taxidea taxus</i>                Striped Skunk <i>Mephitis mephitis</i>                Eastern Spotted Skunk <i>Spilogale putorius</i>            Family: Felidae - Cats                Bobcat <i>Lynx rufus</i></p> <p><b>Order: Artiodactyla - Cattle, Deer, Pronghorn</b>            Family: Cervidae - Deer                Elk <i>Cervus elaphus</i>                Mule Deer <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>                White-tailed Deer <i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>            Family: Antilocapridae - Pronghorn                Pronghorn <i>Antilocapra americana</i></p>
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*Ferruginous Hawk. Photo courtesy of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.*

### Part 3

## Ornithological History and the Birds

### History of Bird Study in Southwestern Kansas

It is obvious from the history of the area why so little ornithological work was done in the area. While birds throughout the western United States were being described and studied (principally by military doctors), this region was off-limits because of the Indian conflicts and the lack of water. Moreover, travelers on the Cimarron Cut-Off who had taken the time to describe the landscapes and wildlife at other places along the trail hurried through this stretch because of the inhospitable conditions. Apparently, people lacked the time or desire to make detailed comments on the wildlife. In other words, they were not inclined to take the suggestion of the recent Kansas Tourism Department slogan to "Linger Longer." Likewise, county residents from the time of settlement through the Dust Bowl years often were preoccupied with their own survival, leaving little time to make note of the avifauna.

The earliest accounts of wildlife are sketchy and generic, but they provide an enticing glimpse of the fauna encountered by the first travelers into the area. Although not referring specifically to Morton County, the Cimarron River valley was described in the 1870s as "abounding not only in buffalo, but in many antelope, deer, wild turkeys, quail, grouse, and plover." Did these "grouse" include Sage Grouse or were they merely Lesser Prairie-Chickens? And, were the plovers the now nearly extinct Eskimo Curlew or were they Upland Sandpipers, Long-billed Curlews, or something entirely different? Other species mentioned by Santa Fe Trail travelers and early settlers include Roadrunners, Ravens, and Burrowing Owls.

The first ornithological expeditions to Morton County were led by William H. Burt from the University of Kansas. His party spent portions of the summers of 1926 and 1927 collecting scores of specimens. The most noteworthy was a Lewis' Woodpecker collected on 4 July 1927. This specimen, along with the others from these expeditions, are in the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History.

W.S. Long camped along the Cimarron River about 12 miles northeast of Elkhart 7-12 November 1934. His party collected many specimens, including a Red-naped Sapsucker, a Common Loon, five Western Scrub-Jays, and "Rocky Mountain races" of White-breasted Nuthatch and Song Sparrow.

In February 1950, Richard and Jean Graber began a study of the birds of western Kansas. They observed many species and collected many specimens, including several first state records. Their work represented the first thorough study of Morton County birdlife.

Three other significant ornithological studies have been done in Morton County since then. James Rising conducted field work in western Kansas between the years 1963 and 1968. Much of his field work was in Morton County. Mark Ports spent most of the summers of 1978 and 1979 studying the breeding birds of Morton County. From 1990 to 1994 Marvin Schwillig studied the birds of six southwestern Kansas counties, including Morton. Each of these studies added significantly to understanding the avifauna of Cimarron NG.

The first Christmas Bird Count on the Grassland was held in 1963 (see table 3). Ten years passed before anyone conducted another one. Christmas Bird Counts have been conducted every year since 1973,

though some of the early counts were never published in *American Birds*, the official outlet for CBC results. They have added much to our knowledge of the winter birds of the Grassland. These regular Christmas Counts may be partially responsible for stimulating interest in the Grassland among Kansas birders. During the 1970s and early 1980s, a small but dedicated contingent of Kansans birded Cimarron NG several times a year. Most visits occurred in the fall when the chance of finding rarities is greatest. Other than the formal studies mentioned above, birders have made few birding trips to the Grassland during summer. However, in recent years birders focusing on early fall migrants, particularly hummingbirds, have found August to be a rewarding time to visit Morton County.

Just as the Christmas Bird Count presents a vital picture of winter birdlife on Cimarron NG, the Breeding Bird Survey offers an important glimpse of summer birdlife. Begun in the 1960s, the BBS program monitors breeding bird populations by establishing a long-term count along fixed 25-mile routes. Originally, routes were chosen with mathematically random techniques for every one-degree block of latitude and longitude across the lower 48 states. Not enough competent birders exist to cover all these routes, so many have never been done. No BBS route crosses

Cimarron NG, but three routes lie close by. The towns of Hooker and Keyes, Oklahoma, and Campo, Colorado, each have routes that course through terrain and habitat similar to that of Cimarron NG. Results of these routes (tables 4a and 4b) indicate the kinds and numbers of birds that probably nest on Cimarron.

Examining the numbers presented in the CBC and BBS tables paint a vivid picture of which species routinely inhabit Cimarron NG, which species occasionally pass through, and which species experience period increases and decreases in their populations. The tables make one fact abundantly clear: Cimarron is undoubtedly important for wintering bird populations.

In recent years Morton County has become one of Kansas' most popular birding destinations. Birders have "flocked" to Morton County to see such first state records as the Pyrrhuloxia, Canyon Wren, and Great Kiskadee, and to witness the infrequent visits of Steller's and Western Scrub-Jays, Phainopeplas and other western visitors. As we learn more about the birds of Cimarron NG, and as word spreads about the exciting birding opportunities there, birding interest in the area will increase.

Species accounts immediately follow the tables.

Table 3. Results of National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts, 1963-95. Count included within a 15-mile circle centered at 37° 07' N, 101° 52' W, seven miles north of Elkhart, Kansas. The count circle includes parts of Cimarron National Grassland, but also includes private land as well as the town of Elkhart. Parenthetical data indicate species seen within the period of three days before or three days after the count but not actually seen on count day. Gaps indicate unavailable data.

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
Great Blue Heron	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tundra Swan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Snow Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	125	3
Ross' Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Canada Goose	0	0	0	250	0	0	0	177	0	51	0	15	(1)	0	30	1	0	21	0	11	0	0	3	240
Green-winged Teal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Mallard	0	23	0	0	2	7	9	33	2	34	0	6	0	3	1	0	0	15	0	1	0	0	(1)	2
Northern Pintail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
American Wigeon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Goldeneye	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bufflehead	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Common Merganser	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ruddy Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bald Eagle	2	1	3	1i	2a	0	3a	0	1a,2i	3a	1a,1i	3i	(1a)	(1a)	0	0	4	1i	1a	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Harrier	6	27	45	4	19	42	11	61	29	24	23	24	14	6	19	31	50	57	35	25	17	46	11	9
Sharp-shinned Hawk	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	3	(1)	1	1	1	4	4	1	6	2	2	2	1	0
Cooper's Hawk	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	(1)	1	1	1	4	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	1
Accipiter sp.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Red-tailed Hawk	1	0	1	0	4	5	1	8	9	6	16	21	10	3	16	19	21	28	21	6	8	15	14	24
Ferruginous Hawk	4	0	8	3	1	6	12	12	23	10	8	21	8	7	31	7	30	64	17	45	15	41	22	24
Rough-legged Hawk	2	1	7	7	12	14	6	24	6	10	6	16	4	2	10	6	15	16	13	8	3	17	6	18
Buteo sp.	0	0	1	0	0	5	2	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	3	0	0	0	1	1
Golden Eagle	2	1	3	1a	2a,1i	3a	1a	4i	0	2a,1i	1a,1i	1a,1i	4i	2a	10a,2i	2a,1i	4	7a,3i	3a,3i	4a,1i	1a	5	4	2
Eagle sp.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Kestrel	2	2	19	3	14	36	5	11	12	12	15	8	9	6	31	13	32	20	6	15	12	27	11	13

Table 3. Continued

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
Merlin	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	7	5	2	4	2	(1)	0	0	0	5	1	2	8	16	3	4	7
Peregrine Falcon	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prairie Falcon	3	4	1	0	1	5	1	11	5	3	3	7	1	1	5	2	7	1	3	6	2	7	2	6
Falcon sp.	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ring-necked Pheasant	2	3	7	3	2	53	14	4	43	11	101	80	15	3	64	3	15	9	39	3	3	19	10	46
Lesser Prairie-Chicken	0	0	20	28	4	7	21	3	5	3	8	3	16	4	12	7	0	58	5	0	21	12	2	2
Wild Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	2	15	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	5	0	0	0
Northern Bobwhite	21	72	6	0	31	100	72	33	106	22	159	59	0	12	12	145	47	145	65	14	0	58	50	10
Scaled Quail	0	0	0	0	0	119	36	10	213	83	57	67	22	15	50	90	34	2	52	(1)	11	47	4	62
Bobwhite x Scaled Quail	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sandhill Crane	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Killdeer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Snipe	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ring-billed Gull	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Herring Gull	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rock Dove	0	13	12	29	1	77	30	38	68	23	69	87	105	37	63	5	38	26	14	33	39	63	5	28
Mourning Dove	0	4	22	3	125	17	1	123	3	16	35	40	22	0	0	38	15	46	0	(1)	22	20	44	0
Greater Roadrunner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barn Owl	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Eastern Screech Owl	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	3	4	2	4	1	6	2	1	2	4	1	0	0	2
Western Screech-Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Great Horned Owl	6	0	7	2	4	10	4	12	11	7	18	17	14	7	10	16	13	14	13	4	12	18	12	10
Burrowing Owl	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	0
Long-eared Owl	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	3	3	1	0	0	1
Short-eared Owl	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	(1)	(1)	3	0	(1)	(1)	0	0
Lewis' Woodpecker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	3	3	8	5	4	3	1	9	4	3	2

Table 3. Continued

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
Downy Woodpecker	11	0	6	5	9	8	19	5	9	8	11	6	7	2	5	16	16	49	18	6	3	18	8	3
Hairy Woodpecker	1	0	5	3	0	5	7	5	3	1	3	5	5	1	5	6	5	0	1	1	2	7	7	5
Northern Flicker	0	0	28	0	0	4	12	5	2	3	0	6	10	1	24	2	45	16	20	18	30	26	12	31
Unspecified	30	3	0	6	13	50	22	14	22	13	53	13	11	12	29	61	0	29	0	0	7	31	19	0
Red-shafted	11	1	0	4	5	9	3	5	5	11	8	6	3	0	1	5	0	5	0	4	9	6	10	0
Yellow-shafted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red x Yellow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Say's Phoebe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horned Lark	225	9369	8824	18	499	185	113	57387	1448	3493	10071	6304	675	246	2141	1425	8623	4276	15000	2260	3789	16958	689	669
Steller's Jay	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blue Jay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	2	4	0	4	3	13	2
Western Scrub-Jay	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
Black-billed Magpie	16	57	48	53	34	46	75	37	91	80	74	103	83	35	125	104	103	190	70	61	71	130	76	85
American Crow	16	0	47	27	53	61	29	31	15	15	50	39	57	11	35	17	19	29	2	14	109	116	23	6
Chihuahuan Raven	0	2	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Black-capped Chickadee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mountain Chickadee	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	2	0	10	0	0	6	0	0	1
Chickadee sp.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bushtit	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0
Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	7	0	0
White-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	(1)	0	0	7	10	2	7	1	5	4	2
Pygmy Nuthatch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brown Creeper	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	3	1	0	0	0
Rock Wren	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	1	0	(1)	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canyon Wren	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Carolina Wren	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Bewick's Wren	3	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	3	(1)	0	1	0	3	2	0
Marsh Wren	5	0	4	0	0	2	2	4	3	3	5	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	1

Table 3. Continued

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Eastern Bluebird	2	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	8	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	2	0	0
Mountain Bluebird	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Townsend's Solitaire	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	2	6	1	6	2	14	1	0	4	1	5	2	3	8	5	5
Hermit Thrush	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Robin	2	0	0	12	4	0	25	(1)	3	4	5	17	30	12	29	4	8	4	1	39	67	71	15	23	23
Northern Mockingbird	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Brown Thrasher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Curve-billed Thrasher	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Bohemian Waxwing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cedar Waxwing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	0	1	2	0	0	17	0	18	12	0	45	0	21	4	3	2	2
Northern Shrike	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	2	2	0	0	3	3
Loggerhead Shrike	4	0	7	1	12	16	2	5	4	3	3	7	6	6	22	12	16	12	8	13	13	21	6	11	11
European Starling	35	33	300	1500	254	327	150	554	176	586	958	310	705	377	510	108	169	159	314	216	282	151	110	707	707
Yellow-rumped Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	0	0	0
Palm Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Cardinal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	(1)	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	2	2	2	0	0	0
Pyrrhuloxia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Spotted Towhee	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Canyon Towhee	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	0	0	3	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
American Tree Sparrow	320	321	964	260	2723	1121	332	1304	182	399	506	897	961	65	786	463	924	1095	1025	1709	175	1836	539	751	751
Brewer's Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Field Sparrow	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	1	4	0	0	1	5	0	0	0
Vesper Sparrow	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	0	4	2	0	0	0
Sage Sparrow	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 3. Continued

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
Lark Bunting	0	0	0	0	209	106	3	306	25	8	50	87	5	0	69	0	31	124	5	4	192	4	34	0
Savannah Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LeConte's Sparrow	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fox Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Song Sparrow	25	3	49	11	46	76	19	29	12	29	14	7	20	1	86	38	52	32	39	20	15	25	39	31
Lincoln's Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swamp Sparrow	0	0	3	1	0	4	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
White-crowned Sparrow	10	81	19	1	447	628	9	471	7	452	278	134	117	4	380	132	1158	625	734	53	286	416	142	122
Harris' Sparrow	0	1	4	0	957	33	13	141	0	14	3	7	20	0	8	11	5	212	1	4	7	2	0	3
Dark-eyed Junco																								
Unspecified	0	0	270	0	0	55	56	40	5	3	30	23	63	4	300	27	1141	1463	402	617	235	406	300	298
Slate-colored	12	20	0	11	594	105	81	241	114	86	306	39	163	0	125	297	0	358	54	325	147	723	140	0
White-winged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Oregon	38	4	0	15	536	69	91	151	156	71	326	31	98	19	40	170	0	515	10	362	160	556	333	0
Gray-headed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
McCown's Longspur	0	1	0	0	0	10	5	4	4	4	11	0	2	0	0	0	7	71	26	0	1	801	0	0
Lapland Longspur	5	42	63	1	7	57	1	13,685	207	1805	4340	380	372	22	13	3028	354	1001	3657	650	92	556	8	30
Chestnut-collared Longspur	0	22	0	0	0	145	6	1358	1	8	1	7	0	2	0	0	15	(1)	0	8	59	18	0	0
Longspur sp.	0	55	909	0	0	0	0	0	500	2223	2218	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	350	0	30	0	0
Red-winged Blackbird	40	77	212	15	13	555	19	853	18	120	3152	7	336	11	872	934	767	756	115	713	17	1947	226	48
Western Meadowlark	73	366	297	175	892	2210	189	1274	312	214	833	470	141	86	357	841	561	754	1082	336	105	724	224	350
Meadowlark sp.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64	0	0	0
Brewer's Blackbird	0	0	25	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	12	4	12	0	6	0	0	0	5	0	0
Great-tailed Grackle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Common Grackle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	49	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	1
Brown-headed Cowbird	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	4	0	0	1	19	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0
Blackbird sp.	0	30	0	0	300	0	0	0	0	26	1	0	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. Continued

	63	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
Purple Finch	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
House Finch	0	0	31	25	56	12	25	9	2	54	75	50	27	41	93	81	157	115	245	736	331	184	134	283
Red Crossbill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Redpoll	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pine Siskin	6	1	24	139	100	492	10	(1)	38	182	46	243	62	0	274	299	49	248	1	272	73	6	1	91
Lesser Goldfinch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(1)						
American Goldfinch	20	20	142	97	183	92	9	22	77	42	120	20	110	0	54	72	87	46	23	140	30	42	13	75
Evening Grosbeak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
House Sparrow	1	111	186	1092	427	1245	2232	743	1390	1445	3027	2078	1434	427	1493	1824	885	610	2256	1671	348	1186	617	822
<b>Total Species</b>	38	33	45	39	45	62	55	54	51	61	58	53	59	49	62	59	61	67	54	50	66	66	58	58
<b>Total Individuals</b>	984	12,645	8618	3836	5385	27,155	5906	8317	15,594	25,482	6996	4108	5013	10,788	3813	8,275	8,275	3836	79,350	5385	12,214	11,798	5906	8317
<b>Total Parties</b>	2	3	8	6	13	8	5	13	10	15	10	9	22	7	16	9	16	15	9	15	9	26	10	10
Field	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Feeders	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	7	3	5	3	4-5	5	4	5	4	9	4	5
<b>Total Party Hours</b>	9	20	15	30	33	28	38	32	39	36	42.5	51	24	40	28	43.5	45	33	48	30	70	32	34	34
Car	5	16	16	14.5	21	22	26.5	20	18.5	34	16	22	17	29.5	26.5	23.5	30	21	48	22	24	24	24	24
Foot	10	14	17	13.5	17	10	12.5	16	22.5	16	8	18	10	14	18.5	9.5	18	9	21.5	10	10	10	10	10
Feeder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Owling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.5	.5	0	0	1	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Party Miles</b>	77	233	110	318	304	410	320	357	332	209	431	598.5	213	390	273	382.5	532	239	550	370	600	294	308	308
Car	100	298	283	394	295	330	313	193	393	559	191	366	231	366	508	229	520	358	568.5	279	300	300	300	300
Foot	10	20	21	16	25	27	19	16	24	29.5	10	24	18	16.5	24	10	30	12	31.25	15	8	8	8	8
Owling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Temperature Lo-Hi (°F)</b>	30-50	18-37	29-53	9-16	21-37	40-64	25-50	11-35	19-40	27-44	23-51	18-46	7-29	30-49	28-35	4-22	29-36	37-56	29-45	28-42	28-50	28-50	28-50	28-50

Table 4a. Results of two Breeding Bird Survey routes of the National Biological Survey. The routes are fixed near the towns of Hooker and Keyes, both in Oklahoma immediately south of Morton County, Kansas, and the Cimarron National Grassland. HKR = Hooker and KYS = Keyes.

	1992		1993		1994		1995	
	HKR	KYS	HKR	KYS	HKR	KYS	HKR	KYS
Black-crowned Night-Heron	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
Mallard	5	0	2	0	20	0	12	0
Northern Shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Turkey Vulture	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0
Northern Harrier	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1
Swainson's Hawk	1	4	2	1	1	2	0	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	33	28	36	7	47	29	20	19
Northern Bobwhite	1	3	1	1	1	0	3	0
Scaled Quail	3	3	1	4	0	3	1	5
Killdeer	24	3	23	1	40	3	26	1
Mountain Plover	0	7	0	3	0	3	0	4
American Avocet	1	0	0	0	7	0	1	0
Long-billed Curlew	0	9	0	5	0	3	0	4
Rock Dove	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Mourning Dove	114	65	93	43	97	89	104	61
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Barn Owl	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Great Horned Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Burrowing Owl	2	6	3	2	4	5	2	5
Common Nighthawk	0	1	6	1	4	4	3	0
Chimney Swift	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Northern Flicker	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Say's Phoebe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Western Kingbird	14	1	17	4	15	5	8	1
Eastern Kingbird	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0
Horned Lark	115	109	126	97	92	91	86	87
Barn Swallow	10	2	6	4	19	5	10	5
American Crow	1	0	0	5	1	2	1	2
Chihuahuan Raven	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1
American Robin	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Northern Mockingbird	1	0	1	0	3	0	4	1
Brown Thrasher	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Loggerhead Shrike	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
European Starling	0	0	4	0	1	0	1	0
Common Yellowthroat	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Dickcissel	12	3	11	7	3	1	12	1
Cassin's Sparrow	3	25	16	21	0	9	1	7
Lark Sparrow	8	0	4	0	18	0	10	0
Lark Bunting	63	146	23	32	6	30	21	29
Grasshopper Sparrow	39	42	34	43	40	35	44	33
Red-winged Blackbird	274	5	326	33	273	67	261	13
Western Meadowlark	104	164	108	101	97	115	130	138
Yellow-headed Blackbird	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Great-tailed Grackle	2	0	0	0	8	0	15	0

Part 3

*Table 4b. Results of one Breeding Bird Survey route of the National Biological Survey. The route is fixed near Campo, Colorado, immediately west of Morton County, Kansas, and Cimarron National Grassland.*

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Green-winged Teal	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mallard	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey Vulture	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2
Swainson's Hawk	3	7	8	4	3	6	5	1
Ferruginous Hawk	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	1
American Kestrel	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Prairie Falcon	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Ring-necked Pheasant	36	43	26	22	27	15	19	15
Scaled Quail	8	10	13	2	9	4	5	4
Killdeer	3	3	2	0	0	0	2	3
Long-billed Curlew	47	29	30	8	15	16	18	16
Common Snipe	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rock Dove	6	2	2	0	5	2	0	23
Mourning Dove	68	93	32	52	37	51	53	33
Burrowing Owl	6	5	2	0	12	1	4	0
Common Nighthawk	4	0	5	3	7	2	2	1
Say's Phoebe	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Western Kingbird	11	5	8	8	11	14	13	9
Horned Lark	83	82	39	72	112	107	89	122
Cliff Swallow	0	1	0	3	1	0	0	0
Barn Swallow	2	8	1	8	0	3	5	2
Black-billed Magpie	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Crow	3	7	7	2	5	8	2	5
Chihuahuan Raven	6	1	4	6	4	5	15	3
American Robin	5	2	2	2	2	0	3	0
Northern Mockingbird	4	6	4	0	0	3	2	5
Loggerhead Shrike	2	2	1	6	6	8	0	3
Cassin's Sparrow	110	90	77	112	130	148	157	149
Lark Sparrow	15	4	6	6	2	6	4	0
Lark Bunting	56	9	6	2	1	0	0	16
Grasshopper Sparrow	40	45	28	33	31	16	24	15
Red-winged Blackbird	0	0	6	2	1	0	0	16
Western Meadowlark	151	202	196	182	192	142	194	158
Brewer's blackbird	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0
Common Grackle	0	13	3	2	0	0	4	0
Brown-headed Cowbird	0	3	0	1	2	1	2	0
Bullock's Oriole	5	7	2	2	6	4	7	5
House Sparrow	16	0	8	12	18	26	15	21

## Using the Species Accounts

This book describes the status of 342 bird species known to have occurred on Cimarron NG and surrounding Morton County, Kansas, plus 13 unconfirmed bird species.

The species accounts are based on a data set that consists of about 14,000 bird records. The authors compiled these records by systematically reviewing the ornithological literature, historical documents, Santa Fe Trail journals, and computer printouts of museum holdings. In addition, unpublished bird records for the area were generously provided by ornithologists and birders. The species accounts include information about relative abundance, nesting records, migration dates, and high counts for each bird species. For many species, additional information is provided in a "Remarks" section. This section provides further explanations or caveats about the status of individual sightings, information about name changes, and so on.

Citations are given for data taken from published articles, reports, or books. When no formal citation is provided, it indicates that the information was gleaned from unpublished field notes, personal communications, rare bird reports, telephone hotline transcripts, newsletters, and other such informal sources. Typically, names of observers are given for unusual records when known.

The purpose of the book is to provide useful and interesting information to visiting birders or those considering a birding trip to Morton County. Because this book represents a comprehensive compilation of all the known bird records for Morton County, the authors trust that it will have value as a technical reference for people studying the region's birds. Finally, in spite of the thousands of existing Morton County bird records, many gaps in our knowledge still exist. For example, few records exist

between the end of the Christmas Bird Count period and the beginning of April. Summer records are also relatively scarce. Of 342 confirmed species, 97 species have been seen five or fewer times. This partly reflects the central location that attracts vagrants from both the east and west, but it also indicates the infrequent birding in the area. With more birding effort many of these species could be upgraded to a more common status. The authors hope this book will stimulate an interest in conducting field work to gain a better understanding of the region's birdlife.

## Definitions of Terms Used in the Species Accounts

### Status

The "encounterability" of the species. This depends on both the species' abundance and its conspicuousness. Some species may be present in large numbers but may be very difficult to see (e.g., owls, nightjars, rails, some types of sparrows). Conversely, some species may be present in relatively low numbers but may be very conspicuous (e.g., hawks, herons).

These abundance categories are most significant when applied to land birds, especially the passerines. Because Morton County has so little surface water or wetlands, waterfowl and marsh birds are often difficult to find. Many waterbirds on the county checklist are common migrants on the High Plains and would be expected during the proper seasons but are nevertheless very rare in Morton County.

### Abundant

Large numbers (more than 100) can be found every day, in the proper habitat, by a competent observer (Cassin's Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Bullock's Oriole).

### Common

Ten to 25 individuals can be found every day, in the proper habitat, by a competent observer (Red-tailed Hawk, Blue Grosbeak, Rock Wren, Common Yellowthroat).

### Uncommon

The species, being hard to find, can be missed in a day in the proper habitat by a competent observer. Small numbers (1-10 individuals) are not unexpected (Scaled Quail, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Curve-billed Thrasher).

### Rare

These birds are usually missed on any given day and are seen only a few times a year (Eared Grebe, Greater Roadrunner, Cassin's Kingbird).

### Very Rare

Not seen some years, these species have occurred more than five times (Steller's Jay, Western Tanager, Sage Thrasher, Rufous-crowned Sparrow).

### Accidental

Five or fewer records document the species (Pyrrhuloxia, Canyon Wren, White-winged Scoter, Red Phalarope).

### Other Reported Species

This category includes species for which some evidence exists that they may have occurred in Morton County. Many of these species may have been correctly identified, but the circumstances of the sighting or the subsequent documentation did not meet the criteria for acceptance by the Kansas Bird Records Committee. Or, in some cases, these reports have not been

submitted to the Kansas Bird Records Committee, but accounts of the sighting were published or widely communicated.

## Species Accounts

### Gaviiformes - Loons Gaviidae - Loons

#### Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. Long (1935) found a specimen on the prairie about one-half mile north of the Cimarron River on 9 November 1934. A large hole in the sternum was probably made by a bullet, and Long reasoned that the loon was probably shot on the river and had flown away from the river before dying. The skeleton is preserved at the University of Kansas. A Common Loon in basic plumage was seen at the Elkhart sewage ponds on 11 May 1991 and on 4 May 1996.

**Remarks:** Morton County does not have any natural bodies of water with enough acreage or depth to attract significant numbers of diving birds. Although many species of loons, grebes, and diving ducks probably migrate overhead in fair numbers, few individuals stop in the county; and those that do tend to stay only briefly.

### Podicipediformes - Grebes Podicipedidae - Grebes

#### Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Dates range from 27 April through 13 May and from 8 September through 27 October.

**High Counts:** Six on 4 May 1996.

#### Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*)

**Status:** Accidental; five records. One bird was seen on 14 May 1985, and the other sightings occurred 10-25 September.

**Eared Grebe** (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 12 April to 27 May and from 28 August to 20 October.

*High Counts:* Five on 27 September 1986 and three on 28 August 1993, all at Elkhart sewer ponds.

**Western Grebe**  
(*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. The head and neck of a single dead bird were found at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 5 May 1996.

**Clark's Grebe** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. Cable, Seltman, and Rader found, and observed at close range, one bird at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 5 May 1996.

**Pelecaniformes - Frigatebirds,  
Boobies, Pelicans, Cormorants  
Pelecanidae - Pelicans**

**White Pelican**  
(*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

*Status:* Accidental; four records. Single birds were seen on the Elkhart sewer ponds on 11 September 1992, 21-22 September 1985, and 21 September 1986. The Smiths reported a flock of 18 on 7 April 1995 that remained for over a week.

**Phalacrocoracidae - Cormorants**

**Double-crested Cormorant**  
(*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

*Status:* Accidental; five records. Single birds were found on 25 April 1968, 1 May 1983, 11 September 1992, 3-4 May 1995, and 3-4 May 1996.

**Ciconiiformes - Storks, Herons,  
Ibises  
Ardeidae - Herons**

**American Bittern**  
(*Botaurus lentiginosus*)

*Status:* Accidental; three records. Charles Ely collected one specimen at Middle Spring on 15 April 1967. The Grabers reported one on 5 May 1950. One record documents the species on 21 September 1986.

**Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant, rare summer and winter resident. One University of Kansas specimen was taken by Long from the Cimarron River on 9 November 1934. Records exist for each month of the year. It has been recorded on Christmas Bird Counts in 1979, 1980, 1989, and 1995. A bird seen at the sewer ponds on 22 January and again on 20 February may have over-wintered.

*Nesting Records:* No confirmed records. One adult was seen by an old nest on 28 May 1978.

*High Counts:* 10+ on 1 September 1990.

*Remarks:* Morton County seems to lack sufficient aquatic life to support a breeding population of herons.

**Great Egret** (*Casmerodius albus*)

*Status:* Accidental; three records. One record is from 21 September 1986. Individuals seen on 5 September and 11 September 1992 may have been the same bird.

**Snowy Egret** (*Egretta thula*)

*Status:* Very rare; six records. Three spring records date from 8 to 15 May, and three late summer records range from 11 to 21 September.

**Little Blue Heron** (*Egretta caerulea*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. Moore observed the bird on 21 September 1986.

**Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)**

**Status:** Accidental; three records. One bird stayed 22-25 May 1979, one was sighted on 11 September 1992, and one bird visited the Elkhart sewer ponds 21-22 September 1985.

**Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant and summer resident. Few recent records exist. Dates ranged from 17 April through 8 August with one late record on 5 October 1991.

**Nesting Records:** A nest with four eggs was found on 3 June 1968.

**Remarks:** This species was called "Green Heron" until 1982. At that time, the species was combined with the Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*), a species not found in North America. The name "Green-backed Heron" was assigned to this combined species, and this name appeared in all field guides published after that date. Additional field studies and lengthy discussions about the definition of "species" prompted a return to the earlier separation of the two birds as discrete species (1993). The name "Green Heron" is now restored.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron**

(*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Spring dates range from 2 April to 27 May, summer-autumn dates from 21 August through 19 September.

**High Counts:** 12 on 3 May 1996.

**Out of Season:** One midsummer record on 21 July 1979 by Ports.

**Remarks:** Black-crowned Night-Herons have been seen most often near the Elkhart sewer ponds, roosting in nearby shelterbelts, and in the Elkhart Cemetery.

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**

(*Nyctanassa violacea*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. The Grabers found one on 22 May 1950. One

sub-adult was at the Point of Rocks Pond on 13 July 1973. Ports (1978) found one on 3 June 1978, and an immature was found in an Elkhart alley on 31 August 1991.

**Threskiornithidae - Ibises,**

**Spoonbills**

**Threskiornithinae - Ibises**

**White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant; about 10 records. Spring dates range from 17 April to 20 June, and summer-autumn dates from 11 to 21 September.

**High Counts:** The Smiths reported seeing a flock of 125 on 25 April 1996. A group of 125 was seen 2 May 1996. A flock of 75-80 were at the Elkhart sewer ponds 17 April 1985. A more typical flock of seven was at the same location 18 May 1987.

**Remarks:** White-faced Ibis was not recorded in Morton County prior to 1982 but has been reported most years since. During this same period, Ibis populations have risen dramatically at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area (Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks) and Quivira National Waterfowl Refuge (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service), both in central Kansas. Further, the number of sightings has increased across the High Plains. In Morton County migrant White-faced Ibises have limited resting areas because of scarce surface water, but flocks occasionally stop briefly in irrigated or flooded fields or at farm ponds. This species may become more common in the future but is presently listed as threatened in Kansas, primarily because its nesting locations are vulnerable to disturbance.

**Anseriformes - Waterfowl**

**Anatidae - Swans, Geese, Ducks**

**Anserinae - Swans, Geese**

**Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)**

**Status:** Accidental winter visitor. Two Tundra Swans first reported by Lawrence

and Ruth Smith at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 1 December 1989 stayed through the month. They were last seen flying over the Wilburton Crossing on the Cimarron CBC on 30 December 1989.

**Greater White-fronted Goose**  
(*Anser albifrons*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Two spring records include two birds on 2 March 1986 and one on 13 May 1995. Two fall records are from 27 September 1954 and 30 October 1988.

**Snow Goose** (*Chen caerulescens*)

**Status:** Rare migrant; one winter record. Dates range from 21 February to 2 April and from 30 October to 11 November.

**High Counts:** A flock of 30 was seen flying overhead south of the North Fork on 11 November 1989. The flock contained one blue-form individual. A flock of 125, including 20 "blue" geese, was seen on the Cimarron CBC on 3 January 1995.

**Ross' Goose** (*Chen rossii*)

**Status:** Accidental. Two birds were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1995. One bird found by the Smiths on 20 February 1995 was seen sporadically up to 21 March 1995.

**Canada Goose** (*Branta canadensis*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 10 February to 23 April and from 27 September through 3 January.

**High Counts:** Gene Young found 450 on 15 November 1992. A flock of 250 was found on the Cimarron CBC of 27 December 1975.

**Remarks:** Although Canada Geese probably migrate over Morton County in large numbers, they are seldom seen on the ground. No records document the species between 23 April and 27 September.

**Anatinae - Ducks**

**Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. A pair on 18 March 1995 was reported by the Smiths. Eight records range from 15 September to 15 November. One male specimen was collected on 11 November 1979.

**Green-winged Teal** (*Anas crecca*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, rare winter resident. Dates range from 18 February to 25 May and from 29 August to 3 December. The species has been found on only three Cimarron CBC's.

**High Counts:** 70 on 24 February 1995.

**Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

**Status:** Common migrant and winter resident, uncommon summer resident.

**Nesting Records:** Records document at least three nestings plus additional early summer sightings of suspected breeders. Eight broods were recorded by Thompson, White, and Schwilling on 18 May 1978. Ports found a nest with three eggs on 23 May 1979. One record from 2 July 1988 is the only mid-summer report for the species.

**High Counts:** 34 on 1 January 1982. This low count is a result of poor record-keeping by observers. Large flocks of several hundred birds are known to pass through the area during migration.

**Remarks:** The Mallard is the most common duck in Morton County and can be expected in any season. Opportunistic breeders on the High Plains, it can be expected to breed in Morton County following wet springs but may be absent in drought years.

**Northern Pintail** (*Anas acuta*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, one winter record. Dates range from 18 February to 17 May and from the very early date of 29 July through 30 October. One bird was seen on 3 January 1995.

**High Counts:** 100 were on the Elkhart sewer ponds on 18 February 1995.

**Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)**

**Status:** Common migrant, rare in summer. Most records fall within 2 April to 29 May and from 15 August to 17 November. Only four records exist for June and July, and one of those was a pair seen by Cable at the Elkhart sewage ponds on 30 June 1992.

**Nesting Records:** No records exist, although it seems possible that this species could nest in the county.

**High Counts:** 20 on 5 May and also 19 September. Larger flocks have occurred and would be expected during a normal migration.

**Out of Season:** One record by the Smiths on 7 February 1991 indicates an unusually early arrival for a Blue-winged Teal, but 1991 was a very warm winter with many waterfowl arriving very early throughout Kansas.

**Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)**

**Status:** Very rare spring migrant and summer visitor. Spring dates range from 12 April through 18 May. Two summer records include a single bird on a farm pond on 15 August 1978 and a pair at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 30 June 1992.

**Remarks:** A hybrid Blue-winged X Cinnamon Teal male was seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 18 May 1987. This individual had the typical cinnamon coloration of a Cinnamon Teal except for spotting on the breast and an almost complete white facial disc.

**Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)**

**Status:** Common migrant. Dates range from 18 February to 8 June and from 1 August through 30 November.

**High Counts:** A flock of 171 birds was discovered at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 4 May 1996, a flock of 125 on 14 April 1990, and 60 on 2 April 1994.

**Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 26 February to 14 May and from 8 September to 1 November. One specimen collected on 30 June is the only summer record.

**Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A male was found among a flock of American Wigeons at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 10 March 1995. It was seen by several additional observers that day but was absent the following morning. A Eurasian Wigeon had wintered at Amarillo, Texas just prior to this sighting.

**American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, rare in winter. Dates range from 26 February to 27 May and from 8 September to 16 November. The species has been recorded four times on the Cimarron CBC, ranging from 29 December to 2 January.

**High Counts:** 20 on 14 April 1990.

**Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 18 February to 26 May and from 8 September to 30 November.

**High Counts:** 10 on 10 November 1992.

**Redhead (*Aythya americana*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 18 February to 27 May and from 29 August to 17 November.

**High Counts:** 24 on 24 February 1995 and 11 on 10 November 1992.

**Out of Season:** Two pairs seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 30 June 1990 constitute the only summer record.

**Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 31 March to 20 May and from 25 September to 30 November.

**High Counts:** 34 on 10 November 1994.

**Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*)**

**Status:** Accidental; four records. A report from 28 March 1983 by Lehman, a pair seen by Rader and Seltman on 14 April 1990, and a male on the Elkhart sewer ponds from 22 February to 8 March 1995 document the species in late winter and early spring. Smith reported one bird on 17 November 1985.

**Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 18 February to 26 May and from 15 September to 17 November.

**High Counts:** 9 on 10 November 1994.

**Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)**

**Status:** Accidental. One bird on the Elkhart sewer ponds was seen by Crawford and Erickson on 6 May 1995 though it had been reported several days earlier by an unknown observer.

**White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A group of four birds (1 adult male, 2 adult females and 1 immature male) was seen by Patti at Elkhart sewer ponds on 3 November 1986.

**Common Goldeneye**

(*Bucephala clangula*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One bird was seen on 9 November 1991 and another on 29 December 1984.

**Remarks:** Common Goldeneyes are very common on large bodies of water on the High Plains during winter so they can be expected again. They no doubt migrate across the area in high numbers, but the small ponds available in Morton County are apparently unattractive to this species.

**Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Dates range from 10 March to 4 May and from 20 October to 17 November. One record from the Cimarron CBC on 3 January 1995 is

remarkable because this species is very rare anywhere in Kansas in mid-winter.

**High Counts:** Three on 28 April 1985, 17 November 1985, and 14 April 1990.

**Hooded Merganser**

(*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. The Smiths found a lone bird on the Elkhart sewer ponds on 10 March 1995. Rader saw a female there on 8 June 1996.

**Common Merganser**

(*Mergus merganser*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant and winter visitor. Early dates include 31 March 1987 and 25 February 1995. Only the 30 October 1988 date documents the species in autumn. Common Mergansers have been recorded on the Cimarron CBC three times.

**High Counts:** Eight on Cimarron CBC, 31 December 1988.

**Out of Season:** One bird at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 30 May 1993 and another on 5 May 1996.

**Remarks:** Like Common Goldeneyes, Common Mergansers are common on large reservoirs of the High Plains in winter, but they visit Morton County only briefly and in small numbers.

**Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant; one winter record. Dates range from 24 February to 27 May and from 21 August to 23 November.

**Out of Season:** The species has been recorded once on the Cimarron CBC— 29 December 1984.

**Falconiformes - Vultures, Hawks, Eagles, Falcons  
Cathartidae - New World Vultures**

**Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)**

**Status:** Common migrant, uncommon summer resident. Records are scattered

from 9 April to 5 October. A total of only seven mid-summer records suggests that few Turkey Vultures actually summer in Morton County, although large roosts were present in 1978 and 1995.

**High Counts:** A roost with 60-65 birds was found at the Cimarron River in June 1995 by Jerry Cline. During the summer of 1978, 26-30 individuals roosted at the Boy Scout area (Ports 1978).

### **Accipitridae - Osprey, Kites, Hawks, Harriers, Eagles Pandioninae - Osprey**

#### **Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Only two definite dates, 23 September 1993 and 5 September 1994, both from the Elkhart sewer ponds. Several observers have reported seeing ospreys between mid-August and late September. Cable saw one perched on a telephone pole along US 56 on or about 16 August, and in late September or early October he saw one flying low over the grasslands north of the Cimarron River. Rader has seen ospreys flying over Elkhart on two occasions in September.

**Remarks:** Although no spring sightings have been reported, this species is probably a very rare spring migrant also. Rader has seen them twice in April in adjacent Stevens County, and they occur regularly on reservoirs throughout western Kansas in both spring and fall. As with many species closely associated with water, ospreys undoubtedly pass over Morton County in spring and fall but do not linger because large bodies of water are absent.

### **Accipitrinae - Kites, Hawks, Harriers, Eagles**

#### **Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon summer resident. Dates range from 10 May to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** At least five nestings have been confirmed, but the species has probably nested annually since the 1960s. The first nest, which contained one downy chick, was found along the Cimarron River on 13 July 1964. Ports found eggs during the first week of June and counted 15 active nests in 1978.

**High Counts:** 35 adults were counted along the Cimarron River on 15 July 1973.

**Remarks:** The Grabbers did not mention Mississippi Kites during their work in Morton County in the early 1950s, which suggests that the species may be a fairly recent arrival. In 1953 Schwilling noted that "kites apparently are increasing rapidly and spreading out over much of south-west Kansas..." (Schwilling 1994). The first Morton County record comes from July 1963 when two pairs were observed along the Cimarron River. However, no evidence indicated these birds had bred in Morton County. The first nest was found the following summer and by 1973 they were rather common. In July 1973, Schwilling found about 35 along 14 miles of the Cimarron with several active nests and four or five more birds in Elkhart. Although hard evidence is lacking, it would appear that at least 10 pairs have nested annually since 1973 and that the population is stable in Morton County. Recently, Schwilling noted a general decrease of kites in western Kansas since the 1980s and an accelerated decline in numbers since 1990. The Morton County population should be watched for signs of a similar decline.

Morton County may have been the westernmost nesting location for this species on the High Plains at one time, but now the nesting range extends west up the Cimarron River into extreme northeast New Mexico and northwest of Morton County to at least Lamar, Colorado, in the Arkansas River drainage. In southwestern Kansas most towns have nesting Mississippi Kites, although in Morton County the kites seem to prefer the riparian habitat along the Cimarron River to the town of Elkhart.

**Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon winter resident. Bald Eagles have been seen in small numbers on most Cimarron CBC's. Only three reported sightings have not been part of a CBC. Dates range from 9 November to 2 February.

**High Counts:** Four were seen on the 31 December 1988 CBC.

**Remarks:** The Bald Eagle is currently listed as threatened at the federal level but still as endangered by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Numbers have risen dramatically across the U.S. and Canada in the last two decades, and ornithologists believe the species has nearly recovered from its population crash that began in mid-century. Any Bald Eagle encountered in Morton County should be left undisturbed because federal law forbids harming, pursuing, or even frightening a Bald Eagle in any manner. That CBC records so vastly outnumber other winter records indicates how rarely the area is birded during the winter except during the CBC.

Throughout most of its range this species is usually found near water. It strikes many birders as odd to flush a Bald Eagle from a dry river bed or to see one flying low over the sagebrush. In dry habitats such as those found throughout Morton County, Bald Eagles feed on mammals such as rabbits, squirrels and carrion of all sorts.

**Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)**

**Status:** Common winter resident and rare summer resident. Records exist for every month. Large numbers of harriers winter in Morton County where they hunt for prey over grasslands and crop stubble, but in the spring numbers diminish rapidly and only a few remain to nest.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a female with five fledged young 12 miles north of Elkhart on 6 June 1978. Several other summer records probably refer to birds nesting in the area.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 61 on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979.

**Remarks:** Northern Harriers can be identified at great distances because of their unique style of flying low across fields and grasslands. E.H. Forbush in 1927 noted "As [the harrier] bounds up and down in the air, it seems to move more like a rubber ball than a bird." William Quayle described their erratic flight as if they "...had just bought wings and were trying what sort of wings they were."

**Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 4 September to 10 May. Patti reported seeing one on 13 July 1973.

**High Counts:** Six were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1990.

**Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)**

**Status:** Very rare spring migrant; uncommon summer-autumn migrant and winter resident. No spring sightings were recorded until 1993; and very few spring records have been compiled since, but including one on 21 May 1995. Late dates range from 2 September to 3 January.

**High Counts:** A total of about eight was seen by several groups of birders on 19 September 1986.

**Remarks:** Cooper's Hawks move through western Kansas in fair numbers each year, especially from late February through early April. Traditionally, Kansas birders have not traveled to Morton County until late April, leaving a gap in bird information between the CBC period of mid-winter and about mid-spring. This could explain the paucity of records.

**Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. On 4 December 1985 Seltman watched as a large immature bird with a prominent eyeline flew into a cottonwood tree at the Boy

Scout area where it remained for at least 10 minutes. One bird was reported by Corder on 12 September 1992.

**Remarks:** Northern Goshawks are fairly regular winter visitors to various sites in western Kansas and probably occur more often in Morton County than these records suggest, especially during invasion winters.

**Broad-winged Hawk**  
(*Buteo platypterus*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Five spring dates range from 1 May to 18 May, and five summer-autumn dates range from 10 September to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Two were seen on both 20 September 1986 and 16 September 1989.

**Out of Season:** Ports documented an immature bird hunting over grasslands near the Cimarron River on 11 June 1978. His report (Ports 1978) contains a good description, but this species is completely unexpected in southwestern Kansas in June.

**Swainson's Hawk** (*Buteo swainsoni*)

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates range from 2 April to 8 October.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers found a pair building a nest near K-27 on 5 May 1950 for the first nesting record. Ely found a nest on 12 May 1962. The Lewises found a nest on 5 May 1973. Ports (1978) found two nests in 1978 and at least three nests in 1979. Egg dates were as early as 25 May and young fledged as early as 20 July. Schwilling found four nests on 21 May 1990. A survey of all trees away from the river corridor on the grasslands in 1995 produced 18 Swainson's Hawk nests.

**High Counts:** 30 were found on 19 September 1986. Larger numbers would not be unexpected during migration.

**Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

**Status:** Common resident. The local population is supplemented by wintering

individuals beginning in early fall.

**Nesting Records:** Red-tailed Hawks are early nesters and therefore were not thoroughly detected by the various summer studies of Morton County birds. Numerous reports of juveniles seen in late May and early June most likely were of young fledged locally. Ports (1979) found four recently fledged juveniles hunting with one parent near Rolla on 13 June 1979. Schwilling (1991) reported a Red-tailed Hawk feeding young in a nest 6.3 miles east of Elkhart Crossing on 14 June 1991.

**High Counts:** 28 were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989.

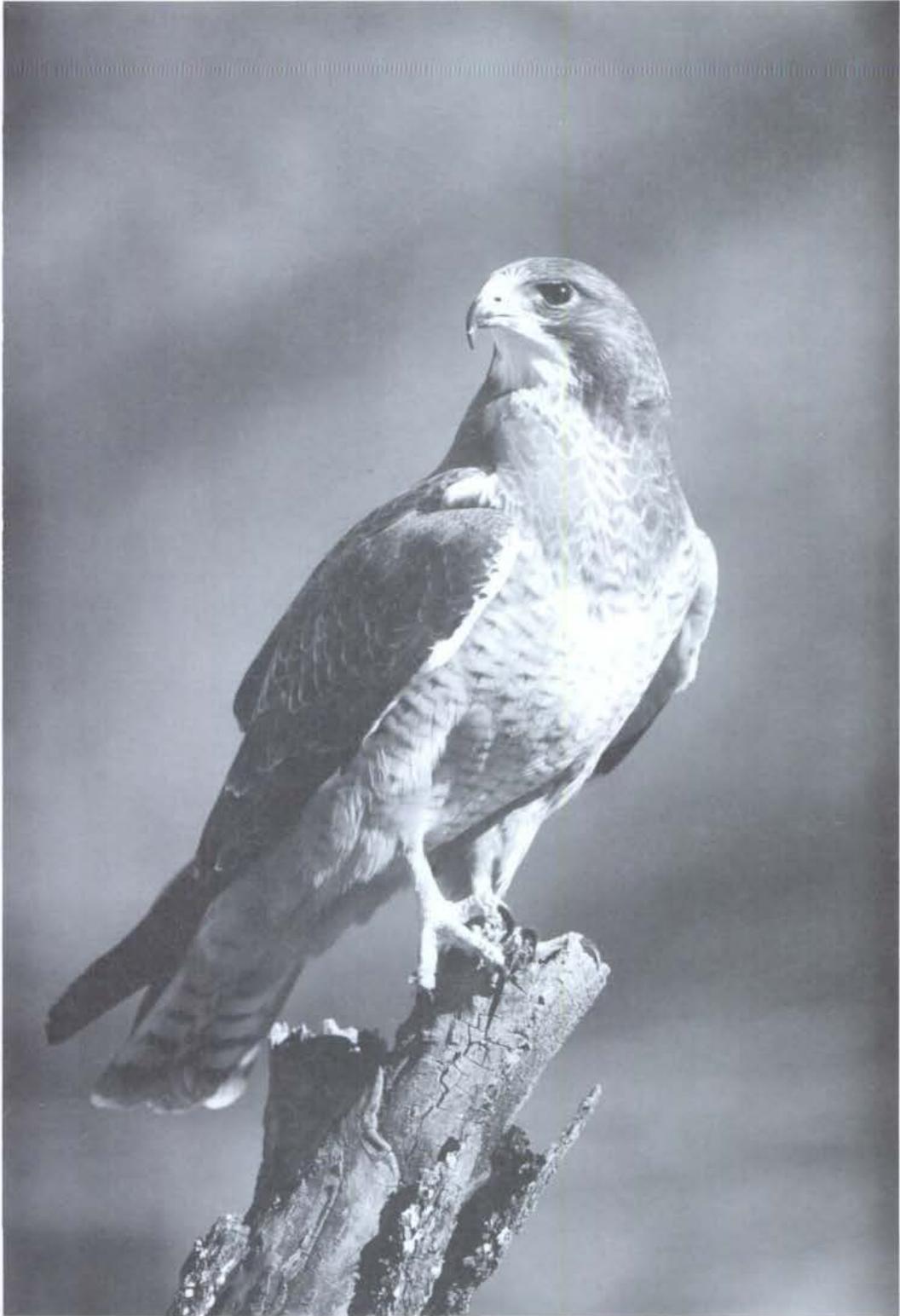
**Ferruginous Hawk** (*Buteo regalis*)

**Status:** Common resident from fall through early spring, rare summer resident.

**Nesting Records:** One pair of Ferruginous Hawks has probably nested more or less continuously since 1978 in southwestern Morton County. Ports found two nestlings west of Elkhart on 4 May 1979 (Ports 1979). Smith photographed two large nestlings on 18 June 1985. A nest four miles west of Elkhart discovered by Mike and Ellen Rader in 1993 was destroyed by a severe thunderstorm about 4 July. Cable and Seltman found carcasses of two fledglings beneath the nest on 14 July. Three pairs nested in Morton County in 1995.

**High Counts:** 63 were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989, and 45 were reported on the CBC of 30 December 1991. This CBC often has the national high count for Ferruginous Hawks, meaning that the wintering population may be as concentrated in Morton County as anywhere else in the U.S.

**Remarks:** The Ferruginous Hawk is North America's largest buteo and is a powerful hunter. It usually associates closely with prairie dogs and often nests near their towns. However, this does not necessarily seem to be the case on Cimarron NG.



*Swainson's Hawk showing characteristic unfeathered feet and bib. Photo by Bob Gress.*

When hunting prairie dogs, this species flies in low and fast like a jet on a bombing run, in a sense flying under the "radar" of the ever-alert prairie dogs. Animals looking the wrong way or those that do not respond quickly enough to their neighbors' alarm barks are often plucked right from their burrow entrances. Golden Eagles also use this technique when hunting prairie dogs.

#### **Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon winter resident. Dates range from 15 October through 28 March. Some birds may linger into April or early May some years, but no records currently exist for these months.

**High Counts:** 17 were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1993, and 16 were recorded on the CBC's of 31 December 1983 and 30 December 1989.

#### **Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)**

**Status:** Accidental in spring and summer; uncommon autumn-winter resident. Dates range from 15 October to 6 February. Two spring records and a summer record fall outside the normal occurrence dates. Smith saw one bird on 27 April 1992 and Corder saw another on 28 April 1992. Ports (1979) saw an immature Golden Eagle in western Morton County on both 4 June and 12 June 1979.

**High Counts:** 12 were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1986.

**Remarks:** The presence of non-breeding immatures during the breeding season is unusual but not completely unexpected. Morton County would appear to contain good Golden Eagle habitat; and although no cliff nest sites are available, isolated cottonwood trees such as those used by other nesting eagles elsewhere in Kansas are readily available. Golden Eagles nest in fair numbers in the higher elevations just 50 miles west of Morton County.

While camped along the Cimarron in November 1934, Long saw two Golden

Eagles. One "flew into the grove near our tent. The men at the ranchhouse shot at it with rifles, but the range was too great..." (Long 1935). Formerly persecuted as a threat to livestock, Golden Eagles are now fully protected under state and federal laws. Shooting at them with rifles is now both socially unacceptable behavior and illegal.

#### **Falconidae - Falcons**

##### **American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)**

**Status:** Common resident with numbers supplemented by migrants.

**Nesting Records:** Only four nestings have been recorded. Ports (1978) found a pair at a cavity along the Cimarron River on 3 June 1978. He also discovered two adults with five juveniles at an old house west of Wilburton on 20 July 1978. Schwillig reported finding one addled kestrel egg from the previous year in a nest box on 26 February 1991. Later in 1991, a pair successfully nested in the same box.

**High Counts:** A group of birders found about 50 throughout the county on 19 September 1986. Kestrels can also be quite common in winter as shown by the 36 seen on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1977.

##### **Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 10 September to 27 May.

**High Counts:** 16 were seen on 2 January 1993. Seven were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979, and eight were seen on the CBC of 28 December 1991.

**Remarks:** An immature male collected by the Grabers on 5 March 1950 made the first record. Merlins have been recorded in almost every year since 1974. In migration Merlins often are seen in Elkhart where migrant passerines are congregated, but in winter they are most often seen in open

fields where they hunt longspurs and Horned Larks. A very dark (melanistic?) individual was seen near the Elkhart Cemetery by Rader and Seltman on 27 October 1990.

#### **Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant; seven records. One was reported on the Cimarron CBC of 8 January 1974. The Grabers reported two individuals on 1 May 1950. Three other spring records span 5-11 May. Two summer records include an immature bird seen by Seltman at the Richfield Cemetery on 11 September 1983 and an immature bird harassing shorebirds at the Elkhart sewer ponds seen by Cable on 1 August 1995.

**Remarks:** The Peregrine Falcon is still listed as endangered on both state and federal lists; but like the Bald Eagle, this species has recovered from its former decline and may soon be upgraded to threatened.

#### **Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)**

**Status:** Accidental in spring and summer; uncommon fall and winter resident. Late dates begin as early as 19 August and extend through 8 March. Four records exist from 1 April to 8 June.

**High Counts:** 11 were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979.

**Remarks:** Prairie Falcons nest as near as the Carrizo Creek area in neighboring Baca County, Colorado, so they could wander into Morton County during the breeding season.

### **Galliformes - Grouses, Pheasants, Quails**

#### **Phasianidae - Grouses, Pheasants, Quails**

#### **Phasianinae - Pheasants**

#### **Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)**

**Status:** Common resident.

**Nesting Records:** No nesting records exist for this species in Morton County. However, direct and indirect evidence clearly establish the species as a common breeder in Morton County.

**High Counts:** 101 birds were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1982.

**Remarks:** Citizens from southwest Kansas, southeast Colorado, the Oklahoma panhandle and north Texas have initiated a movement to break away from their current states and become a separate 51st state. At a recent convention delegates selected Ring-necked Pheasant as their State Bird. The selection of this introduced species was undoubtedly influenced by the positive economic impact this region receives from the fall influx of pheasant hunters.

### **Tetraoninae - Grouses**

#### **Sage Grouse**

(*Centrocercus urophasianus*)

**Status:** Extirpated.

**Remarks:** Goss (1886) reports that Assistant Secretary of State William T. Cavanaugh shot Sage Grouse near the "southwest corner of the state" while bison hunting in the early 1870s. Sutton (1967) reported them from nearby Cimarron County, Oklahoma in July 1920. Lawrence Smith clearly remembers that in the early 1930s, just prior to the major dust storms, that his brother-in-law shot a Sage Grouse a few miles west of Wilburton while hunting prairie-chickens. Smith, just a small boy at the time, was sent to retrieve the Sage Grouse and recalls a mighty struggle as he tried to carry the huge bird (personal communication). The distinctive markings and size left no doubt in their minds about the identity of the bird. The nearly complete destruction of habitat in Morton County during the Dust Bowl years would have eliminated any remnant population.



*Male Lesser Prairie-Chicken in full courtship display. Photo courtesy of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.*

**Lesser Prairie-Chicken**  
(*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*)

*Status:* Uncommon resident.

*Nesting Records:* Ports (1979) found at least four nests in 1979. One nest east of Wilburton held 12 eggs on 18 May 1979, was still being incubated on 30 May, and contained all nestlings just out of their shells on 1 June. A second nest near this same location contained 13 eggs on 26 May 1979 that had all hatched by 30 May.

*High Counts:* 58 were found on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989. The Smiths surveyed lek sites and found 50 birds on 28 March 1995.

*Remarks:* These prairie grouse were considered to be abundant by Santa Fe Trail travelers through southwestern Kansas. Early Morton County settlers would pull wagons behind them when hunting prairie-chickens and would have no trouble filling them. In 1904, a group of 15,000-20,000 birds was observed around one grain field in nearby Seward County (Bent 1932). During the Dust Bowl years, the numbers were reduced considerably. The Lesser Prairie-Chicken is today believed to occupy only about 10 percent of its historical range throughout North America (Jerry Cline, personal communication). Plowing and overgrazing grasslands have caused a dramatic decline in numbers. Cimarron NG supports a significant portion of the remaining world population and is considered one of the premier spots to observe Lesser Prairie-Chickens (Jerry Cline, personal communication).

The Forest Service operates two blinds for the viewing of prairie-chickens. These provide birders and naturalists the opportunity to see birds displaying on their leks. The leks are generally active from about February into early June with the peak of activity normally coming in April and early May. As the females begin to nest and gradually stop coming to the leks, the activity of the males subsides. Outside the spring mating season, Lesser Prairie-Chickens can be very hard to find. In early

fall many birds can be seen flying to and from sorghum fields to feed; but as hunting season opens in early November, the birds become secretive.

In 1995, only 14 active leks were known on Cimarron NG. The numbers of Lesser Prairie-Chickens have been declining on Cimarron and throughout their range (Jerry Cline, personal communication). Estimated population density has declined from 12.6 birds/sq. mi. in 1990 to a low of 1.4 birds/sq. mi. in 1994 (Jerry Cline, personal communication). Conventional wisdom would suggest that the reseeding of 88,000 acres of Morton County cropland to native grass under the Conservation Reserve Program would have had a positive effect on grassland species such as the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, but the newly seeded fields bear little resemblance to the sand-sage prairie that this species prefers. It may be that the CRP fields have actually limited the food sources for Lesser Prairie-Chicken while providing excellent habitat for animals that prey on them, such as coyotes. Habitat destruction throughout this bird's range has been an obvious factor in its general decline, but today numbers are still decreasing in areas with seemingly suitable habitat. In response, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has shortened the hunting season and decreased the bag limit on this species. This action alone, however, may have little effect on chicken numbers as even states that do not allow hunting of this species are experiencing the same long-term decline (Jerry Cline, personal communication).

In Morton County the Lesser Prairie-Chicken primarily inhabits the sand-sage prairie south of the Cimarron River, a strip about two to five miles wide. The overall population is unknown but is presumed to be several hundred birds.

**Meleagridinae - Turkeys**

**Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)**

*Status:* Uncommon resident.

**Nesting Records:** Liesveld found a nest with 12 eggs on 13 May 1967; the Lewises found a nest with 14 eggs on 7 May 1973; and Cable found a nest with four eggs below Point of Rocks on 30 May 1988. In recent years, the discovery of nests or the sighting of young birds has become fairly frequent.

**High Counts:** 15 birds were found on the Cimarron CBC of 29 December 1978.

**Remarks:** The Wild Turkey was a native member of Morton County's avifauna prior to settlement. In fact, it is one of the most frequently mentioned wildlife species in the journals of Santa Fe Trail travelers through southwestern Kansas. Overhunting probably extirpated this species soon after the arrival of settlers. Beginning in the mid-1960s, turkey numbers began rebounding in southwestern Kansas, partly because of an active restocking program in Kansas and partly because of a simultaneous recovery in adjacent areas of Oklahoma and Colorado.

### Odontophorinae - Quails

#### Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)

**Status:** Common resident.

**Nesting Records:** Ports (1978) found three juveniles taking a dust bath on 21 July 1978. No nest has ever been reported.

**High Counts:** 159 were found on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1982.

**Remarks:** Bobwhite are seen in all habitats in Morton County but are the only quail likely to be encountered along the Cimarron River. The numbers seem to be very dynamic. Schwilling noted a considerable increase from 1978 through 1991, but numbers were down in 1993 from the 1991 peak (Schwilling 1994).

#### Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident.

**Nesting Records:** A pair of specimens collected on 13 July 1964 showed physical

evidence of breeding. A pair along with eight half-grown chicks were seen by Seltman on 8 September 1984.

**High Counts:** 213 were found on the Cimarron CBC of 28 December 1980, and 119 were found on the CBC of 30 December 1977.

**Remarks:** Scaled Quail numbers have shown wide fluctuations over the years with periods of remarkable abundance followed by equally remarkable scarcity. A very rare Northern Bobwhite x Scaled Quail hybrid was seen on the Cimarron CBC of 29 December 1978.

### Gruiformes - Rails, Cranes Rallidae - Rails Rallinae - Rails, Coots

#### Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A small rail described as black with white spots on its back was seen well by George Moore and Lawrence Smith at a distance of 10 feet on 17 October 1984 at the Point of Rocks Fish Ponds.

**Remarks:** This species is known to breed in western Kansas; and a summering population has recently been discovered in the Arkansas River Valley in eastern Colorado, so this sighting is not totally unexpected, although the habitat in which it was seen is very atypical.

#### King Rail (*Rallus elegans*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Gene Young found two birds on 1 November 1992.

#### Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*)

**Status:** Accidental.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers collected an adult male at a cattail marsh along the Cimarron River eight miles south of Richfield on 23 May 1950. The next day, they returned to the same location and found the surviving female with six small

downy young. This record apparently was the first time Virginia Rail had been documented as a breeding bird in Kansas, although it is now known to breed elsewhere in the state. This remains the only record for Virginia Rail in Morton County.

**Remarks:** Just as diving birds are scarce in Morton County because large bodies of water are absent, many marsh birds are scarce because the county's wetlands are fragmented and small. The artificial fish ponds created by the Forest Service along the Cimarron River have good marsh habitat but are so often visited by fisherman and campers that birds are probably frightened away. Virginia Rails and Soras are regular migrants through the region and can be expected again.

#### **Sora (*Porzana carolina*)**

**Status:** Very rare spring migrant and accidental fall migrant. Six records fall between 10 May and 15 June. Gene Young reported one bird on 1 November 1992.

#### **American Coot (*Fulica americana*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and accidental breeder. Dates range from 31 March to 21 June and from 4 September to 20 October.

**Nesting Records:** Rising found two pairs of American Coots, both with young, at ponds along the Cimarron River on 21 June 1967. This remains the only nesting record for the county with no other sightings in either July or August.

**Out of Season:** One very early migrant was found by the Smiths at the sewer ponds on 25 February 1995.

### **Gruidae - Cranes** **Gruinae - Typical Cranes**

#### **Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Only 10 sightings have been recorded, all falling between 5 October and 5 November. However, the Grabers (1951) reported that

throughout March 1950 they saw "thousands of these birds in flocks of several hundreds, flying over or standing in feed-fields." Although their field work included Hamilton and Meade Counties, they were in Morton County from March 1-12 and 21-24; and they comment that they saw them "in all localities."

**High Counts:** Aside from the Grabers, other high counts include 100 reported by Smith on 13 October 1985, 145 seen by Schwilling on 31 October 1989, and 800 seen by Young on 1 November 1992.

**Remarks:** This bird is probably more common than the few records would indicate. The lack of spring records probably reflects the few birders visiting Cimarron NG during peak crane migration in March.

### **Charadriiformes - Shorebirds** **Charadriidae - Lapwings, Plovers** **Charadriinae - Plovers**

#### **Black-bellied Plover**

(*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. Rader reported one at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 21 May 1995. Ports saw a bird in alternate plumage 21 miles north of Elkhart on 31 July 1978, and Smith saw one at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 12 October 1985.

#### **Snowy Plover**

(*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. One bird was seen 13 May 1967, one was seen by many observers at the Elkhart sewer ponds 25 April 1992, and a third individual was found at the sewer ponds 3 May 1996.

**Remarks:** The Snowy Plover is listed as threatened in Kansas.

#### **Semipalmated Plover**

(*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. The Smiths reported single individuals at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 12 October 1985, 3 May 1995, and 13 May 1995.

**Piping Plover** (*Charadrius melodus*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. One was seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds by the Smiths on 4 May 1985. A small breeding population exists in eastern Colorado so this species is not unexpected.

**Killdeer** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 8 March through 23 November.

**Nesting Records:** Ports (1978) found flightless young on 20 June 1978.

**High Counts:** One flock of 91 was seen 21 miles north of Elkhart by Ports on 12 August 1978.

**Remarks:** Killdeers aggressively defend their nests and young. Besides their well-known broken-wing act to distract predators, they are also adept at preventing their ground nests from being trampled by grazing animals such as cattle or bison. A killdeer will stand between the nest and the threatening animal and call loudly while flapping its wings. Settlers reported that a killdeer parted a bison herd down the middle while defending its eggs!

**Mountain Plover**  
(*Charadrius montanus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and very rare breeder. Dates range from 4 May to 8 June and from 25 July to 16 September.

**Nesting Records:** On 4-5 May 1991 two pairs were found just south of the North Fork by KOS members, and many people observed their courtship displays. Shackford (1992, cited in Schwilling 1994) found indications of Mountain Plovers nesting in plowed fields in Morton and three other western Kansas counties. In Morton County, he observed males performing courtship calls and flights on 17 May 1992. He concluded that they were much more common than previously reported. A pair of adults with two downy chicks were found by Schwilling in Point Rock Pasture on 5 June 1993. The exact location was four miles west of state high-

way 27 and .9 miles south of state highway 51. The adults were still present but with only one chick on 8 June 1993 when they were photographed by the Smiths. The plovers were not seen after that date. This was the first breeding record for Mountain Plover in Morton County and only the second recorded nesting in Kansas in about 50 years. In 1994 Shackford identified three nest sites near Richfield.

**High Counts:** Seltman photographed more than 30 west of Dermot on 7 August 1982 and he found 25 in a field one mile south of state highway 51, just east of the Colorado line on 3 August 1991. Eighty fall migrants were seen in a single field along state highway 51 on 4 August 1991 by Rader. Schwilling reported about 200 along state highway 51 on 17 September 1993.

**Remarks:** Shackford's observations are very intriguing. If Mountain Plovers are nesting in plowed fields, those fields may be functioning as ecological traps. The nest destruction and chick mortality is undoubtedly tremendous since the nesting coincides with the time farmers are working their fields. The Forest Service is planning to conduct intensive nest searches for this species in the next few years.

Mountain Plover numbers have shown a downward trend since the late 1960s (Knopf 1994, Knopf and Rupert 1996). The bird is presently considered a Class 1 species of concern under the Endangered Species Act and would now be legally protected as a threatened species under that act but for the moratorium placed on further designations by Congress (F. Knopf, personal communication). Morton County was once within their breeding range, and hopefully a breeding population will become reestablished on Cimarron NG.

Not long ago, Mountain Plovers were considered very rare migrants in Kansas; but recent discoveries suggest that they are common during late July and early August, especially in the fields along state highway 51. Mountain Plovers nest early and the adults and many juveniles apparently begin moving south in midsummer.

Birders who travel to Morton County in late August and early September for the passerine migration miss the peak of Mountain Plover migration.

### Recurvirostridae - Stilts

#### Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. A single bird was at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 26 April 1986, and two were there on 20 May 1995.

#### American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer visitor. Dates range from 6 April to 21 September.

**Nesting Records:** Two adults and an immature were reported from the Elkhart sewer ponds on 13 May 1992. It is unknown if these birds nested locally.

**High Counts:** 17 on 1 August 1978.

### Scolopacidae - Sandpipers, Phalaropes Scolopacinae - Sandpipers

#### Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Dates range from 21 March to 4 May and from 11 September to 27 October.

**High Counts:** 15 were seen by Corder on 28 April 1985.

#### Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 2 April to 18 May and from 11 July to 28 September.

#### Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 30 May and from 30 July to 19 September.

**High Counts:** Three were seen near Richfield Cemetery on 30 May 1981.

#### Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 26 April to 5 May and from 30 June to 11 September.

**High Counts:** Six were seen on 11 September 1992 and five on 26 April 1986.

#### Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and very rare summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 8 June and from 11 July to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Ports (1978) found an agitated pair at a pond along the Cimarron River east of the Boy Scout area on 31 May 1978, but no further evidence of nesting was noted.

**High Counts:** Smith found 15-20 at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 13 May 1991.

#### Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)

**Status:** Rare migrant, one summer record. Spring records document the species on 10 May 1973, 4 May 1995, and 4 May 1996. Six summer-autumn records spread between 29 July and 25 September. One specimen collected on 29 June is preserved at University of Kansas.

**High Counts:** Ports found 16 on 12 August 1978. Five were seen on 4 May 1996.

**Remarks:** Many sightings have apparently gone unrecorded because Upland Sandpipers are regular fall migrants over Morton County. Birders familiar with their flight calls should have no trouble hearing them migrating overhead at night each July and August. Ports (1978) listed Upland Sandpiper as a fairly common migrant. Three birds heard flying over Point of Rocks by Seltman and Rader after sundown on 25 September 1993 were near the record late date of occurrence for Kansas.



Long-billed Curlew. Photo by Bob Gress.

**Whimbrel (*Numenius borealis*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Birders attending the KOS conference in Elkhart found 35 at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 3 May 1996. Three were found there the next day, 4 May 1996.

**Remarks:** This species is included on the U.S. Forest Service Checklist of Birds of the Cimarron NG, but we could find no record of this species prior to the May 1996 sighting.

**Long-billed Curlew  
(*Numenius americanus*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates are scattered from 30 March to 5 September. A skeleton in the University of Kansas collection is dated 21 August 1926. The first of several other specimens was taken on 27 June 1927.

**Nesting Records:** Two females with

enlarged ovaries were collected by the Grabers on 12 May 1950. A flightless downy chick was found west of Elkhart by Smith on 14 June 1978. A flightless juvenile was found northwest of Elkhart by Ports (1979) on 12 June 1979. Numerous territorial adults have been observed. This species probably nests in small numbers every year.

**High Counts:** A flock of 24 spent two days at a farm pond 21 miles north of Elkhart on 12 August 1978, and 25-30 migrants were seen on 6 April 1985.

**Out of Season:** A single bird was seen in the southeast corner of Morton County by Patti and several other observers on the extraordinary date of 11 November 1989. This is the latest date for Kansas, but it occurred in a fall characterized by very warm and dry weather.

**Remarks:** The generic name *Numenius* is from the Greek, meaning "new moon" as the bill shape was thought to resemble

the crescent moon. Throughout history, curlews have been associated with death, black magic, supernatural destructive powers and other assorted evils. Terry Tempest Williams wrote, "When a curlew is near, the air is stirred; they are aggressive... Curlews cause guilt. You are reminded of your intrusion, that you do not belong."

**Marbled Godwit** (*Limosa fedoa*)

*Status:* Accidental; four records. One bird was at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 23 April 1985. One was at the same location 25-27 April 1992, and another one was there on 4 May 1995. One was seen flying over Elkhart on 1 August 1995.

**Ruddy Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. One bird was seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds by many observers on 15 September 1984.

**Sanderling** (*Calidris alba*)

*Status:* Very rare migrant; seven records. The first record is from 13 July 1977. Three spring records are for 28 April 1985, 13 May and 21 May 1995. Summer-autumn records include three at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 11 September 1983, five on 25 September 1993 and two late migrants on 1 November 1992, one of which is now in the collection at Southwestern College.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper**  
(*Calidris pusilla*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 28 April to 18 May and from 14 July to 28 September.

*High Counts:* Ports found 18 at a farm pond 21 miles north of Elkhart on 29 July 1978. Eight were at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 14 July 1993.

**Western Sandpiper** (*Calidris mauri*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from

26 April to 15 May and from 14 July to 19 September.

*High Counts:* 75 were at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 14 July 1993.

**Least Sandpiper** (*Calidris minutilla*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 23 April to 18 May and from 11 July to 28 September.

*High Counts:* 10 were at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 12 May 1991.

**White-rumped Sandpiper**  
(*Calidris fuscicollis*)

*Status:* Accidental; two records. One was seen on 10 May 1950, and another was seen by Seltman on 26 May 1984.

*Remarks:* White-rumped Sandpipers are abundant each May in central Kansas. It is surprising that they have not been observed more often at the sewer ponds and other shorebird habitat in Morton County.

**Baird's Sandpiper** (*Calidris bairdii*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 11 March to 21 May and from 14 July to 21 September.

*High Counts:* Seven were seen on 12 August 1978.

**Pectoral Sandpiper**  
(*Calidris melanotos*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 31 March to 26 May and from 1 September to 12 October.

**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*)

*Status:* Accidental. The Smiths found two birds at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 8 May 1993.

**Stilt Sandpiper** (*Calidris himantopus*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 23 April to 21 May and from 24 July to 28 September.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper**  
(*Tryngites subruficollis*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. Ports found two birds at a farm pond 21 miles north of Elkhart on 29 July 1978.

**Short-billed Dowitcher**  
(*Limnodromus griseus*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. Corder found one bird on 11 September 1992.

**Long-billed Dowitcher**  
(*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 8 April to 1 May and from 24 July to 12 October.

*High Counts:* 10 were seen on 26 April 1986.

**Common Snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*)

*Status:* Rare migrant and very rare winter resident. Dates range from 3 April to 10 May and from 5 September to 4 January. Snipe have been recorded on three Cimarron CBC's. The species probably lingers into December and January when the weather is mild.

*High Counts:* Three were seen 20 October 1984.

**American Woodcock** (*Scolopax minor*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. A report by Stewart J. Adams on 16 April 1972 published in *Audubon Field Notes*, 26(4):776, is considered valid although no details of the sighting are known.

**Phalaropodinae - Phalaropes**

**Wilson's Phalarope**  
(*Phalaropus tricolor*)

*Status:* Common migrant. Dates range from 10 April to 27 May and from 29 July to 29 September.

*High Counts:* Observers estimated 300 were at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 3 May

1996. Other counts include 50 on 4 and 5 May 1990, 48 on 5 August 1978, and 30 on 26 April 1986.

*Out of Season:* An arrival on 11 March 1995 was very early for this species.

*Remarks:* Although Wilson's Phalaropes are common, they are seen regularly only at the Elkhart sewer ponds.

**Red-necked Phalarope**  
(*Phalaropus lobatus*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. The single spring record is from 18-20 May 1995. Summer-autumn dates range from 25 August to 5 October.

*High Counts:* A flock of 18 was present on the Elkhart sewer ponds 21-28 September 1986.

**Red Phalarope** (*Phalaropus fulicaria*)

*Status:* Accidental; two records. Cable and Seltman found one bird in basic plumage on 21 September 1985 at the Elkhart sewer ponds, where it remained until at least 1 October 1985. Two birds were at the same location on 16 September 1990.

**Laridae - Jaegers, Gulls, Terns**  
**Larinae - Gulls**

**Franklin's Gull** (*Larus pipixcan*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 31 March to 27 May and from 11 September to 10 October.

*High Counts:* KOS birders counted 49 at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 3 May 1996, and 20 were seen on 26 April 1986.

**Bonaparte's Gull** (*Larus philadelphia*)

*Status:* Accidental. Three were found on 3 May 1996, and several individuals were seen from 25 October to 2 November 1984.

**Ring-billed Gull** (*Larus delawarensis*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant, very rare winter visitor. Dates range from 13 April

to 20 May and from 1 September to 17 November. The four winter dates include 29 December 1984 when 10 birds were recorded on the Cimarron CBC, two on 31 December 1993, and one on 10 February 1991. Several individuals lingered at the Elkhart sewer ponds from 18 February through March 1995.

**High Counts:** 30 were recorded on 27 October 1990.

#### **California Gull (*Larus californicus*)**

**Status:** Accidental. One second-year bird was seen by several observers and photographed at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 16 August 1991. This record was accepted by the KOS Records Committee.

**Remarks:** Prior to 1990, a California Gull in Morton County would have been very unlikely; but California Gulls have recently colonized the Arkansas River Valley in Colorado and are nesting at Blue Reservoir, less than 150 miles from Elkhart. Additional records are likely in the future.

#### **Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)**

**Status:** Accidental. One bird was seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds during the Cimarron CBC of 29 December 1984.

**Remarks:** Herring Gulls are common winter residents on many High Plains reservoirs. The scarcity of Morton County records is puzzling.

#### **Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*)**

**Status:** Accidental. Seltman photographed an adult in breeding plumage at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 26 May 1984. This is not only a remarkable record for Morton County but it is also one of only a very few spring records of Sabine's Gull in all of interior North America. An immature Sabine's Gull first seen at the Elkhart sewer ponds by Rader on 18 September 1993 was observed by many members of the Wichita Audubon Society on 19 September and remained through 23 September. Although still unexpected at this loca-

tion, this record does fit the pattern of autumn vagrancy established by Sabine's Gulls in the interior over the last few decades.

### **Sterninae - Terns**

#### **Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One was reported by Smith at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 19 May 1985, and another was at the same location on 13 September 1985.

#### **Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One bird was at the Elkhart sewer ponds on 11 September 1983, and another was at the same location on 4 May 1995.

**Remarks:** Regionally, Forster's Tern are common migrants so the lack of Morton County records is surprising.

#### **Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 10 May to 27 May and from 11 July to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Ports counted 38 in a flooded field 18 miles north of Elkhart on 18 July 1978.

**Remarks:** Prior to renovation of the Elkhart sewer ponds in the late 1980s, Black Terns were very regular and occasionally very abundant at that location, sometimes exceeding 200 birds. After construction of modern concrete-lined lagoons, the numbers of Black Terns dropped dramatically.

### **Columbiformes - Pigeons Columbidae - Pigeons**

#### **Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)**

**Status:** Common resident.

**Nesting Records:** Apparently, no nestings have been recorded; but Rock Doves certainly nest in large barns and

abandoned buildings throughout the county and are abundant in the vicinity of Elkhart's grain elevators.

**High Counts:** 105 were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 29 December 1984, and 100 were seen on 10 October 1987.

**Remarks:** Virtually all farmsteads and grain elevators in Morton County are graced with resident Rock Doves. Experienced and jaded birders often refer to such common introduced species as "junk birds" or "trash birds." This name-calling fails to recognize the merits of all bird species and our role in creating "junk" habitat. During WWII, the U.S. Army used 50,000 Rock Doves. About 17,000 were parachuted to supporters of the Resistance in occupied Europe. One such "junk bird" saved an entire U.S. battalion behind enemy lines, losing an eye and a leg in the process. Medics fitted the bird with a wooden leg. To those soldiers, this species was definitely not a "trash" bird.

#### **White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A single bird visited an Elkhart feeder between 15 November and 2 December 1995.

#### **Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)**

**Status:** Abundant migrant and summer resident, uncommon winter resident.

**Nesting Records:** Numerous nests have been found between 5 June and 17 July. Ports (1978) estimated an astonishing population of 74 territorial males per 100 acres in riparian habitat with additional estimates of 10 males per 100 acres in sagebrush and six males per 100 acres in short-grass prairie.

**High Counts:** Few observers have attempted to count all the Mourning Doves seen in one day. However, 125 were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1976, and 123 were counted on the CBC of 30 December 1979. Ports apparently counted 100 to 200 per day along census routes during both 1978 and 1979.

#### **Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Seltman observed a male Common Ground-Dove at length and at close range on 19 September 1992 at the Boy Scout area. This species is rare in Kansas but has been previously documented in southwestern Kansas.

**Remarks:** The very similar Inca Dove has begun to invade southwestern Kansas and may have bred in Finney County in 1992, but this species has not yet been reported from Morton County.

#### **Cuculiformes - Cuckoos Cuculidae - Cuckoos Coccyzinae - New World Cuckoos**

##### **Black-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One was reported on 15 June 1951. Another single bird was seen at the Boy Scout area by many observers on 15 September 1984.

##### **Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates are spread rather evenly from 8 May to 19 September.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a nest containing three chicks and one unhatched egg six feet above ground in a willow on 10 July 1978. A nest with two eggs was found by Ports on 24 June 1979.

**High Counts:** Ports (1978, 1979) recorded 14 on 12 June 1978, 12 on 28 May 1979, and 13 on 4 June 1979.

#### **Neomorphinae - Roadrunners**

##### **Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*)**

**Status:** Rare resident.

**Nesting Records:** No nestings have been recorded. Rader heard a pair calling

along the Cimarron River at the Colorado line on 6 July 1991. Very possibly, Greater Roadrunners may not breed in Morton County but individuals may wander in from Baca County, Colorado, or Cimarron County, Oklahoma, where the birds are common.

**High Counts:** Reports indicate no more than two birds have been seen at a time. Patti and McHugh observed two birds at Point of Rocks on 15 October 1988.

**Remarks:** "Birds with long tails would walk the trail before us; walk upright and faster than our mules could walk. The drivers called them road-runners." So writes Marion Sloan Russell, who went down the Cimarron Cut-Off of the Santa Fe Trail in 1857. Roadrunners must have been fairly common along the Cimarron Cut-Off because they are mentioned regularly in diaries and journals. Today, the Greater Roadrunner remains a mystery in Morton County, with plenty of anecdotal evidence from local residents that some are always present but with very few sightings by birders. Long (1935) found the same to be true in 1934 and wrote: "Ranchers in Morton County said that it was often seen there, but we did not see one." Andy Sigler saw one, however, on 16 June 1994. It was dodging traffic in downtown Elkhart!

### Strigiformes - Owls Tytonidae - Barn Owls

#### Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident. Barn Owls are present year-round although numbers may be somewhat higher during spring and fall migration.

**Nesting Records:** No breeding has been documented, but birders generally believe it nests annually in Morton County. Eric Cable discovered a young Barn Owl barely capable of flight on 11 September 1992. It was floundering in tamarisk below several potential nest cavities in a sand bank

along the Cimarron River near the Boy Scout area.

**High Counts:** The Seltmans found seven during the day on 24 August 1991.

**Remarks:** Many birders who live in areas where Barn Owls are scarce marvel at their relative abundance on Cimarron NG. The high, steep embankments east of the Boy Scout area harbor many burrows and collectively make perhaps the most reliable spot to see these birds. Any birder who walks through riparian habitat or shelterbelts is likely to encounter a Barn Owl sooner or later.

### Strigidae - Typical Owls

#### Eastern Screech-Owl (*Otus asio*)

**Status:** Common resident.

**Nesting Records:** Schwilling found four screech-owl eggs in a nest box on 10 April 1990 and four eggs in the same box on 9 April 1991. Two Eastern Screech-Owls were occupying other nest boxes along the Cimarron River on 26 May 1991.

**High Counts:** Gene Young counted 17 individuals on 1 November 1992.

**Remarks:** Six screech-owl nesting boxes were monitored by Schwilling during the breeding seasons of 1990, 1991, and 1993. In those three years, the boxes housed three Eastern Screech-Owl nests, one possible Western Screech-Owl nest (see remarks under Western Screech-Owl), two unidentified screech-owl nests, and two American Kestrel nests (Schwilling 1994).

#### Western Screech-Owl (*Otus kennicottii*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. Seltman found a single owl on 11 May 1985 along the Cimarron River at the Colorado state line. This Western Screech-Owl responded to an owl tape being used to attract passerines. It gave both the double-trill and bouncing-ball calls that are diagnostic for Western Screech-Owl. The owl, observed sitting in a dense stand of tamarisk, was gray and had an all-black bill.

Seltman and Lawrence Smith returned to the area later on 11 May and attempted unsuccessfully to photograph the owl. Smith, however, did confirm that the vocalizations were of Western Screech-Owl. This bird was not found again.

On 1 January 1987 Patti heard a Western Screech-Owl in the same location along the Colorado line. Nine months later about three Western Screech-Owls were found in this same area. On 19 September 1987 a group of 10 birders heard two individuals calling along the state line, and one bird sitting in a large cottonwood was observed by the entire group. Patti and Thompson heard three birds in the same vicinity the next night, 20 September 1987. No photographs, recordings, or specimens exist for Morton County or for Kansas.

**Nesting Records:** Schwilling found an adult screech-owl with five eggs in a nest box at the state line on 10 April 1991. The adult ignored a tape of the Eastern Screech-Owl but was agitated by a tape of the Western Screech-Owl. Seltman and Rader observed one adult at the entrance hole soon after, but the individual had a horn-colored bill typical of Eastern Screech-Owl. No observers ever heard any vocalization by the birds in question and the identification was never positively determined. The three birds occupying a small area along the state line on 20 September 1987 probably were a family group, and that record remains perhaps the strongest circumstantial evidence of breeding.

**Remarks:** Prior to 1983, Eastern and Western Screech-Owl were considered to be races of the same species; and therefore, few birders or ornithologists prior to that date attempted to separate the two. The Cimarron River from western Morton County, westward through Baca County, Colorado, to the Oklahoma line may constitute one of the few known zones where the breeding ranges of the two species overlap. More study of the status of these two species along this stretch of river is needed.

### **Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)**

**Status:** Common resident. Numbers appear to be stable year-round.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found an adult with two juveniles at the North Fork on 12 June 1978.

**High Counts:** Young counted 20 on 19 November 1992. Eighteen were counted on the Cimarron CBC's of 31 December 1982 and 31 December 1993.

**Remarks:** Great Horned Owls are common throughout Morton County and can be found roosting by day under bridges, inside abandoned farm buildings, and anywhere mature trees grow.

### **Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Lawrence Smith observed a Snowy Owl in Morton County sometime during the winter of 1974-1975, date uncertain. This was a classic invasion year for Snowy Owl on the Great Plains with dozens of birds reported elsewhere in Kansas during that winter.

### **Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*)**

**Status:** Common resident from spring through fall, rare in winter.

**Nesting Records:** Patti reported family groups on 11 June 1972. Adults have been recorded near presumed nest burrows on numerous dates.

**High Counts:** Ports reported 24 birds 3.5 miles south of Wilburton on 13 June 1979. He estimated 56 owls distributed among 12 prairie dog towns during the summer of 1978.

**Out of Season:** Burrowing Owls are very scarce in cold-weather months but have been known to overwinter. They have been seen on several CBC's including 27 December 1975 and 31 December 1988, three on 2 January 1993 and 1 on 31 December 1993. Other winter records include one from 12 January 1981 and another sighting on 26 February 1988. Both of these latter winters were very mild. Most birds



*A family of Burrowing Owls. Photo courtesy of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.*

arrive at their nesting grounds in late March.

**Remarks:** The first published bird record for Morton County for the Twentieth Century may be of this species. In her published memoirs, Edith Diehnel mentions that in 1911 on her way to school she would walk past a prairie dog town with "owls and a hawk" (Diehnel 1983). Clearly the owl was a Burrowing Owl. It is anybody's guess what the hawk was, although Ferruginous Hawks are known to frequent prairie dog towns.

#### **Barred Owl (*Strix varia*)**

**Status:** Accidental. On 1 November 1992 a Barred Owl along state highway 27 was attracted by a tape recording of its call. The bird responded vocally and was also seen in a spotlight. Two nights later (3 November), a Barred Owl responded to a taped call below Point of Rocks and another Barred Owl was found along state highway 27 near where the first sighting occurred. This bird was added to the collection at Southwestern College in Winfield. Max Thompson and Sebastian Patti believed they heard a *Strix* owl near the Kansas-Colorado line in November 1991.

#### **Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident from fall through spring. Dates are scattered from 28 September to 23 May.

**Nesting Records:** One egg from a clutch of four was collected on 15 April 1967. A nest with young found at the Boy Scout area by Calvin Cink was seen by many observers during a KOS meeting on 30 April and 1 May 1983.

**High Counts:** Four were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989.

**Remarks:** Despite the lack of summer records, Long-eared Owls presumably inhabit the Cimarron River valley year-round. Long-eared Owls have been recorded in Morton County every year since 1983. The best place to look for them is in

the pines and junipers at the Forest Service work station.

#### **Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)**

**Status:** Rare. Dates range from 28 December through 10 February with two late-season records of 15 April 1967 and 5 May 1996.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found one dead juvenile 10 miles north and 6 miles west of Elkhart on 9 June 1978. An adult was seen several miles away on 12 June 1978.

**High Counts:** Three were found on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1990.

**Remarks:** Short-eared Owls were discovered nesting in adjacent Stevens County in June 1995.

#### **Caprimulgiformes - Nightjars Caprimulgidae - Nighthawks, Nightjars Chordeilinae - Nighthawks**

#### **Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 3 May to 27 September.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers collected both a male and a female in breeding condition on 19 May and 21 May 1950, respectively. Schwilling found a Common Nighthawk nest with one egg on 11 June 1991.

**High Counts:** Young counted 100 on 16 September 1992.

**Remarks:** The nasal "peent" of the nighthawk is one of the most common sounds of summer in Morton County. Even nonbirders notice these conspicuous birds as they swoop low over Elkhart's backyards, playgrounds and athletic fields. Some locals refer to them as "bull-bats." Over the surrounding grasslands, one can hear the booming sound made by the wings of males in courtship dives. Thoreau was stunned when he found this "winged toad" sitting on its ground nest. "She look so Saturnian, so one with the earth, so sphinx-like. ...It was not a living creature, far less

a winged creature of the air, but a figure in stone or bronze, a fanciful production of art, like the gryphon or phoenix." He later referred to it as an "imp of the darkness," noting that with its dashing and erratic flight it easily could be regarded with "superstitious awe."

### Caprimulginae - Nightjars

#### Common Poorwill

(*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare summer resident. Dates are scattered from 29 April to 17 October.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found four juveniles and two adults on 25 June 1978. Normal clutch size is two eggs, so more than two family groups were probably represented.

**High Counts:** Seltman and Rader heard seven and saw one at Point of Rocks on the evening of 25 September 1993.

### Apodiformes - Swifts, Hummingbirds Apodidae - Swifts Chaeturinae - Swifts

#### Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 25 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** No nestings have been recorded, but Chimney Swifts are present in Elkhart throughout the breeding season and undoubtedly do nest.

**High Counts:** Seltman found more than 100 over Elkhart on 28 August 1993.

### Apodinae - Swifts

#### White-throated Swift

(*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

**Status:** Accidental. Patti repeatedly observed two White-throated Swifts at Point of Rocks 9-11 June 1972.

### Trochilidae - Hummingbirds

#### Ruby-throated Hummingbird

(*Archilochus colubris*)

**Status:** Accidental. Patti and others observed an immature male coming to a feeder in Elkhart on 15 September 1994. A female reported by Corder on 12 September 1992 was well described, but separating females and immatures from the very similar Black-chinned Hummingbird is very difficult, if not impossible, in the field.

#### Black-chinned Hummingbird

(*Archilochus alexandri*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Patti and Radell photographed a male in Elkhart on 8 May 1987 for the first documented record of this species in Kansas. The pictures clearly show the deep purple gorget typical of the species. Further, the bird was observed performing its characteristic "J" display flight. Another male was seen by Velda Griffith at her Elkhart feeder on 5 May 1992. Two unconfirmed sight records are from 7 September 1991 and 28 August 1992.

**Remarks:** Black-chinned Hummingbirds nest just 50 miles west of Morton County at Black Mesa, Oklahoma, and in the Carrizo Creek and Cottonwood Canyon area of Colorado. This is probably the most likely species to be seen at Elkhart hummingbird feeders.

#### Calliope Hummingbird

(*Stellula calliope*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. One immature female was collected by Graber on 3 September 1952.

#### Broad-tailed Hummingbird

(*Selasphorus platycercus*)

**Status:** Accidental. Dates include 4 May, 17 and 18 May plus from 25 August to 5 September. One bird collected on 18 May 1978 is the only Kansas specimen. A

record from Velda Griffith's Elkhart feeder on 4 and 5 September 1992 was accepted by the KOS Records Committee.

**Rufous Hummingbird**  
(*Selasphorus rufus*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. One bird was seen on 25 August 1990, another on 26 July and again 8-10 August 1991 at Velda Griffith's feeder and another individual seen on 5 September 1992.

**Coraciiformes - Hornbills,  
Hoopoes, Motmots, Kingfishers,  
Todies**

**Alcedinidae - Kingfishers  
Cerylinae - Typical Kingfishers**

**Belted Kingfisher** (*Ceryle alcyon*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 2 April to 16 May and from 8 September to 20 October.

**Out of Season:** One seen by Ports on 21 June 1979 is the only summer record and most likely involved a late migrant. Morton County would seem to lack adequate conditions for nesting.

**Piciformes - Puffbirds, Jacamars,  
Barbets, Toucans, Woodpeckers  
Picidae - Wrynecks, Piculets,  
Woodpeckers  
Picinae - Woodpeckers**

**Lewis' Woodpecker** (*Melanerpes lewis*)

**Status:** Very rare. One University of Kansas specimen was collected on 4 July 1927. Ely observed one flying along the Cimarron River on 5 May 1963. Fall birds were seen on 13 October 1985 and 16 September 1989. One was found on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1995, and another in the Elkhart cemetery on 3 May 1996.

**Remarks:** The rarity of Lewis' Woodpeckers in Morton County, in fact in all of

southwestern Kansas, is a mystery. This species is a common breeder just west of Morton County in the Black Mesa country of Oklahoma and in western Baca County, Colorado. The Cimarron River ought to provide an excellent corridor for individuals to wander into Kansas, and one would think that a few birds of this migratory species would appear in Morton County during migration.

**Red-headed Woodpecker**  
(*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 9 November.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found one juvenile with an adult on 14 June 1978.

**High Counts:** The highest total of 20 reported on 18 May 1987 seems low considering the species' relative abundance.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker**  
(*Melanerpes carolinus*)

**Status:** Very rare. Records include one on 1 May 1983 and six birds scattered from 18 August to 27 September.

**Remarks:** The Red-bellied Woodpecker has expanded its range westward in recent years and is now resident within 100 miles of Morton County. This species has a propensity to wander and sightings may become more frequent.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**  
(*Sphyrapicus varius*)

**Status:** Very rare. Dates include one spring record from 25 April 1992 and five records from 27 September to 28 December. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has been recorded on the Cimarron CBC four times with two birds present on 2 January 1993.

**Red-naped Sapsucker**  
(*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*)

**Status:** Very rare; seven records. Dates range from 14 September to 14 November. One specimen was taken by Long on 14

November 1934. At least two sight records have been submitted to the KOS Bird Records Committee, and both were approved.

**Remarks:** Red-naped and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were regarded as one species until the mid-1980s. Distinguishing the two in the field can be difficult, particularly for immature birds. Other than the 1934 specimen, all records have occurred since 1986 and were carefully identified by the observers as Red-naped Sapsuckers. The status of this species is somewhat uncertain and may change as more records are collected.

#### **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**

(*Picoides scalaris*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident. Because the species becomes locally more numerous in late summer and autumn, the local population may be supplemented by birds coming down the Cimarron River from the west.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers observed a female believed to be near a nest hole on 9 May 1950. Ely reported probable nesting along the Cimarron River on 12 May 1967 and found an active nest in the same location on 3 June 1968. A nesting pair was found by Schwilling and observed by many KOS members on 1 May 1983.

**High Counts:** Nine were found on 2 January 1993, and eight were noted on the Cimarron CBC of 1 January 1988.

**Remarks:** Morton County appears to be the only county in Kansas where the Ladder-backed Woodpecker is resident. The species may have been absent in some past years. Ports covered all the Cimarron River valley extensively in 1978 and 1979 but did not mention Ladder-backed Woodpecker in his reports. More recently, numbers appear to be low, but stable. Records exist for every year since 1982.

#### **Downy Woodpecker**

(*Picoides pubescens*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident, more common in winter.

**Nesting Records:** Ely reported probable nesting on 14 May 1967. A possible family group of four was seen by Ports on 17 July 1978.

**High Counts:** Cimarron CBC's of 30 December 1989 and of 29 December 1978 tallied 49 and 19, respectively.

**Remarks:** Birders accustomed to seeing Downy Woodpeckers on almost every field trip elsewhere in Kansas are often surprised by the species' scarcity in Morton County. As a breeding bird, it may be no more common than Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

#### **Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident.

**Nesting Records:** Numerous pairs have been seen but no confirmed nestings have been recorded.

**High Counts:** Cimarron CBC's of 29 December 1978, 30 December 1993, and 3 January 1995 each tallied seven.

#### **Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and year-round resident, often abundant during migration.

**Nesting Records:** Ely described Flickers as common nesters along the Cimarron River in 1967. Four juveniles and an adult were flushed from a nest cavity by Ports on 27 June 1978. On 1 May 1983 a mated pair of Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted Flickers were seen entering a nest hole at the Boy Scout area.

**High Counts:** More than 100 were seen on 19 September 1986 and on 10 October 1987. The high for the Cimarron CBC was 68 on 1 January 1988.

**Remarks:** Birders often carefully distinguish Yellow and Red-shafted Flickers, but many individual flickers on the High Plains are of mixed parentage. Flickers in Morton County often show some intermediate characteristics. On the Cimarron CBC the ratio of Red-shafteds to Yellow-shafteds is often 10 to 1.

**Passeriformes - Songbirds  
(25 families)**

**Tyrannidae - Tyrant Flycatchers  
Tyranninae - Flycatchers**

**Olive-sided Flycatcher**  
(*Contopus borealis*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 3 June and from 17 August to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Cable found 15-20 on 28 September 1986. At least 10 were seen by Seltman on both 11 September 1982 and 8 September 1984.

**Out of Season:** A record from 21 June 1982 and a University of Kansas specimen from 25 June probably involve late spring migrants.

**Western Wood-Pewee**  
(*Contopus sordidulus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, rare summer resident. Dates range from 29 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Although numerous specimens in breeding condition have been collected and numerous singing males have been heard on territories, no firm evidence (nests, eggs, flightless young) of nesting is known from Morton County.

**High Counts:** Five Western Wood-Pewees were collected along the Cimarron River on 4 May 1963, making the highest confirmed count from a single day. Seltman counted more than 50 wood-pewees on 14 September 1991, with both Western and Eastern Wood-Pewees presumably represented.

**Out of Season:** Two silent wood-pewees were seen by Rader on the early date of 27 March in 1988. As unbelievable as this sighting may appear, it followed a remarkable heat wave with gale force southerly winds and temperatures in the 80s. Four days later on 1 April 1988, about one foot of snow fell in Morton County, either sending these flycatchers back south or to an early doom.

**Remarks:** The separation of the two wood-pewee species in Morton County has been a perennial problem dating back to the first specimens taken in 1950. The field identification of silent wood-pewees is a very perilous if not futile business, and some specimens defy separation in the hand even by the most experienced ornithologists. Specimen records suggest that Westerns are the more common species in Morton County. Sight records of Westerns also outnumber records of Easterns by a large margin but may reflect the observer bias of birders from the eastern half of the state anxious to see western birds while in Morton County. To confound matters more, the two types are known to interbreed. Rising reasoned that because both species are scarce along the Cimarron River in Morton County individual birds would be even more likely to mate with the wrong species (Rising 1974). Birders should be aware of these problems and should rely primarily on vocalizations to identify wood-pewees in Morton County.

**Eastern Wood-Pewee**  
(*Contopus virens*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, rare summer resident. Dates range from 9 May to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Four specimens collected during June and July provide the only suggestion of possible breeding.

**High Counts:** Two singing birds were heard on 26 May 1991 by Patti, Sigler and Seltman.

**Out of Season:** See note on Western Wood-Pewee above.

**Remarks:** Eastern Wood-Pewees are so similar in appearance to Westerns that birders should use only voice as a reliable means of separating the two.

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**  
(*Empidonax flaviventris*)

**Status:** Accidental. One record from 5 August 1957 is supported by a University of Kansas specimen. One was netted by

Ports on 12 August 1979 along the Cimarron River.

**Alder Flycatcher** (*Empidonax alnorum*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One specimen was collected on 3 July 1966, and another was taken on 13 May 1967.

**Remarks:** These specimens possibly refer to the nearly identical Willow Flycatcher. At the time these birds were collected, Alder and Willow Flycatchers were considered to be the same species.

**Willow Flycatcher** (*Empidonax traillii*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Spring records from 6 May to 26 May and fall records from 3 July to 28 September. About nine specimens including one collected on 3 July 1966.

**Remarks:** Separation of *Empidonax* flycatchers is extremely difficult in the field and it is certainly possible that some of the 11 sight records are suspect. Elsewhere in Kansas Willow Flycatcher is often the "default" species for sightings of empids that are not typical Least. However, in Morton County it would appear that the most common empid in spring or fall is probably Dusky.

**Least Flycatcher** (*Empidonax minimus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 29 April to 5 June and from 29 July to 28 September.

**High Counts:** The Grabers collected four on 14 May 1950.

**Hammond's Flycatcher**  
(*Empidonax hammondi*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Ten records range between 25 August and 28 September. This is the only species of *Empidonax* known to occur in Morton County that is not supported by a specimen.

**High Counts:** Two birds have been reported on 21 September 1986, 2 September 1987, and 25 August 1990.

**Remarks:** Confirmation of this species in Morton County is still needed, but it is included here on the basis of several excellent sight records of birds carefully scrutinized by experienced observers. No primary songs have been heard, but several individuals, especially one observed by Seltman on 7 September 1991, gave the hard "pik" call note typical of this species. A group of birders on 2 September 1990 made a careful study of a relatively tame bird north of the Elkhart Cemetery and with good optical equipment determined that the underside of the very small bill was half-dark, a field mark supposedly diagnostic for Hammond's (but see Kaufman 1990). The relative status of all Morton County *Empidonax* flycatchers could perhaps be resolved with a long-term bird-banding project.

**Dusky Flycatcher**  
(*Empidonax oberholseri*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 29 April to 18 May and from 17 August to 27 September.

**High Counts:** Schwilling found eight along the Cimarron River on 17 May 1951. Five were reported on 1 September 1990.

**Remarks:** Numerous specimens exist and several singing birds have been identified. This species is common along the Front Range of the Rockies. Thompson and Ely (1992) described Dusky Flycatcher as "probably the most regular of the western *Empidonaces* in Kansas..." Both Dusky and Gray Flycatchers were formerly referred to as "Wright's" Flycatcher. The Grabers published reports of "Wright's" Flycatcher specimens (Graber 1951) actually refer to Dusky Flycatcher.

**Gray Flycatcher** (*Empidonax wrightii*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Dates range from 29 April to 26 May and from 5 September to 20 September.

**Out of Season:** One sight record from 7 July 1989 by an expert birder would seem to be outside the normal migration

periods for this species and may have just involved a vagrant.

**Remarks:** The only specimen of this species in Kansas was taken along the Cimarron River on 29 April 1967. A sight record from below Point of Rocks on 5 September 1992 was accepted by the KOS Records Committee. Gray Flycatcher adults molt in late fall after migration and therefore are often extremely pale and washed-out when they are most likely to be seen in Morton County (Kaufman 1990). Several other recent late summer sight records have involved plain gray birds that were probably this species.

**Cordilleran Flycatcher**  
(*Empidonax occidentalis*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Most records date between 1 and 19 September with only two spring dates of 11 and 26 May. The 26 May 1984 record was a bird Seltman heard singing the primary song at the Boy Scout area.

**High Counts:** Four were seen on 2 September 1990. Graber saw "2 or 3 daily" from 2 to 5 September 1952 (Graber 1954).

**Remarks:** Formerly known as "Western" Flycatcher, Cordilleran Flycatcher and Pacific-slope Flycatcher were recently separated into full species (A.O.U. 1989). The names "Cordilleran" and "Pacific-slope," obviously picked by a committee, are not very descriptive. Both species live in the "cordillera," and almost all of the Cordilleran Flycatcher's breeding range lies west of the Continental Divide or technically on the "Pacific slope!" All Morton County birds are assumed to be from the Rocky Mountain population of Cordilleran Flycatcher. Non-singing birds of these two species are indistinguishable in the field.

"Cordillera" extends the issue of how to pronounce bird names. According to *Webster's College Dictionary* (1991, Random House), "cordillera" is an Americanized derivative of the Spanish word "*cordilla*." As such, it does not take the Spanish pronunciation (core-dee-YARE-uh), but these

American pronunciation (either cordle-YARE-uh or core-DILL-er-uh).

**Black Phoebe** (*Sayornis nigricans*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A single Black Phoebe was well seen by Shane on 16 March 1976 at the Point of Rocks Fish Ponds. This is the only report from Morton County and is considered the most valid of several Kansas sight records.

**Eastern Phoebe** (*Sayornis phoebe*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 30 April to 10 June and from 21 August to 27 October.

**Nesting Records:** No known breeding records exist.

**Remarks:** Although Morton County might be considered by some to be too far west for this species, a good breeding population of Eastern Phoebes inhabits the Carrizo Creek area of western Baca County, Colorado (Andrews and Righter 1992). Plausibly, some Eastern Phoebes in Morton County originate from that area.

**Say's Phoebe** (*Sayornis saya*)

**Status:** Common migrant, uncommon summer resident. Dates range from 22 March to 5 October, with only two winter records, both from the Cimarron CBC.

**Nesting Records:** Seltman found a used nest inside an abandoned farmhouse at North Fork in May 1992, and this constitutes the only evidence of breeding. Ports found a mated pair at this same location on 12 June 1978.

**High Counts:** 30 were counted on 19 September 1986.

**Out of Season:** The two winter records of five birds seen on 30 December 1979 and two seen on 31 December 1982 are extraordinary. One might expect phoebes to linger in very mild autumns, but both of these sightings followed rather cold weather.

**Remarks:** Say's Phoebes are a regular sight in Morton County during migration but are quite scarce in summer with no

records for July. They breed in good numbers elsewhere in western Kansas.

**Vermilion Flycatcher**  
(*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. Ely collected one female just northwest of the state highway 27 bridge on 15 April 1967. The male of a pair was photographed by Lawrence Smith near Point of Rocks on 3 or 4 May 1982. The photo clearly shows all the field marks of the male Vermilion Flycatcher. The female of the pair was not photographed.

**Remarks:** This species has nested several times in Cimarron County, Oklahoma and should be expected again in Morton County.

**Ash-throated Flycatcher**  
(*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare summer resident. Dates range from 29 April to 19 September.

**Nesting Records:** A pair was seen by Ports at North Fork on 22 June 1978. Bluebird boxes placed by Schwilling along the Cimarron River attracted at least two pairs in 1991 with four eggs found in one box and five in another on 10 June 1991. A possible juvenile was present near one of these boxes on 6 July 1991. Two more nest boxes were occupied in 1993 with eggs in both on 4 June 1993 and four eggs in one and five chicks in the other on 22 June 1993. An adult was near a nest box with four eggs at the western river crossing on 21 May 1995.

**Remarks:** the Ash-throated Flycatcher is a common breeder just west of Morton County in both Cimarron County, Oklahoma, and Baca County, Colorado. Many of the bluebird boxes placed on the Reigner Ranch east of Kenton, Oklahoma, are occupied by this species.

**Great Crested Flycatcher**  
(*Myiarchus crinitus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare

summer resident. Dates range from 16 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Three adults were seen inspecting a nest cavity by Ports on 24 June 1979. Seltman saw adults feeding three or four fledged young at the Boy Scout area on 10 August 1991.

**High Counts:** Four were seen on 18 May 1978.

**Great Kiskadee** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A Great Kiskadee was found at Middle Spring by Harold McFadden on 18 May 1995. This bird remained until at least 31 May and was seen by about 20 additional observers with both photographs and video taken to document the record.

**Remarks:** This was the first report in Kansas and may perhaps be the northernmost record for this species which nests no closer to Kansas than southern Texas. Several records from the East Coast as far north as New Jersey are believed to involve birds escaped from captivity.

**Cassin's Kingbird**  
(*Tyrannus vociferans*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 10 April to 15 June and from 29 August to 30 September.

**High Counts:** Seltman found more than 20 on 27 September 1986. Schwilling reported 14 during the spring of 1951.

**Remarks:** Most of the early records are from spring; but since 1984, Cassin's Kingbirds have been observed most often in September. This species nests in high numbers not far west from the Kansas border in Colorado (Andrews and Righter 1992).

**Western Kingbird** (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

**Status:** Abundant migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** Many nesting records with egg dates extend from 8 June into summer. Ports (1978) estimated that Westerns outnumbered Easterns five to one.



*Horned Lark. Photo by Bob Gress.*

**High Counts:** The 52 recorded along a census route by Ports on 28 May 1979 is the highest actual tally on record, but this number is low compared to the Western Kingbird's true abundance. On 14 June 1979 Ports estimated the density of Western Kingbirds to be 36 per 100 acres of riparian habitat along the Cimarron River.

**Out of Season:** The Smiths' record from 10 April 1985 is about 10 days earlier than all other records.

**Remarks:** From May through September, Western Kingbirds are probably one of the five most conspicuous birds on Cimarron NG. Sometimes, it seems as if every treetop, every fenceline, and every yucca has its own kingbird!

#### **Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer

resident. Dates range from 10 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Schwilling found one nest on 14 June 1951. Ports (1978) reported seeing juveniles beginning the second week of July.

**High Counts:** Cable saw 15 on 30 June 1992. Ports (1979) estimated four per 100 acres of riparian habitat along the Cimarron River on 14 June 1979. Larger daily totals have gone unrecorded during migration.

**Out of Season:** The 10 April 1985 record by the Smiths precedes all other spring arrivals by more than two weeks.

#### **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** More than five confirmed nestings with additional sightings of fledged juveniles have been recorded. The first nest was reported on 5 June 1952. A nest with a juvenile was found on 8 June 1960 by Barlow. Ports had a family group of two adults and three juveniles on 20 July 1978. Seltman saw an adult on a nest at Middle Springs on 6 June 1981.

**High Counts:** Seltman found more than 10 adults on 26 May 1991.

**Remarks:** Even nonbirders take notice of this dapper gray and salmon pink "wire bird" with the tail that seems to be a spare part from a much larger bird. In his book, *Blue Highways*, William Least Heat Moon noted them sitting on wires with their "oddly long tails hanging under them like stilts." Fortunate birders may witness their spectacular mating display with the male flying 100 feet in the air, opening and closing his tail while flying in a zig-zag pattern and calling enthusiastically.

## Alaudidae - Larks

### Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)

**Status:** Abundant resident. Numbers often increase dramatically during winter, sometimes reaching or exceeding 10,000 birds.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a nest with four eggs on 7 June 1978. Schwilling had a nest with three eggs on 21 May 1990, and Gene Young had a nest with young on 19 May 1992.

**High Counts:** A figure of 57,387 was compiled on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979. Other CBC totals include 10,071 on 31 December 1982, 15,000 on 30 December 1990, and 16,958 on 31 December 1993.

**Remarks:** The Horned Lark is certainly one of the five most abundant birds in Morton County and next to the Western Meadowlark is probably the least likely species to be missed during a day of birding.

## Hirundinidae - Swallows

### Hirundininae - Typical Swallows

#### Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Two spring dates include 18 May 1978 and 1 May 1983, and two late summer dates include 2 September 1989 and 5 September 1992.

**Remarks:** Purple Martins are quite rare in western Kansas and have not been known to breed in eastern Colorado (Andrews and Righter 1992). Therefore, the paucity of records appears to reflect a true lack of migrants in Morton County.

One of the most widely held bird myths is that martins eat mosquitoes. Kale (1968) traced the history of the martin-mosquito myth and refutes it. Martin feeding behavior and mosquito behavior exclude the possibility of a large mosquito kill. Martins typically feed diurnally at 100-200 feet above the ground. Mosquitoes are crepuscular or nocturnal, spending the day resting on vegetation near the ground. In fact, mosquitoes eat martins! Martins provide blood meal for some mosquitoes that feed on avian blood. And, because martins feed on dragonflies which in turn eat mosquitoes, they may marginally increase mosquito populations. This should not discourage people from putting up martin houses. As Kale concludes, "The purple martin is one of our most beautiful and friendly birds. It daily consumes large numbers of insects. Its aesthetic qualities alone recommend it highly to man. There is no need to ascribe to the martin abilities greater than those it already possesses in order to encourage its protection and propagation."

#### Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 18 April to 14 May and from 24 July to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Six were at a farm pond in northern Morton County on 24 July 1978 (Ports 1978).

**Remarks:** Ely listed this species as common on 28 April 1967.

**Violet-green Swallow**  
(*Tachycineta thalassina*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One individual was seen by Cable 26-27 September 1986, and another found by Patti was seen by multiple observers on 18 August 1990.

**Remarks:** Violet-green Swallows appear as fall vagrants elsewhere in western Kansas to as far east as Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area. This species would probably be seen regularly in Morton County if larger bodies of water were present.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow**  
(*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates extend from 10 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found an active nest on 14 June 1979.

**High Counts:** Cable found 25 on 30 June 1992.

**Remarks:** Rough-winged Swallows are not colonial nesters, so nests can be difficult to find. A few birds probably nest in banks along the Cimarron River every summer.

**Bank Swallow** (*Riparia riparia*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 28 April to 27 May and from 1 September to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Corder reported 80 on 28 April 1985, and Seltman saw more than 30 on 14 September 1991.

**Remarks:** This species is a very common migrant in Kansas and should be expected in Morton County. Bank Swallows congregate in large flocks, so on the few days a year when it does occur in the county large numbers may be present.

**Cliff Swallow** (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 23 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Many summer records exist for this species. The only nesting record was a "small colony" that Schwilling found under a bridge over the North Fork of the Cimarron 14.75 miles north and 7 miles west of Elkhart (1 mile east of the Colorado line).

**High Counts:** The Grabbers had 20 on 23 April 1952. Cable had 10 feeding over the Elkhart sewage ponds on 30 June 1992.

**Remarks:** A couple factors may limit the numbers of this species in Morton County. The county has few bridges, and none of them spans permanent water. So, one of this species' favorite nesting situations is lacking. Also, some observers have speculated that the soil is too sandy to allow nest construction.

**Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 10 October.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found two nests under the Rolla bridge on 2 June 1978 and two nests in an abandoned farmhouse on 20 June 1978.

**High Counts:** Seltman found 50 on 5 May 1990.

**Remarks:** Like Cliff Swallows, Barn Swallows are easy to find in Morton County but are not abundant breeders. One limiting factor may be the lack of available mud for nesting. Much of the sandy soil in the area crumbles very easily when dry. This may explain why so few nests have been reported.

**Corvidae - Jays, Magpies, Crows**

**Steller's Jay** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

**Status:** Very rare. Records spread between 13 October and 9 May. Five records exist prior to 1986. Schwilling reported the

first sighting on 5 January 1954. A spectacular invasion of this species into southwestern Kansas occurred from October 1989 to May 1990. Numerous reports from Morton County indicate at least seven and perhaps more than 10 individuals. Such invasions are probably widely spaced and may occur only a few times a century. Two specimens have been collected.

**High Counts:** Six birds were seen on 11 November 1989. A flock of five that spent much of October and November 1989 at the Boy Scout area may have been part of the six.

**Remarks:** This beautiful jay is common in the higher elevations of Colorado and northern New Mexico and can be expected again. Steller's Jays are known to leave the mountains for lower elevations during periods of severe winter weather or food shortage. The latter cause would seem to explain the 1989-90 invasion because the 13 October 1989 arrival date for the first birds preceded the onset of cold weather.

#### **Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)**

**Status:** Common migrant, uncommon summer and winter resident.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found adults feeding one juvenile on 26 July 1978. Young discovered an active nest on 19 May 1992.

**High Counts:** The Ottes reported 25 on 14 September 1992. At least 15 were recorded by Schwilling on 27 September 1954.

**Remarks:** Although Blue Jays are common year-round in most of Kansas, they can be surprisingly scarce in Morton County, especially in winter. On the Cimarron CBC this species is absent many years with the highest number on the count being 13 on 3 January 1995 and the next highest number being only four on 30 December 1990.

#### **Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)**

**Status:** Very rare. Records spread between 16 September and 14 May. Only

about 15 records are known, but most of them involve several birds. Long collected five specimens in November 1934, which suggests that Scrub Jays have a long-established pattern of occurrence in Morton County. Scrub Jays invaded Morton County in 1963 when eight were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 25 December 1963. Ten years later, the Lewises saw six along the Cimarron River just east of Colorado on 11 May 1973. The invasion of 1989-90, which also involved Steller's Jay (see above), was the largest Scrub Jay invasion to date in Kansas.

**High Counts:** The Seltmans and Corder watched more than 25 fly down the Cimarron River on 16 September 1989. Fourteen were scattered in six locations on 21 October 1989. At least 10 individuals were still present on 5 May 1990 and were seen by many KOS members.

**Remarks:** Western Scrub-Jays are common residents from Cimarron County, Oklahoma, and Baca County, Colorado, westward and need only wander about 50 miles from their breeding grounds to reach Morton County. Most records are along the Cimarron River. The Scrub Jay was separated into three species (A.O.U. 1995).

#### **Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*)**

**Status:** Very rare. Dates range from 12 September to 6 January.

**High Counts:** The Seltmans observed a flock numbering more than 100 birds flying down the Cimarron River at Point of Rocks on 12 September 1982. Patti saw 21 along the Cimarron River on 4 October 1991. A flock of 35 was discovered at Point of Rocks on 16 September 1995.

**Remarks:** Pinyon Jays are very gregarious and are probably more likely to be seen in a flock than alone. This species is common in Cimarron County, Oklahoma, and Baca County, Colorado, during most winters and can be expected to return to Morton County occasionally.

### **Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*)**

**Status:** Abundant resident. In Morton County this species shows its highest numbers and greatest concentrations during winter.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers found a nest with two eggs on 1 May 1950. A nest with five eggs was reported by Schwilling on 5 June 1952. Ports found four active nests on 12 June 1978 and three juveniles on 14 June 1979. Young birds had already fledged north of the Elkhart Cemetery on the early date of 21 May 1995. Old nests are a common sight throughout the county.

**High Counts:** A total of 190 birds were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989. Five other CBC's have totals above 100. Seltman saw more than 100 on 6 February 1993.

**Remarks:** Black-billed Magpies very likely did not occur regularly in Morton County 100 years ago. They probably began spreading onto the Great Plains following pioneer settlement. The first record in Morton County was one seen by Long on 9 November 1934. According to Ely (personal communication), the best guess to when magpies began breeding regularly in southwest Kansas is about 1920.

### **American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)**

**Status:** Common resident. Highest numbers occur during winter.

**Nesting Records:** The Grabers reported the first nesting record on 15 May 1950. Another nest with eggs was found on 9 April 1978.

**High Counts:** Participants tallied 109 birds on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1993 and 130 on the CBC of 31 December 1993.

**Remarks:** Crows have never been abundant in Morton County and were once considered quite rare. Long saw none in Morton County in November 1934, but he did record seeing two on 16 and 18 November 1934 in nearby Hamilton County. Ely still considered them rare in May 1963

and regular but scarce in May 1967. Beginning about 1974, numbers apparently began to rise during the winter months and within a few years the species had become established.

### **Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident. Ravens are never seen in large numbers, but a few individuals are probably present in all seasons. Schwilling studied ravens in western Kansas during the early 1950s. He concluded that rather than migrating after the breeding season, they seem to congregate into flocks and drift around the area (Schwilling 1994).

**Nesting Records:** The first nest was reported on 7 May 1953. Ports found three nests on 28 May 1978. Schwilling found a nest northeast of Rolla on 10 June 1991, another with three eggs and one young on 15 April 1993, and also that year a nest 10 miles east of Elkhart with six "newly hatched young, 3-4 days old, still naked."

**High Counts:** Five birds have been reported on three dates, including 4 January 1975, 28 May 1978, and 19 July 1979. Large flocks numbering 50 or more birds are common in Stevens County east of Rolla in autumn.

**Remarks:** Chihuahuan Ravens were abundant prior to the destruction of the bison herds and formerly bred at least 200 miles north of Elkhart (Johnsgard 1979). Santa Fe trail travelers reported mistaking flocks of ravens at a distance for Indians or bison herds. One traveler also noted that large flocks of ravens "follow in the wake of the (bison) caravans with even a greater consistency than the wolves" (Gregg 1806-50). Not only did the ravens decrease with the bison herds because they were losing a food source, but the ravens were also being poisoned. Socolofsky (1969) wrote that during the time the bison herds were being destroyed by market hunters "wolves poisoned the buffalo carcasses and picked up thousands of wolf hides and in the

process killed off most of the raven population....”

Schwilling (1994) provided a thorough review of historical changes in the status of this species in western Kansas and concludes with the following summary assessment:

“In 1886 Goss reported them as rare but quite common in fall migration. In 1891 he listed them as rare but common during fall and winter, but decreasing as settlement increases. By 1894 Menke lists them as abundant residents. In 1903, Snow again lists them as rare residents and by 1940. Long lists them as extinct as does Goodrich in 1945. However, by 1951, I found them to be a common nesting bird and local resident. They continued to increase in number at least through 1954 [Schwilling had found at least 225 nests in 1953] and continued high at least through 1966. By 1974 Rising listed them as a regular but not common resident. Ports listed them as fairly common in Morton County in 1978. By 1990-1991 I found them to be quite rare. Now the population is at a very low level. There are probably a combination of factors that regulate population level but their primary predator may be destruction of nests and young by local people.”

Chihuahuan Ravens’ nests are often large and some are constructed almost entirely of barbed wire and lined with grass and cattle hair. Dead trees are sometimes used for nesting and Ports found one nest on a power pole transformer, but often they nest on abandoned windmill towers in areas where grasslands have been converted to farmland. A young man from Pawnee County, Kansas, who went to work on a wheat farm along the Colorado border in the 1930s came home with reports of an area so desolate that “crows built their nests on windmills. There were no tree branches so they built their nests out of barbed wire and the grasshoppers were so starved that they had eaten all the rust off the wire.” Of course, no one at

home believed him (A.A. Seltman personal communication). In Morton County Chihuahuan Ravens are usually found near Rolla or Wilburton. This species was formerly known as White-necked Raven (A.O.U. 1983).

## Paridae - Chickadees, Titmice

### Black-capped Chickadee

(*Parus atricapillus*)

**Status:** Very rare. Records spread between 2 September and 30 May.

**Nesting Records:** None.

**High Counts:** Two were seen at the North Fork on 11 November 1989.

**Remarks:** Although Black-capped Chickadees are common in the Arkansas River drainage, they are very rare along the Cimarron River. The first record is of a specimen collected by the Grabers on 4 April 1950. The next record came 31 years later when Seltman found one along the Cimarron River on 30 May 1981. Since 1986, records have occurred almost every year. Every chickadee encountered in Morton County should be carefully scrutinized. Carolina Chickadees have been encountered along the Cimarron River as far west as Seward County, Kansas, and could eventually wander to Morton County.

### Mountain Chickadee (*Parus gambeli*)

**Status:** Uncommon. Dates range from 21 October to 5 May. Birds that arrive in fall may remain through the winter.

**High Counts:** All maximum counts of note have been on the Cimarron CBC with 13 on 29 December 1978, 12 on 31 December 1982, and 10 on 30 December 1989.

**Remarks:** The regular presence of Mountain Chickadees in Morton County in winter may perhaps be a recent development. No sightings were recorded prior to November 1978, but records exist for most years since that time. During the fall and winter of 1989-90 when several west-

ern species invaded Morton County, Mountain Chickadees were seen by many observers beginning on 21 October with the last lingerer remaining at North Fork on 5 May 1990.

### **Aegithalidae - Bushtits**

#### **Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*)**

**Status:** Very rare. Of about seven records, all but two involve multiple individuals.

**High Counts:** More than 25 were seen at the Boy Scout area on 28 November 1987. Sixteen were on the Cimarron CBC of 1 January 1988 and 12 on the CBC of 2 January 1993.

**Remarks:** This species is almost always seen in flocks. Exceptions include one bird seen by Seltman on 8 October 1994 and a lone bird reported by Parker and Crawford on 5 September 1993. Bushtits are common in the Black Mesa country, and Morton County birds have probably wandered down the Cimarron River from that area.

### **Sittidae - Nuthatches**

#### **Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare winter resident. Records range from 1 August to 17 May.

**High Counts:** Seven were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1993. Six were seen on 2 September 1989. Five were seen on 9 September 1989 and on 16 September 1984.

**Out of Season:** A specimen collected on 1 August 1954 would seem early for a fall migrant, but three additional August records establish their early presence.

#### **White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and win-

ter resident. Records range from 14 September to 13 May.

**High Counts:** Ten were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989, and seven were seen on the CBC of 28 December 1991.

**Remarks:** White-breasted Nuthatches are decidedly scarce along the Cimarron River despite an apparent abundance of habitat. The birds that are found in Morton County may originate in the easternmost mountains of Colorado. The specimen collected by Long on 13 November 1934 and another by Ely on 13 May 1967 were both identified as being the *nelsoni* race typical of the Rocky Mountains.

#### **Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant and winter resident; one spring record. Records extend from 12 September to 28 December. One bird found on 12 May and collected on 13 May 1967 by Ely is the only spring record.

**High Counts:** Five were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 28 December 1985.

### **Certhiidae - Creepers Certhiinae - Typical Creepers**

#### **Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 19 September to 28 April.

**High Counts:** Four were seen on the Cimarron CBC of 25 December 1963.

### **Troglodytidae - Wrens**

#### **Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident; very rare winter straggler. No records for the period January through March. The earliest spring arrival date is 2 April.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found two adults with three juveniles on 17 June

1978. On 25 May 1979 he found a nest with seven eggs. Seltman saw seven fledglings on 7 August 1982. All three sightings were at Point of Rocks.

**High Counts:** More than 80 birds were seen by the Seltmans on 19 September 1986. These wrens were scattered throughout the county in a variety of habitats.

**Out of Season:** Rock Wrens are not known to overwinter in Morton County, but they have been seen on Cimarron NG a total of four times on dates ranging from 25 to 30 December.

**Remarks:** Any summer visitors to Point of Rocks probably have encountered a Rock Wren. At this site, with their loud song, Rock Wrens have serenaded Native Americans, Coronado and the men of his expedition, hundreds of merchants and families traveling the Santa Fe Trail, and several generations of cowboys.

Rock Wrens also nest at other small rock outcroppings on Cimarron NG, and Ports found a pair around some junk car bodies along the North Fork on 25 June 1978.

#### **Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. Crawford and Parker found a single bird at the large cliff east of the Boy Scout area on 6 September 1992. It was seen by many additional observers in following days and was well documented with photographs. This bird was in immature plumage when first found but had molted into adult plumage when last seen on 6 February 1993 by Seltman. This species is common in nearby Baca County, Colorado, and Cimarron County, Oklahoma, but is quite sedentary and seldom leaves its preferred rocky habitat. This was the first confirmed record of Canyon Wren for Kansas. Another lone bird was repeatedly observed from 25 November to 30 December 1995 at Point of Rocks.

#### **Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One

bird found by Patti on 19 September 1987 remained in Elkhart until at least 10 October 1987. Another individual was seen on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1993.

#### **Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident; very rare summer resident.

**High Counts:** Cable found five or six on 28 September 1986.

**Out of Season:** Ely heard several singing males along the Cimarron River on 3 June 1968, and Ports heard three singing along the river northeast of Rolla on 16 June 1979. These are the only breeding season records.

#### **House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 14 April to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** One nest was reported on 15 June 1951. Schwilling found a nest with eggs on 7 June 1978. Ports observed three juveniles accompanied by an adult on 14 June 1978.

**High Counts:** 30 were seen on 5 May 1990.

**Remarks:** The dead and dying cottonwood trees along the dry Cimarron River provide ideal nesting habitat for this species making it one of the most abundant birds in the riparian woodlands. In Elkhart, it is the common wren that not only nests in wren houses, but also garages, cans, pipes, mailboxes, and even hats and boots. The genus name *Troglodytes* refers to its Troglodyte tendencies to skulk into small dark places. In celebration of the House Wren's exuberant singing, the specific name "aedon" refers to the Queen of Thebes who was changed into a nightingale by Zeus.

#### **Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)**

**Status:** Accidental; four records. One was seen by Schwilling on 15 September 1984 at the Boy Scout area. Another bird was seen there on 28 September 1991. One

bird was along the North Fork on 17 October 1984, and Thompson had one there on 28 October 1989.

**Sedge Wren** (*Cistothorus platensis*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. The Grabers reported the species "through late May" in 1951. One was found at Middle Springs by Mick McHugh on 19 September 1986, and several additional observers saw it on 21 September 1986.

**Marsh Wren** (*Cistothorus palustris*)

**Status:** Rare. Dates range from 10 October to 4 January. Although Morton County has only limited Marsh Wren habitat, primarily at a few small ponds along the Cimarron River, this species was seen on the Cimarron CBC in 10 consecutive years.

**High Counts:** Five were seen on the Cimarron CBC's of 25 December 1963 and 31 December 1982.

**Out of Season:** One report on 13 May 1995 by the Smiths is the only spring report and is late for migration.

**Muscicapidae - Kinglets, Thrushes  
Sylviinae - Kinglets, Gnatcatchers**

**Golden-crowned Kinglet**  
(*Regulus satrapa*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates extend from 22 September to 2 January.

**High Counts:** Seven were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 1 January 1988.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**  
(*Regulus calendula*)

**Status:** Common migrant. Dates range from 10 April to 28 May and from 10 September to 3 January. The Smiths found six on 21 March. This is an unusually early record. This species has lingered until the Cimarron CBC on three occasions with dates from 31 December to 3 January.

**High Counts:** Cable and Seltman found more than 50 migrants on 10 October 1987.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**  
(*Poliophtila caerulea*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 11 June and from 19 August to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** Rising collected a breeding pair on 11 June 1965. They were near the Cimarron River.

**High Counts:** Cable observed four on 28 September 1986, and 5-6 were found on 4 May 1996.

**Out of Season:** One very late bird found by Crawford and Parker on 23 November 1987 still remained following a major snowstorm on 28 November 1987. This is the latest fall date for all of Kansas.

**Turdinae - Bluebirds, Solitaires,  
Thrushes**

**Eastern Bluebird** (*Sialia sialis*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident. Numbers are somewhat higher during seasonal migrations.

**Nesting Records:** One juvenile from a nest of three was collected on 8 June 1968. Ports observed juveniles in both 1978 and 1979. Nest boxes erected by Schwilling have attracted several breeding pairs of bluebirds each year since 1990. In the three breeding seasons of 1990, 1991, and 1993, the 32 bluebird boxes housed nine Eastern Bluebird nests.

**High Counts:** Seltman found 30 on 20 October 1984.

**Remarks:** More than any other species found on the Cimarron NG, this species has inspired American nature writers for the past 200 years. John Burroughs wrote, "His gentle manners, his soft, appealing voice, not less than his pleasing hues, seem born of the bright and genial skies." Thoreau wrote, "The bluebird carries the sky on its back." He was also moved by the bluebird's song, "...the blue curls of their

warblings, — harbingers of serene and warm weather, little azure rills of melody trickling here and there from out the air, their short warble trilled in the air reminding of so many corkscrews assaulting and thawing the torpid mass of winter, assisting the ice and snow to melt and the streams to flow. ...I hear more bluebirds and see their azure flakes settling on the fence posts." Birders on the Cimarron NG can also be inspired by these "azure flakes" thanks in large part to Marvin Schwilling's extensive trail of bluebird houses.

The same 32 boxes that resulted in nine bluebird nests in three breeding seasons also housed 29 House Wren nests, five House Sparrow nests, and five or six Ashthroated Flycatcher nests (Schwilling 1994). These bird houses still exist and will undoubtedly continue to support cavity nesting birds for several more years.

#### **Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 15 October to 4 May. Two specimens were taken on 2 April 1962.

**High Counts:** More than 100 were seen along the Cimarron River on 21 October 1989. More than 50 were seen on 15 October 1988. More than 25 were inside the Elkhart city limits on 10 October 1987.

**Remarks:** Mountain Bluebirds are common migrants on the High Plains, but in Morton County they normally occur only within a narrow migration window. The species has been recorded only twice during March, but elsewhere in western Kansas migrating Mountain Bluebirds are often found during that month.

#### **Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates are scattered from 5 September to 15 May.

**High Counts:** Seltman counted more than 20 on 28 September 1991. Participants counted 14 on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987.

**Remarks:** Although Townsend's Solitaires are never abundant in Morton County, several may be seen during normal birding from late summer to early spring. Most sightings come from Elkhart or the Cimarron NG Work Station north of Elkhart, but Solitaires are also seen regularly along the Cimarron River.

#### **Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*)**

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Spring records range from 28 April to 23 May. One bird was netted and banded on 4 September 1992 for the only summer-autumn record.

**High Counts:** Ely collected two and observed several more on 14 May 1967.

#### **Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range through 6-26 May plus three records between 27 September and 10 October.

**High Counts:** Two were seen on 11 May 1973, 6 May 1990, and 26 May 1991.

**Remarks:** Coloradans consider Gray-cheeked Thrush very rare with only 12 accepted records as of 1991 (Andrews and Righter 1992). Evidence from Morton County would seem to contradict that notion and would suggest that Gray-cheeked Thrush is a rare but regular migrant, at least along the Kansas-Colorado border. Many of the Morton County birds were singing and therefore positively identified.

#### **Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 8 June and from 1 September to 28 September. A bird on 15 November 1992 occurred well beyond the usual migration period.

**High Counts:** 10 were seen on both 28 September 1986 and 26 May 1991. Ports reported "heavy migration" of this species on 23 May 1979.

**Remarks:** The Swainson's Thrush is

the most common migrant thrush in Morton County with the Hermit Thrush being the second most common.

#### **Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Records extend from 11 April to 8 June and from 12 September to 17 October. The Grabers collected five specimens between 22 April and 9 May 1950, and they saw many additional birds.

**High Counts:** Five were seen on 30 April 1967.

**Out of Season:** One found on the Cimarron CBC of 1 January 1988 and two birds seen on 1 December 1992 constitute the only winter records from Morton County.

#### **Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Patti found one bird on 11 May 1988.

#### **American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)**

**Status:** Abundant migrant and uncommon summer resident. In winter their status varies annually from uncommon to abundant.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found an adult feeding two spotted juveniles on 25 June 1978.

**High Counts:** Seltman found more than 500 throughout the county on 6 February 1993. Long reported "several hundred daily in timber" in November 1934.

**Remarks:** Ports found no breeding robins along the Cimarron River in 1978 and only encountered singing males in the town of Elkhart (Ports 1978).

### **Mimidae - Catbirds, Mockingbirds, Thrashers**

#### **Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 8 May to 13 June and from 15 September to 10 October.

**Nesting Records:** No nestings have

been recorded, but Schwilling's record on 13 June 1991 suggests that some individuals may linger into the breeding season.

**High Counts:** Cable found two or three birds on 28 September 1986.

#### **Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)**

**Status:** Common resident spring to fall, rare winter resident. Records exist for all months except February and March, but some individuals probably stay through mild winters.

**Nesting Records:** Of the many breeding records most document fledged young. Ports found a nest with two eggs on 31 May 1979. Ely found four small young on 20 June 1982. Cable saw a family group of six on 30 June 1992.

**High Counts:** Ports counted 35 along census routes on 22 June 1978, and he counted 139 individuals during the summer of 1978 (Ports 1978). The Seltmans saw more than 30 feeding in shrubs at Point of Rocks on 7 August 1982.

**Remarks:** On 18 August 1990 Patti and the Seltmans heard a Mockingbird call note in the parking lot of the El Rancho Restaurant in Elkhart. They subsequently rescued a juvenile about ready to fledge from under the hood of a pickup truck with Morton County license plates. After being force-fed a hearty meal, the young mockingbird was released to an uncertain fate in shrubbery at the Morton County Courthouse.

#### **Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, very rare in summer and winter. The status of Sage Thrasher in Morton County is uncertain and may have changed over the last several decades. Sightings exist for every month except March.

**Nesting Records:** A family group was observed and a specimen of a juvenile taken on 17 July 1963.

**High Counts:** Cable, Rader, and Seltman observed 18 birds on 27 September 1986. This is an unusually high number and probably represents migrants diverted by unusual weather.

**Remarks:** Several species associated with sagebrush were formerly more common in Morton County. It is unknown whether their decline results from the dwindling sage habitat (mostly because of eradication efforts by the Forest Service), or whether these species have experienced more widespread declines throughout their breeding ranges in adjacent states.

#### **Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates are scattered from 26 April to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** Patti found a nest on 11 June 1972. A nest on the ground near the Rolla bridge contained three chicks on 2 June 1978 (Ports 1978).

**High Counts:** Members of the KOS found 20 on 5 May 1990.

**Out of Season:** Brown Thrashers have been encountered on three Cimarron CBC's on dates ranging from 28 December to 1 January. These are the only records between October and April.

**Remarks:** Although very common elsewhere in Kansas, Brown Thrashers can occasionally be very scarce, even absent, in Morton County.

#### **Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident declining to very rare. This species first bred in the county in the late 1970s, increased in numbers during the 1980s, and now is experiencing a decline.

**Nesting Records:** Schwilling found a used nest in a cholla cactus on 27 April 1977. Ports found the first known active nest near the Cimarron River northeast of Rolla on 24 June 1978. In recent years one or two pairs have nested in Elkhart, but no nests have been found on Cimarron NG.

**High Counts:** Other than family groups, the highest total is four adults seen on the

Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987.

**Remarks:** Before 1977 only three Curve-billed Thrashers had been encountered in Morton County. The first state record was reported on 1 May 1950 by the Grabers. Patti and Cole observed one northwest of Elkhart on 10 June 1972, and one was found on the Cimarron CBC of 27 December 1975. The historical rarity of Curve-billed Thrashers prior to 1977 plus the apparent decline of the 1990s collectively suggest that the recent expansion of the breeding range into southwestern Kansas may have been brief and temporary. In 1991 and 1993 Schwilling (1994) searched all known nest sites in Morton County and found only one pair of nesting birds. That pair was nesting in a residential section of Elkhart. He concluded, "It now appears that the Kansas population has decreased and the bird is retreating back into the desert southwest. This may be a natural population fluctuation." Curve-billed Thrashers are common in Cimarron County, Oklahoma; and sightings are likely to continue in Morton County even if the Curve-billed Thrasher disappears as a breeding species.

#### **Motacillidae - Pipits**

##### **American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 7 April to 21 May and from 27 September to 5 November.

**High Counts:** Six were seen on 5 May 1990 and 4 May 1996.

**Remarks:** This high count figure is low because small flocks should be encountered in migration. Birders, however, spend little time in the open fields preferred by this species in migration, so few records exist. A few American Pipits have been seen walking the water's edge at the Elkhart sewer ponds.

## **Bombycillidae - Waxwings**

### **Bohemian Waxwing**

(*Bombycilla garulus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. One bird was seen by many observers on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987 and another bird was reported on 1 January 1989. This species regularly invades the Great Plains in winter, but birds seldom reach as far south as Morton County.

### **Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident, accidental breeder. Records exist for all months except March, June, and July.

**Nesting Records:** Both Rader and Seltman witnessed adults feeding fledged juveniles in Elkhart in September 1992. The young birds still had some downy feathers and poorly developed tail feathers, indicating they were hatched locally. In recent years Cedar Waxwings have been sporadic nesters all across Kansas, and this would seem to be just another incident in that trend.

**High Counts:** Seltman observed more than 200 on 6 February 1993.

## **Ptilogonatidae - Silky-Flycatchers**

### **Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*)**

**Status:** Accidental. John Rakestraw discovered a female at Middle Spring on 3 September 1994. This bird was seen and photographed by six additional observers before it disappeared the next day. This was only the second documented state record for Kansas at the time, but in the following weeks two Phainopeplas were reported from Haskell County and one from Garden City in Finney County. All Kansas records are from September. A previous convincing report of a female at Point of Rocks by Don and Fran Vannoy on 10 September 1987 included a good

description of the plumage and the distinctive "purp" call-note. The KOS Records Committee, which adds birds to the state checklist only if supported by photograph, recording, or specimen, rejected this first sight record of Phainopepla for Kansas. However, this sighting now seems to be perfectly in line with the other Morton County record and the three other southwestern Kansas records to date.

## **Laniidae - Shrikes**

### **Laniinae - Typical Shrikes**

#### **Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)**

**Status:** Uncommon autumn and winter resident. Dates range from 15 October to 1 January.

**High Counts:** Three were recorded on 27 December 1981 and 30 December 1989.

**Out of Season:** One report from the Elkhart sewer ponds on 13 April 1986 needs confirmation. A record from 5 June 1952 is undoubtedly in error and may refer to a recently fledged Loggerhead Shrike.

**Remarks:** In late fall and early winter Northern Shrikes are usually present in low numbers on Cimarron NG. However, each shrike encountered between October and March should be studied carefully because both species may be present during that period.

#### **Loggerhead Shrike**

(*Lanius ludovicianus*)

**Status:** Common resident with numbers supplemented by migrants in spring and fall.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a nest with seven eggs near the Cimarron River on 25 May 1978.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 22 on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987, and 21 were seen on the CBC of 31 December 1993. A group of birders counted 20 migrants on 19 September 1986.

## Sturnidae - Starlings

### European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

**Status:** Abundant resident with highest numbers in winter.

**Nesting Records:** No definite records exist, but Ports reported them nesting in dead cottonwoods along the Cimarron River with Red-headed Woodpeckers occupying adjacent holes.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 1,500 on the Cimarron CBC of 27 December 1975, 958 on the CBC of 31 December 1982, and 705 on the CBC of 29 December 1984.

**Remarks:** On 16 March 1890, Eugene Schieffelen, a man devoted to introducing to the U.S. every bird Shakespeare ever mentioned, released 60 birds into New York City's Central Park. Within weeks they were nesting under the eaves at the American Museum of Natural History. The next year 40 more were released to make sure they would survive. The descendants of these birds did not arrive in Morton County until the mid-1950s.

Starlings were not noted by Long in 1934 or even by the Grabers in 1950-51. Schwilling saw more than 25 on 27 September 1954. No more records existed until the Cimarron CBC of 25 December 1963. During the next 10 years, the numbers exploded with the all-time high of 1,500 noted above. In recent years the numbers of Starlings counted on the annual CBC have diminished, which is encouraging because they compete with a wide variety of cavity-nesters during the breeding season.

Birders will encounter Starlings at the Elkhart cemetery, the sewer ponds, at outlying feedlots, and in residential neighborhoods. Before dismissing them with disgust, consider what Terry Tempest Williams wrote, "I admire Starlings' remarkable adaptability. Home is everywhere... The man who wanted Shakespeare's birds flying in Central Park and altruistically brought Starlings to America from En-

gland is not to blame. We are — for creating more and more habitat for a bird we despise." Williams was able to even find beauty in them. "The symmetry of Starling flocks takes my breath away, I lose all track of time and space. They wheel and turn, twist and glide, with no apparent leader. They are the collective. A flight of frenzy. They are black stars against a blue sky."

## Vireonidae - Vireos

### Vireoninae - Typical Vireos

#### White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. Patti found both birds: one in Elkhart on 12 May 1973 and another on 11 May 1988.

#### Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Graber found one along the Cimarron River on 10 May 1950, and Seltman found another below Point of Rocks on 12 September 1982. Young found a nest on 19 May 1992. Patti found one on 4 September 1995.

**Remarks:** The rarity of this species is puzzling. Bell's Vireo nests regularly in parts of western Kansas, so one would think it would be a regular migrant in Morton County. This bird may be overlooked and probably is more common than the current paucity of records indicates.

#### Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 27 April to 18 May and from 24 August to 27 October.

**Remarks:** All three subspecies of Solitary Vireo are documented in Morton County, a matter of special interest to birders because of the possible elevation to full species status for each form. Birders should try to identify each Solitary Vireo to type. The gray "plumbeous" race is quite distinctive; but the "Cassin's" and "Eastern" races can be difficult to separate.

**Yellow-throated Vireo** (*Vireo flavifrons*)

*Status:* Very rare migrant. All reported dates but one occur within the short period of 1-14 May. Ely encountered a singing bird on 16 June 1979.

**Warbling Vireo** (*Vireo gilvus*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Records extend from 1 May to 23 September.

*Nesting Records:* Young found a nest on 19 May 1992, and Ports observed territorial males on 14 June 1979.

**Philadelphia Vireo**  
(*Vireo philadelphicus*)

*Status:* Accidental; four records. Ely collected a singing male on 5 May 1963, one was found in the Elkhart Cemetery on 26 September 1990, one was seen by several observers on the North Fork on 16 September 1994, and one was seen on 3 May 1996.

**Red-eyed Vireo** (*Vireo olivaceus*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 18 May to 8 June and from 24 August to 28 September.

*Out of Season:* A specimen collected on 29 June 1956 and a bird seen on 4 July 1966 are the only summer records, but they suggest possible breeding. The Grabers collected two males in breeding condition on 19 and 20 May 1950 but did not find a nest (Graber 1951).

**Emberizidae - Warblers, Tanagers,  
Cardinals, Sparrows, Blackbirds  
Parulinae - Warblers**

**Golden-winged Warbler**  
(*Vermivora chrysoptera*)

*Status:* Accidental; one record. Patti, Seltman, and Sigler found a singing male in Elkhart on 26 May 1991.

**Tennessee Warbler**  
(*Vermivora peregrina*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. Dates range from 26 April to 18 May and from 14 September to 10 October.

*High Counts:* Cable found more than 10 on 28 September 1986.

**Orange-crowned Warbler**  
(*Vermivora celata*)

*Status:* Common migrant. Dates range from 23 April to 15 May and from 25 August to 30 October.

*High Counts:* Seltman observed more than 20 on 8 October 1994, and Cable estimated 10-15 on 28 September 1986.

**Nashville Warbler**  
(*Vermivora ruficapilla*)

*Status:* Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 26 April to 14 May and from 14 September to 30 October.

**Virginia's Warbler** (*Vermivora virginiae*)

*Status:* Rare migrant. All reported spring dates occur within the very short period of 4-12 May, but late summer dates range from 24 August to 20 September.

*High Counts:* The Grabers saw two and collected one specimen on 8 May 1950. Many observers saw two north of the Elkhart Cemetery on 7 May 1990 and again on 4 May 1996.

*Remarks:* This species is rare in Kansas and is likely encountered only during the very narrow migration windows listed above. Virginia's Warblers are a common breeding bird in the lower elevations of Colorado's mountains and would be a good candidate for vagrancy in southwestern Kansas during migration. High numbers of this species migrate through the foothills near Trinidad, Colorado (Dan Bridges, personal communication).

**Northern Parula** (*Parula americana*)

*Status:* Very rare migrant. Dates range

from 27 April to 3 June. Seltman discovered a single bird on 20 September 1986.

**High Counts:** Several people observed two on 27 April 1985.

#### **Yellow Warbler** (*Dendroica petechia*)

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates extend from 26 April to 27 September.

**Nesting Records:** Apparently, no confirmed nests have been found. Ports recorded 12 territorial males on 14 June 1979.

**High Counts:** 50 were seen throughout the county on 18 August 1990.

#### **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (*Dendroica pensylvanica*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Five spring records all occur in the period 6-24 May. Two other records are from 14 September 1991 and 16 September 1989.

#### **Magnolia Warbler** (*Dendroica magnolia*)

**Status:** Very Rare; six records. KOS members watched two birds during 5-8 May 1990. Other spring birds were found on 10 May 1995 and 4 May 1996. Three records occurred within the period 12-18 September.

#### **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (*Dendroica caerulescens*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. The three spring records occur between 29 April and 17 May. Four additional records range between 17 September and 10 October.

**Remarks:** As strange as it may seem, Morton County is perhaps the most likely place in Kansas to encounter this beautiful eastern warbler. A similar vagrancy pattern for this species exists in adjacent eastern Colorado (see Andrews and Righter 1992).

#### **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (*Dendroica coronata*)

**Status:** Common to abundant migrant.

Dates range from 2 April to 28 May and from 14 September to 10 November. Three remained until the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1993, and seven were counted on the CBC of 31 December 1993.

**High Counts:** More than 350 were seen on 4 May 1996. More than 200 were seen on 28 September 1991, and 100 were seen on 10 October 1987.

**Remarks:** Many records of the western "Audubon's" form exist for Morton County, and in migration perhaps 10-20 percent are of that type.

#### **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (*Dendroica nigrescens*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Seventeen records occur between 28 April and 17 May. Other records are from 16 August to 28 September.

**High Counts:** The Grabers reported three females on 13 May 1950.

#### **Townsend's Warbler** (*Dendroica townsendi*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 20 May and from 3 September to 2 October. Most records are from September.

**High Counts:** Three were seen on 21 September 1992 and on 18 September 1993.

**Remarks:** This western species was once thought to be very rare in Kansas, but it has been a regular summer-autumn migrant with records from every year since 1986. Townsend's Warbler is much more likely to be encountered than the similar Black-throated Green Warbler.

#### **Black-throated Green Warbler** (*Dendroica virens*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Three spring records occur within the very short period of 6-13 May, and summer-autumn records occur within the period 5-28 September.

#### **Blackburnian Warbler** (*Dendroica fusca*)

**Status:** Accidental; five records. Four

records occur within the period 10-23 May. The Grabers collected one specimen on 10 May 1950. Thompson found one bird at the North Fork on 5 September 1993.

**Pine Warbler** (*Dendroica pinus*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. McHugh found one bird at the North Fork, which was seen by many observers on 10-11 November 1989. An immature bird found by Seltman along the Cimarron River on 18 September 1993 was seen by three observers. The same day Rader saw another Pine Warbler in the Elkhart Cemetery.

**Prairie Warbler** (*Dendroica discolor*)

**Status:** Accidental. Janzen and Yoder found a singing male in the woods below Point of Rocks on 14 May 1988. It remained on territory until at least 2 July 1988. No mate was seen. This bird, being more than 500 miles from its normal breeding range, was seriously lost.

**Palm Warbler** (*Dendroica palmarum*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. A remarkably hardy individual was found on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1977. Patti and Moore found one north of the Elkhart Cemetery on 14 September 1990. Rader discovered one along the Cimarron River on 18 September 1993.

**Bay-breasted Warbler**  
(*Dendroica castanea*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Dates range from 6 May to 10 June. The Grabers collected two specimens on 8 May 1950, and Thompson collected one on 18 May 1978.

**Blackpoll Warbler** (*Dendroica striata*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Dates range from 6 May to 23 May and from 15 September to 1 November.

**High Counts:** Patti found two on 17 May 1973.

**Cerulean Warbler** (*Dendroica cerulea*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Schwilling and Thompson visited the North Fork on 18 May 1978 and found one male Cerulean Warbler and a male Bay-breasted Warbler. No other warblers were present.

**Black-and-white Warbler**  
(*Mniotilta varia*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 4 April to 26 May and from 17 August to 21 September.

**American Redstart** (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 27 April to 26 May and from 17 August to 28 September.

**High Counts:** More than 100 American Redstarts were seen during a remarkable "fallout" of warblers witnessed by the Seltmans on 11 September 1982. This record appears to be an anomaly because the next highest count on record is of five American Redstarts seen on 19 September 1986.

**Prothonotary Warbler**  
(*Protonotaria citrea*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A specimen was collected on 8 May 1970.

**Worm-eating Warbler**  
(*Helmitheros vermivorus*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Elizabeth and Robert Copper first reported this species on 22 April 1990. This bird may possibly have been the same individual that was discovered just north of the Elkhart Cemetery and was seen by dozens of KOS members during 5-6 May 1990. Rader and Seltman saw another individual in low shrubs at Point of Rocks on 11 May 1991. At least two birds were seen by KOS members at Middle Spring on 4 May 1996.

**Ovenbird** (*Seiurus aurocapillus*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Ten records occur in very short migration windows of 5-21 May and 4-14 September.

**High Counts:** Ely reported seeing "several" on 14 May 1967.

**Northern Waterthrush**  
(*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

**Status:** Rare migrant. Of 10 spring records all occur within the very short period of 4-26 May. Additional sightings have gone unrecorded.

**High Counts:** the Grabers saw as many as five individuals daily in May 1950. Ely saw two on 14 May 1967.

**Louisiana Waterthrush**  
(*Seiurus motacilla*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Two spring records document the species on 30 April and 9 May 1950. Four records range from 4 September to 12 October. Richard Graber remarked (1954) that this species occurs in small numbers in both spring and fall, but Louisiana Waterthrushes were only seen twice between 1952 and 1992.

**Kentucky Warbler** (*Oporornis formosus*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. One male was collected on 30 April 1967.

**Mourning Warbler**  
(*Oporornis philadelphia*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. The Smiths closely observed a male on 11 May 1995.

**MacGillivray's Warbler**  
(*Oporornis tolmiei*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Spring dates occur within the period 3-26 May. Additional recorded dates range from 19 August to 12 October.

**High Counts:** Ely saw two on 4 May 1963.

**Common Yellowthroat**  
(*Geothlypis trichas*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant, rare summer resident. Dates range from 22 April to 19 June and from 23 September to 5 October, though only three fall sightings have been recorded.

**Nesting Records:** No nestings have been documented, although nesting is possible. Ports had singing males on territories surrounding the small fishing ponds on Cimarron NG throughout the summer of 1978.

**High Counts:** Thompson reported three on 18 May 1978. This total is very low and could be exceeded easily during a good migration.

**Hooded Warbler** (*Wilsonia citrina*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Moore had one on 16 May 1985. Many members of KOS observed a female just north of the Elkhart Cemetery during 5-6 May 1990. The Smiths found a female on 11 May 1995. A singing bird was seen at the Boy Scout area on 4 May 1996.

**Wilson's Warbler** (*Wilsonia pusilla*)

**Status:** Common to abundant migrant. Dates range from 12 April to 26 May and from 17 August to 27 October.

**High Counts:** Cable and Seltman found more than 300 on 21 September 1985. Cable estimated 200 or more on 28 September 1986. Rader and Seltman reported more than 200 on 14 September 1991.

**Remarks:** Wilson's Warbler is certainly the most abundant warbler during summer-autumn migrations in Morton County, only occasionally being outnumbered by Yellow-rumped Warblers. Large gatherings probably result from migrating birds being blown onto the Great Plains from the Rocky Mountains.

**Yellow-breasted Chat** (*Icteria virens*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Records are scattered from 13 May to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** No nestings have been recorded although territorial males and apparently mated pairs have been observed. Ports monitored two males on territory in June and July 1978 but observed no nest or young. Schwilling found a singing territorial male north and about 30 yards west of the Cimarron River bridge north of Elkhart on 19 June 1993. He returned to the same area the next day and called in both a male and female. On June 21 he could only call in the male and concluded they were nesting.

### **Thraupinae - Tanagers**

#### **Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)**

**Status:** Rare migrant. Typical dates range from 27 April to 27 May plus one late-summer record. The Grabers "noted them frequently after 2 May 1950." Ely collected one on 29 April 1967. Seltman found a molting male along the Cimarron River on 18 September 1993.

#### **Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. The Smiths observed one male north of Elkhart on 8 May 1993.

**Remarks:** This bird was seen sitting in the open on a fence near the Cimarron NG Work Station. At first glance the Smiths thought they had found another male Vermilion Flycatcher. (They found and photographed the only existing county record of a male Vermilion Flycatcher.) However, they clearly saw it was a tanager. According to the Smiths, they recognized that this was a very unusual setting for a tanager, so they made a special effort to identify the bird carefully, specifically making sure it *wasn't* a Vermilion Flycatcher.

#### **Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 27 April to 13 May and from 19 August to 28 September.

**High Counts:** Seltman estimated more than 10 birds on 8 September 1984 and also on 20 September 1986. They are seen in groups greater than five on many occasions.

**Remarks:** Western Tanagers seem to migrate very quickly across southwestern Kansas in the spring, but in late summer many individuals seem to linger in the area, making them much easier to find. Very few adult males in alternate plumage are encountered in late summer, and many birds appear to be immatures.

### **Cardinalinae - Cardinals, Buntings**

#### **Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident late summer into spring. No summer sightings have been recorded. Dates are scattered from 15 August to 13 May.

**High Counts:** Three were found on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989.

#### **Pyrrhuloxia (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)**

**Status:** Accidental; two records. The first record for Kansas was a female found at the Cimarron NG Work Station north of Elkhart by Patti and Thompson on 28 October 1989. This bird was seen by many observers during the next two weeks but was apparently last seen alive on 11 November 1989. Pyrrhuloxia remains, presumably of this bird, were found on 30 December 1989 and were preserved. Garrett and Johnson found a male Pyrrhuloxia north of the Elkhart Cemetery on 1 January 1993. This bird was seen through at least 15 March, also by many observers. It was usually seen in the company of a female Northern Cardinal.

#### **Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 25 April to 26 May.

**High Counts:** Two were seen on both 30 April 1983 and on 13 May 1987.

**Out of Season:** One seen by Schwilling 13 June 1991 was presumably a late migrant; however, a pair seen by the Corders 22 June 1996 suggest possible breeding.

**Black-headed Grosbeak**  
(*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare in summer. Dates range from 28 April to 3 June and from 24 August to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Only one nesting recorded. The Seltmans observed a female with three fledged juveniles along the south river road on 7 August 1982. The young were almost certainly fledged locally.

**High Counts:** Patti and Thompson found large numbers of late migrating Black-headed Grosbeaks on 3 June 1995. More than 20 were seen on 6 June 1995.

**Blue Grosbeak** (*Guiraca caerulea*)

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates range from 29 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Patti found nesting pairs on 11 June 1972. Ports found a nest with four eggs on 5 June 1978 and a fledgling with an adult pair on 20 June 1978.

**High Counts:** The 20 birds recorded on 19 September 1986 is low. Higher numbers have gone unrecorded.

**Lazuli Bunting** (*Passerina amoena*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare summer resident. Dates range from 25 April to 21 September.

**Nesting Records:** Two pairs were present on 15 June 1951 according to Schwilling, but he found no nests. Thompson found a nest with one egg on 18 July 1958. Seltman saw a female carrying food at Middle Spring on 3 August 1991.

**High Counts:** The five seen on 2 September 1989 is a lower figure than observations indicate. Higher tallies have gone unrecorded.

**Remarks:** Range maps in field guides may show Lazuli Buntings nesting in western Kansas, but very little, if any, hard evidence supports these maps. Although Lazuli Buntings migrate through Morton County in good numbers, only a few mid-summer birds have been recorded. A hybrid Indigo X Lazuli Bunting was collected on 14 May 1967.

**Indigo Bunting** (*Passerina cyanea*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare summer resident. Dates extend from 29 April to 19 September.

**High Counts:** Ports found five singing males on 19 June 1979.

**Remarks:** Although Lazuli Buntings may be more common in Morton County during migration periods, Indigos Buntings are more likely to be encountered during summer. No breeding has been detected.

**Painted Bunting** (*Passerina ciris*)

**Status:** Accidental. One coming to a backyard bird feeder in Elkhart on 4 May 1996. Incredibly, the well-known cover of the *Golden Field Guide to the Birds of North* came to life as a male Lazuli Bunting and a male Indigo Bunting were also present in this yard.

**Dickcissel** (*Spiza americana*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 4 May to 23 September.

**Nesting Records:** Numerous singing males have been seen but no confirmed nesting records exist.

**High Counts:** More than 20 were seen on 15 June 1951.

**Remarks:** Dickcissels are common to abundant over most of Kansas, but Morton County seems to lack sufficient habitat to support this species as a breeding bird. Migrants are occasionally heard overhead, especially in late August and early September.

## Emberizinae - Sparrows

### Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. All records occur within narrow migration windows of 25 April to 23 May and 5-30 September.

**High Counts:** Schwilling, witnessing a remarkable migration of Green-tailed Towhees, counted 22 on 12 May 1953. Seltman and Rader had four on 25 September 1993.

### Eastern Towhee

(*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

**Status:** Accidental. Seltman saw an unspotted mail Towhee at the Work Station on 21 October 1989 for the only record for Morton County.

**Remarks:** In 1995, the A.O.U. split the Rufous-sided Towhee into two separate species, the Eastern Towhee and the Spotted Towhee. This taxonomic split will cause birders to look more carefully at the Towhees they encounter. Undoubtedly, this additional attention will result in more records of Eastern Towhee from Morton County.

### Spotted Towhee

(*Pipilo maculatus*)

**Status:** Common migrant and rare winter resident. Dates range from 17 September to 15 May.

**High Counts:** Seltman saw more than 50 on 28 September 1991, and 20 were reported on 10 October 1987.

### Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*)

**Status:** Uncommon visitor with records from 20 September to 17 June. There are no records from July or August. This species was first reported by Patti on 10 June 1972. It is abundant in the Black Mesa country of Oklahoma and at least nine additional records suggest that Canyon Towhees occasionally move down the Cimarron in early fall and may remain in Kansas until early summer. Most Morton County

records involve brief stays, but two birds remained at Point of Rocks from 15 October 1989 to 30 December 1989 and a single towhee seen 14 April 1990 at the same location may have been one of the same individuals.

**Nesting Records:** Patti reported two birds on 10 June 1972, and Al White found one bird on 17 June 1978. These sightings are intriguing because they lie within the normal nesting period for Canyon Towhees, but no nesting behavior was observed.

**High Counts:** Three birds were reported from the Cimarron NG Work Station in late November 1975 (date uncertain).

**Remarks:** Brown Towhee was separated (A.O.U. 1989) into two species, the Canyon Towhee and the California Towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*). All Kansas records pertain to Canyon Towhee.

### Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*)

**Status:** Abundant migrant and summer resident. Normal dates range from 14 April to 23 September.

**Nesting Records:** Patti found a nest with four eggs on 8 June 1974. Ports found two nests with four and five eggs respectively on 7 June 1978 and a third nest with five eggs on 12 June 1978. He also found nests on 2 June 1979.

**High Counts:** Ports counted 180 on 29 May 1978 and 165 on 27 May 1978.

**Out of Season:** Patti reported a bird seen on 10 November 1989. This extremely late bird represents the latest date for the species in Kansas.

**Remarks:** During the nesting season, Cassin's Sparrows are one of the five most conspicuous birds on Cimarron NG.

### Rufous-crowned Sparrow

(*Aimophila ruficeps*)

**Status:** Uncommon. Dates range from 8 September to 13 June. This species is common in the Black Mesa country of Oklahoma and southeastern Colorado. All



*Canyon Towhee. Photo by Bob Gress.*

Morton County records probably involve vagrants from those areas.

**Nesting Records:** Lehman and Finnegan found a singing bird on 13 June 1990 at Point of Rocks. Although this bird may have been defending a territory, no mate was seen and no subsequent nesting behavior was noted.

**High Counts:** Three were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 4 January 1975. Three were also seen at Point of Rocks on 29 October 1989.

**Remarks:** Rufous-crowned Sparrows may occur more often in Morton County, but their secretive habits make them a very difficult bird to find and observe. At Point of Rocks they crawl beneath shrubs and hide in crevices, very seldom taking flight even when surrounded by eager birders.

**American Tree Sparrow**  
(*Spizella arborea*)

**Status:** Abundant winter resident. Dates extend from 8 September to 5 May. Numbers tend to peak in mid-winter.

**High Counts:** All high counts are from the Cimarron CBC's with 2,723 seen on 31 December 1976, 1,709 on 28 December 1991, and 1,836 on 31 December 1993. Tree Sparrows have been seen in numbers exceeding 1,000 on four other occasions.

**Chipping Sparrow** (*Spizella passerina*)

**Status:** Common migrant. Dates range from 4 April to 26 May and from 18 August to 30 October.

**High Counts:** Schwilling found more than 30 on 27 September 1954. Cable estimated 20-30 seen on 28 September 1986. These numbers are low. Numbers above 100 have been observed, but the details have not been recorded.

**Out of Season:** A specimen taken on 17 July 1963 and an adult seen by Ports on 26 July 1978 are the only summer records. This species has bred in Cimarron County, Oklahoma (Johnsgard 1979), but breeding in Morton County would be unlikely.

**Remarks:** In late summer mixed flocks of *Spizella* sparrows are a common sight throughout Morton County. Chipping, Clay-colored, and Brewer's Sparrows have occasionally been seen together.

#### **Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)**

**Status:** Common migrant. Dates range from 9 April to 15 June and from 12 August to 5 October.

**Nesting Records:** Trautman (1969) reported seeing two adults feeding three juveniles on 4 September 1964. This observation is extraordinary because the southern edge of this species' breeding range lies several hundred miles north of Morton County.

**High Counts:** Schwilling estimated more than 50 on 27 September 1954. As with the Chipping Sparrow, few birders have bothered to count individuals so that very high numbers have gone unrecorded.

#### **Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*)**

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare summer resident. Dates range from 8 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Schwilling and White found nesting birds on 17 May 1978. During the summers of 1978 and 1979, Ports found and mapped several breeding colonies in sagebrush habitat southeast of Wilburton and northwest of Rolla. He discovered a nest with four eggs on 26 May 1979. These areas have not been monitored on an annual basis, but Schwilling found five birds on territories on 10 June 1991 and four on 14 June 1991. This species is almost always associated with mature sagebrush, and the available habitat in Morton County is isolated and vulnerable.

**High Counts:** Seltman saw more than 20 migrants in scattered groups on 19 September 1992.

**Out of Season:** No details are known for one bird reported on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1988.

**Remarks:** When nesting, this species is almost always associated with dense and healthy sagebrush. The available breeding habitat in Morton County is limited to a few isolated areas. A sagebrush eradication program to enhance grazing may have negatively affected this and other sage-dependent species. Several years ago, the Forest Service stopped the eradication program.

#### **Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*)**

**Status:** Uncommon resident. The local population is small and is reinforced by migrants in spring and fall. Records exist for every month.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found two juveniles with two adults northwest of Elkhart on 19 June 1979. Singing males have been recorded on 14 May 1967, 14 June 1978, and 13 July 1978.

**High Counts:** More than 20 were seen on 28 September 1991.

**Remarks:** The conventional wisdom about Field Sparrows is that they should not reside on the arid High Plains. In Morton County, however, Field Sparrows are apparently present in low numbers year-round; and the population appears to have remained stable for at least several decades.

#### **Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)**

**Status:** Abundant migrant and very rare summer and winter resident. Records exist for all months.

**High Counts:** Young estimated 1,000 on 28 September 1992. Other large flights of migrants have gone unrecorded.

**Out of Season:** An adult male was collected on 17 July 1963. This and other summer records may suggest breeding,



Lark Sparrow. Photo by David A. Rintoul.

but no nest or young have ever been reported. Vesper Sparrows have been recorded on the Cimarron CBC a total of 10 times with a high of 11 seen on 30 December 1979. Small numbers may overwinter in Morton County.

**Remarks:** This is the most abundant grassland sparrow during migration. Even beginners have been known to lament "Oh, its only another Vesper Sparrow" by the end of a long day of birding.

**Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Two nests were found on 14 July 1964. Patti found two nests, each with four eggs, on 8 June 1974. Ports had a nest with five eggs on 31 May 1979.

**High Counts:** Young saw 100 on 28 September 1992. During the breeding sea-

son, a high of 25 were counted by Ports on 6 June 1978. This species can occasionally be abundant in migration, but greater numbers have not been recorded.

**Black-throated Sparrow  
(*Amphispiza bilineata*)**

**Status:** Accidental. A report of a Black-throated Sparrow on 12 September 1992 by Corder was accepted by the KOS Records Committee. Gerald Horak and Ed Miller reported two near the Boy Scout area on 4 May 1996.

**Remarks:** This species breeds at Black Mesa, Oklahoma, and is expected in Morton County, but all records need confirmation.

**Sage Sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*)**

**Status:** Accidental; five records. Two specimens were taken from a flock of four birds on 1 November 1956. This was a

winter when this species invaded southwestern Kansas. Martinez reported one in extreme southwestern Morton County on 1 July 1969. Six were counted on the Cimarron CBC of 8 January 1974, and one on the CBC's of 30 December 1977 and 30 December 1995.

**Remarks:** The Sage Sparrow is not known to breed anywhere near Morton County, so any birds seen are most prudently classified as vagrants. This species may occasionally invade southwestern Kansas.

### Lark Bunting

(*Calamospiza melanocorys*)

**Status:** Abundant migrant and summer resident and common to abundant winter resident.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a nest with five eggs on 7 June 1978.

**High Counts:** Seltman estimated more than 10,000 migrants on 3 August 1991 with more than 1,000 seen in a single flock. He further reported many flocks exceeded 100 birds. "Hundreds" were seen on 8 May 1977. Ports counted a total of 415 on 24 June 1978.

**Out of Season:** Prior to 1976, no records documented Lark Bunting in Morton County during winter; but since the 209 recorded on 31 December 1976, this species has appeared on almost every Cimarron CBC. Wintering flocks numbering in the hundreds can also be seen in adjacent Colorado and Oklahoma. Severe weather seems to have little effect on Lark Buntings. Large wintering flocks have remained through blizzards and sub-zero cold. This behavior appears to be new and is somewhat puzzling. The historic winter range of Lark Buntings begins several hundred miles south of Morton County.

**Remarks:** The skylarking of Lark Buntings and Cassin's Sparrows is an unforgettable experience for birders visiting the grasslands at the height of the breeding season.

### Savannah Sparrow

(*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant. Dates range from 3 April to 6 June and from 7 September to 12 November.

**High Counts:** 10 were recorded on 10 October 1987.

**Out of Season:** Four were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979, the only winter record.

### Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)

**Status:** Accidental; three records. Schwilling observed one at length north of Wilburton on 6 May 1990 while other KOS members watched courting Lesser Prairie-Chickens from their cars. The bird was under the parked car of one of the prairie-chicken watchers! Most of the group, engrossed with the prairie-chickens, remained oblivious to the sparrow. Patti had another early May sighting, but the exact date is uncertain. James Zellmer reported one north of the Wilburton Crossing on 5 September 1992. Zellmer got excellent views of the bird and several other birders got supporting glimpses of it.

**Remarks:** This species is probably more common during migration than the records indicate. It is difficult to flush and once flushed typically flies or gets blown across the grassland before dropping back into the thick vegetation. Birders have spent hours chasing "short-tailed sparrows" around the grasslands in futile attempts to identify this species.

### Grasshopper Sparrow

(*Ammodramus savannarum*)

**Status:** Common summer resident. Records extend from 2 April to 20 August. Incredibly, no records document the species after 20 August.

**Nesting Records:** No confirmed nesting records exist. Ports estimated 33 territorial males per 100 acres on 19 June 1979.

**High Counts:** Ports counted 64 on 12 June 1979.

**Le Conte's Sparrow**  
(*Ammodramus leconteii*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Cox and Patti saw one bird in tall grass at a pond near the Cimarron River during the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1976.

**Fox Sparrow** (*Passerella iliaca*)

**Status:** Very rare. Six records span the period from 2 October to 2 January. This species was recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1977 and of 2 January 1987.

**High Counts:** Rader and Seltman found two at the Cimarron NG Work Station on 5 October 1991.

**Song Sparrow** (*Melospiza melodia*)

**Status:** Common migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 19 September to 15 May.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 86 on the Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987 and 76 on the CBC of 30 December 1977.

**Lincoln's Sparrow** (*Melospiza lincolni*)

**Status:** Common migrant and very rare winter resident. Dates range from 23 September to 8 June. The species has been recorded on three Cimarron CBC's on dates from 30 December to 2 January.

**High Counts:** Seltman observed more than 30 on 28 September 1991.

**Swamp Sparrow** (*Melospiza georgiana*)

**Status:** Rare migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 2 October to 4 January.

**High Counts:** Four were recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1977 and three on the CBC of 4 January 1975.

**White-throated Sparrow**  
(*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

**Status:** Very rare migrant. Spring dates occur within the very short period of 16-29

April and fall dates range from 28 September to 5 November;

**High Counts:** 15 were seen in Elkhart and at Point of Rocks on 10 October 1987.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow**  
(*Zonotrichia atricapilla*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Rader found one adult among a flock of White-crowned Sparrows on 7 February 1988. This species has been documented in western Kansas before, and this sighting followed one in Scott County by about one month.

**White-crowned Sparrow**  
(*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

**Status:** Abundant migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 16 September to 26 May.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 1,158 on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1988, 734 on the CBC of 30 December 1990, and 628 on the CBC of 30 December 1977.

**Remarks:** White-crowned Sparrows winter in very high numbers in Morton County and can be encountered in every habitat. From October to April it would be difficult to venture far into the field without seeing one of these birds.

**Harris's Sparrow** (*Zonotrichia querula*)

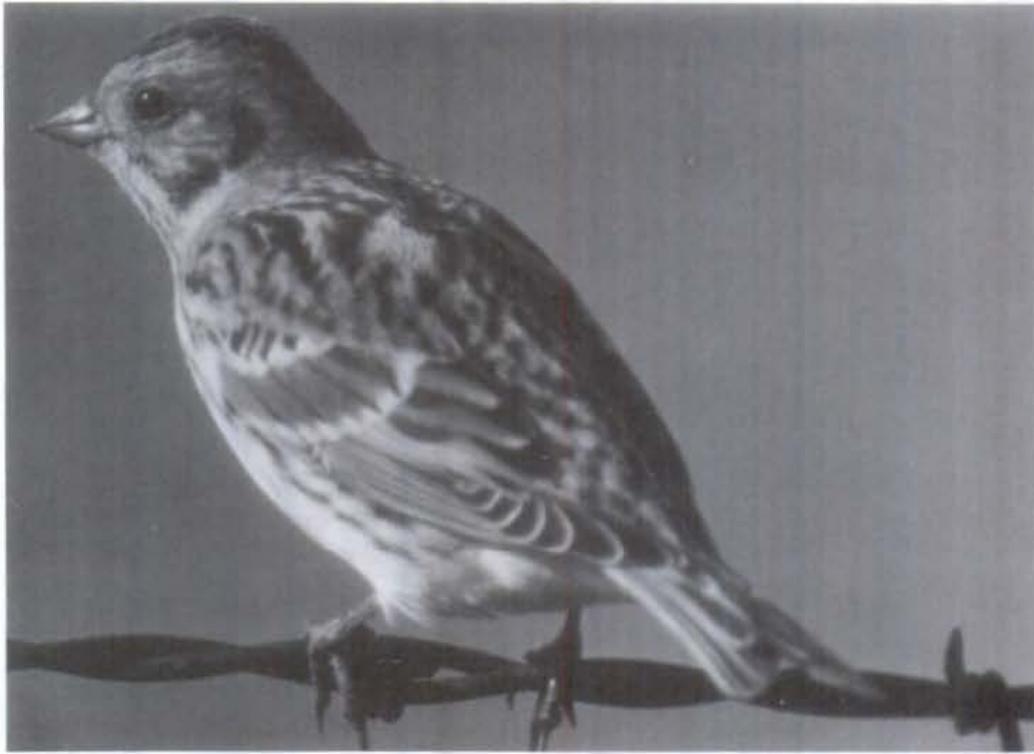
**Status:** Common resident from fall through spring and occasionally abundant in mid-winter. Dates range from 5 October to 11 May.

**High Counts:** A very high total of 957 was tallied on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1976, and 212 were counted on the CBC of 30 December 1989.

**Remarks:** Morton County is on the periphery of the species' normal wintering range, so its local numbers vary.

**Dark-eyed Junco** (*Junco hyemalis*)

**Status:** Abundant resident from fall through spring. Dates range from 11 Sep-



Lapland Longspur showing the claws from which three species get their name. Photo by David A. Rintoul.

tember to 13 May. All forms of this species have been documented in the county.

**High Counts:** An amazing total of 2,337 was recorded on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1989. Participants found 1,683 on the CBC of 31 December 1993 and 1,404 on the CBC of 28 December 1991.

**Remarks:** Oregon types often outnumber Slate-colored. White-winged and Gray-headed types have been seen many times but in small numbers.

**McCown's Longspur**  
(*Calcarius mccownii*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and winter resident. Dates range from 17 October to 8 January. No spring records exist, but this species moves northward across western Kansas in small flocks from late February through early April each year.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 801 on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December

1993. Ely reported a flock of several hundred on 31 December 1978. Seltman saw several hundred on 17 October 1987.

**Lapland Longspur**  
(*Calcarius lapponicus*)

**Status:** Abundant resident from late fall to early spring. Dates range from 9 November to 10 February.

**High Counts:** Observers tallied 13,685 on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979 and 4,340 on the CBC of 31 December 1982.

**Smith's Longspur** (*Calcarius pictus*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. Schwilling reported a flock of 32 in grasslands at the North Fork on 31 October 1989. Seltman and Cable found one in a field south of North Fork on 11 November 1989.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur**  
(*Calcarius ornatus*)

**Status:** Common resident from fall through spring. Occasionally abundant. Dates range from 25 September to 23 April.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 1,358 on the Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979. A more typical count of 145 was tallied for the CBC of 30 December 1977. A flock of 30 on 25 September was very early.

**Icterinae - Blackbirds,  
Meadowlarks, Orioles**

**Bobolink** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. Combs and Kruger discovered a small flock comprised of two males and four females on 2 April 1977. The birds lingered until 16 April 1977.

**Red-winged Blackbird**  
(*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**Status:** Abundant.

**Nesting Records:** Ports found a nest containing three nestlings in cattails at the fish ponds on 20 July 1978.

**High Counts:** A count of 3,152 was tallied on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1982. Numerous daily totals range between 500 and 1,000 individuals.

**Remarks:** The Red-winged Blackbird is not a common breeding bird on Cimarron NG. During the summer, it is more likely to be encountered around irrigated fields away from the Cimarron River.

**Eastern Meadowlark** (*Sturnella magna*)

**Status:** Very rare summer resident. Dates range from 7 April to 2 October. All records are of singing birds.

**Remarks:** Eastern Meadowlarks are apparently very scarce in Morton County. Only a few singing birds have been encountered, but this species is common as far west as nearby Seward County and should be watched or listened for in the future.

**Western Meadowlark**  
(*Sturnella neglecta*)

**Status:** Abundant resident. Some local birds may withdraw farther south in the winter, but they are replaced by northern birds making this one of the more numerous and probably the very most conspicuous avian inhabitant of Morton County.

**Nesting Records:** Only one nesting record exists despite the fact that immatures and family groups abound in late summer. Young found a nest on 19 May 1992.

**High Counts:** Ports found more than 100 per day on census routes during the summers of 1978 and 1979, but all of the highest daily totals are from the Cimarron CBC. High CBC totals include 2,210 on 30 December 1977, 1,274 on 30 December 1979, and 1,082 on 30 December 1990.

**Remarks:** The Western Meadowlark is the State Bird of Kansas and five other states. Its abundance, conspicuous habits, bright coloration, and pleasant song all make it the logical choice for the distinction of being "the state bird." But, a character in William Least Heat Moon's *Prairie Earth* upon learning that this species was the Kansas State Bird was not impressed saying, "That's disappointing. I'd have thought it would be something bigger, wilder, - a hawk or at least the prairie chicken— Fifty states have totem birds and not one of them is a raptor. We're a Caucasian nation of titmice."

**Yellow-headed Blackbird**  
(*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

**Status:** Common migrant and uncommon summer resident. Dates range from 5 April to 28 October.

**High Counts:** Cable found more than 200 on 28 September 1986.

**Rusty Blackbird** (*Euphagus carolinus*)

**Status:** Accidental; one record. The Grabers collected one male on 7 April 1950.

**Brewer's Blackbird**  
(*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

**Status:** Uncommon migrant and rare winter visitor. Migration dates range from 7 April to 21 May and from 8 September to 28 October. This species has been recorded in small numbers eight times on the Cimarron CBC with dates 28 December to 4 January. No additional winter records exist.

**High Counts:** Cable found 100 on 28 September 1986.

**Great-tailed Grackle**  
(*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

**Status:** Uncommon resident spring through fall, very rare winter resident. Dates exist for every month except March. A few birds may have overwintered for the first time in 1990-91. This species has only been in Kansas for about 30 years and first arrived in Morton County in 1978.

**Nesting Records:** The first individuals seen in Morton County attempted to nest but failed. Ports saw a male and female at a nest in Elkhart on 25 June 1978. The male was still present but the nest was abandoned on 9 August 1978. A few young have been recorded around Elkhart in recent years, and Schwilling found a nesting colony of "over 50 birds" in Rolla City Park on 27 May 1991.

**High Counts:** Except for the 50 birds in the Rolla City Park colony, numbers have remained fairly low with the next highest counts being 10 seen on 15 May 1987 and 15 October 1988.

**Remarks:** Great-tailed Grackles are closely associated with cattle feedlots in most of southwestern Kansas. Because Morton County has no major feedlots, this species is unlikely to become abundant locally.

**Common Grackle** (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

**Status:** Abundant resident spring through fall, uncommon winter resident. Large numbers of migrants supplement the local population in spring and fall.

Dates exist for every month except February.

**Nesting Records:** Ely reported finding one nest in Elkhart on 10 May 1979. Ports observed a nest along the Cimarron River on 12 June 1979.

**High Counts:** No definitive high numbers are on record, although several hundred per day have been seen by Seltman. The Cimarron CBC of 30 December 1979 recorded 49, an unusually high winter total.

**Brown-headed Cowbird** (*Molothrus ater*)

**Status:** Common resident. Numbers are lower in winter.

**Nesting Records:** No records exist, but it surely parasitizes many local nesting birds.

**High Counts:** Numbers far more than 100 would be expected during migration, but no exact numbers have been recorded. The Cimarron CBC of 2 January 1987 recorded 19.

**Remarks:** For hundreds of years, Brown-headed Cowbirds, along with enormous herds of bison, roamed what is now Morton County. Brown-headed Cowbirds fed on insects and seeds exposed by bison hooves tearing up the sod. They also ate ticks and other pests from the bison hides. Because the herds, and hence the Brown-headed Cowbirds, moved constantly, it was necessary for female Brown-headed Cowbirds to lay eggs in the nests of smaller birds. The adults would continue to survive by following the moving food source, whereas the young would be raised by the host species. The mutually beneficial relationship between bison and bird was broken when the bison were exterminated. Settlers, rather than bison, broke the sod. Because Brown-headed Cowbirds now had an abundant, stationary food source their numbers increased. They also expanded into new open areas as forests were cleared. Because of these human alterations to the land, Brown-headed Cowbirds are not responsible for declines in several species of warblers and other small birds.

**Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)**

**Status:** Common migrant and summer resident. Dates range from 10 April to 19 September.

**Nesting Records:** Ports observed adults feeding fledglings on 14 June 1978, and Young found a nest on 19 May 1992.

**High Counts:** Seltman estimated more than 200, mostly along the Cimarron River, on 3 August 1991. More than 40 were reported on 18 May 1978.

**Remarks:** Despite the few nesting records, Orchard Orioles are a common and easily observed bird on Cimarron NG throughout the spring and summer.

**Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)**

**Status:** Very rare summer resident; uncommon migrant. Most Baltimore Orioles have been seen during August and September. Seltman has identified as many as 10 male Baltimore Orioles in a day in Morton County.

**Nesting Records:** One record of a mixed pair of Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles producing four eggs on 16 June 1979 (Ports 1979).

**Remarks:** In 1995, the A.O.U. restored Baltimore and Bullock's Orioles as separate species. They were previously lumped under the name Northern Oriole.

**Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)**

**Status:** Abundant migrant and summer resident. Dates extend from 10 April to 28 September.

**Nesting Records:** Numerous nesting records exist beginning with two nests reported on 14 June 1951. The cries of two fledglings captured by Ports on 4 August 1978 brought a mob of 19 additional birds. Almost all nesting records specifically mention Bullock's types.

**High Counts:** Schwilling (1991) saw 46 in riparian habitat on 13 June 1991, but this total is low and numbers above 100 could easily be found during the breeding season.

**Remarks:** Rising examined numerous specimens of orioles from western Kansas and found many birds with intermediate characteristics. In Morton County, Bullock's were found to be very predominant in summer (Rising 1974).

**Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record. A female Scott's Oriole was collected by Larry Anthony on 16 April 1967. The bird was identified after being collected. This is the only record for Kansas.

**Fringillidae - Finches**

**Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*)**

**Status:** Accidental; one record.

**Remarks:** Eddie Stegall and Steve Kingswood found one male and two females at the Cimarron NG Work Station north of Elkhart on 26 May 1979 (Kingswood 1979). This sighting was made by experienced observers and is considered valid. The very late date of this record is exceptional. Based on reported plumage characteristics, these birds may have been of the Rocky Mountain race, which would also be very unusual for Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1992).

**Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*)**

**Status:** Very rare late fall and early winter visitor. Eight records range from 27 October to 31 December. All birds observed have been singles. One male found by the Shanes on 1 November 1987 was seen again by the Seltmans on 27 November 1987.

**Remarks:** Purple Finches were formerly rare but regular visitors to extreme western Kansas, but the species seems to be declining. Some probably go unnoticed among the huge numbers of House Finches present in most towns.

**Cassin's Finch** (*Carpodacus cassinii*)

**Status:** Accidental; two records. Ely collected a brown male along the Cimarron River on 15 April 1967. A male at North Fork gave the species' loud "cheedup" call on 11 November 1989 and was seen by several observers.

**Remarks:** As with the Purple Finch, only birders extremely familiar with Cassin's Finch call notes are likely to pick one out of the crowd of House Finches. This species should be watched for at Elkhart feeders.

**House Finch** (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

**Status:** Abundant resident. Although House Finches are just now becoming common in eastern Kansas, they were present at least in winter as early as 1934 in Morton County. Long collected several specimens between 12 and 14 November 1934. The Grabers found House Finches in spring of 1950 but mentioned no evidence of nesting.

**Nesting Records:** Nests and many juveniles have been observed in Elkhart; but because they are so common, they have been ignored so details have not been recorded. Young found a nest in a cholla cactus.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 736 on the Cimarron CBC of 28 December 1991.

**Remarks:** House Finches may have once been uncommon in the area, but they are now firmly established. First published summer records were in 1979 (Ports 1979).

**Red Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*)

**Status:** Very rare fall and winter visitor. Three records exist from 11 November to 29 December. Patti found one female on 12 May 1988, the only spring record.

**High Counts:** Bryan and Seltman found at least five at the Cimarron NG Work Station on 23 November 1984. Seltman found two males and a female in Elkhart on 29 December 1984. This was an invasion year in western Kansas.

**Common Redpoll** (*Carduelis flammea*)

**Status:** Accidental; four records. Dates range from 20 November to 30 December. Three records are from Cimarron CBC's with dates from 27 to 30 December.

**High Counts:** A flock of 12 was seen on 29 December 1984.

**Pine Siskin** (*Carduelis pinus*)

**Status:** Common migrant and abundant winter resident. Records exist for every month except August.

**Nesting Records:** Rader and Seltman watched a pair building a nest in a juniper in the Elkhart Cemetery on 14 April 1990. A second pair was seen nearby. The nest failed or was abandoned a few weeks later.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 492 on the Cimarron CBC 30 December 1977.

**Out of Season:** Schwilling heard one bird on 7 June 1978. One was reported on 6 July 1978. No other summer records exist.

**Lesser Goldfinch** (*Carduelis psaltria*)

**Status:** Accidental; five records. The only spring record occurred 12 May 1995. An invasion occurred in September 1989 when Corder and the Seltmans estimated more than 20 on 16 September 1989 plus 14 birds seen by Schwilling on 31 October 1989. Corder found one on 11 September 1992. Kilby, Northrup, and Smith found a single bird on 19 September 1993. Lesser Goldfinches are known to breed at Black Mesa, Oklahoma, so they are not unexpected in Morton County.

**American Goldfinch** (*Carduelis tristis*)

**Status:** Common migrant and winter resident. No records exist for July or August.

**Nesting Records:** Goldfinches are late nesters, so the absence of late summer records indicates no breeding in the area.

**High Counts:** Participants counted 183 on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1976.

**Evening Grosbeak***(Coccothraustes vespertinus)*

**Status:** Accidental; five records. Two spring records are from 13 May 1973 and 12 May 1988. Three fall records are from 28 October 1985, 15 October 1989, and 4 November 1989. In 1989 this species invaded western Kansas.

**High Counts:** Patti discovered a flock of 15 along the Cimarron River on 13 May 1973. Patti and Rader found four at the Cimarron NG Work Station on 15 October 1989.

**Passeridae - Old World Sparrows****House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*)

**Status:** Abundant resident. This species was already "common at ranch houses" according to Long in November 1934. House Sparrows were not recorded by the Grabers in the early 1950s and may have been scarce until the 1970s. Today, they are an unwanted nuisance in Elkhart and are encountered in every habitat in the county.

**Nesting Records:** The House Sparrow is probably the most common nesting species in every town and around every farmstead in the area. On 2 May 1991 Schwilling removed incomplete House Sparrow nests from four bluebird nest boxes and found a House Sparrow nest with three young in another box. On 27 May 1991 Schwilling found "many House Sparrow (weaver finch) round nests in isolated trees far away from people."

**High Counts:** Participants counted 3,027 on the Cimarron CBC of 31 December 1982. Several other totals above 2,000 have been recorded.

**Remarks:** The advent of the Breeding Bird Atlas surveys will undoubtedly provide numerous nest records for this species.

**Other Reported Species****Glossy Ibis** (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

**Status:** Probable. On 15 August 1991 an ibis with a broken wing was brought into the Cimarron NG offices in Elkhart. Cable identified the bird as a Glossy Ibis based on the field marks mentioned in Kaufman (1990). This bird subsequently died and was sent to the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. From there it was sent to Louisiana State University, which has an extensive collection of both Glossy and White-faced Ibises. The curators at LSU said "all signs point toward Glossy." However, because they could not observe some of the "soft parts" first hand (e.g., the eye) they did not identify it to species. The specimen was returned and is now in the collection at the University of Kansas Museum.

**Fulvous Whistling-Duck***(Dendrocygna bicolor)*

**Status:** Uncertain. Stuart J. Adams and J.F. Buttery reported a pair of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks nested successfully during the summer of 1971 in Elkhart in a child's tree house! An account of this record was published in *American Birds* (vol. 25, page 873).

**Remarks:** This is without question the oddest bird record from Morton County. Normally, Fulvous Whistling-Ducks nest on the ground in marshes. The closely related Black-bellied Whistling Duck nests in cavities and uses nest boxes and therefore would be more likely. The Fulvous Whistling-Duck is considered accidental at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in central Kansas, but it would not be expected in Morton County. We believe this record probably involved an exotic species or a domesticated duck. Alternatively, the question might be less a matter of whether they were Fulvous Whistling-Ducks and more a matter of where they came from.

**Blue Grouse** (*Dendragapus obscurus*)

**Status:** Unlikely. The published report of a pair of Blue Grouse from the Cimarron NG Work Station 2.5 miles north of Elkhart on 25 June 1981 is believed to be a misidentification. Details of the sighting fail to mention both size of the birds and important diagnostic plumage features. Even if the identification were correct, one would wonder about the origin of these birds. The range of Blue Grouse comes no nearer to Morton County than the mountains west of Trinidad, Colorado. Blue Grouse are notoriously weak flyers with underdeveloped breast muscles that are used only to escape predators or for flying up into trees to feed or roost. To arrive in Morton County, a pair of grouse would have had to walk approximately 170 miles in a straight line across some forbidding terrain.

**Greater Prairie-Chicken**  
(*Tympanuchus cupido*)

**Status:** Uncertain. Both of the two existing specimens are preserved as skeletons. One, collected in 1927, is in the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History; and the other, collected in 1966, is at the University of Nebraska. They may be mislabeled Lesser Prairie-Chickens. However, before settlement days and the plowing of the prairies, the plains grouse intermingled freely and many were recorded far from their normal ranges. Some authorities believe that prairie-chickens may have been somewhat migratory prior to grain crops being planted by settlers. These crops now provide a winter food source that did not exist prior to settlement. Greater Prairie-Chickens may have occurred in Morton County at one time, but now do not occur anywhere south of the Arkansas River in western Kansas.

**Ringed Turtle-Dove**  
(*Streptopelia risoria*)

**Status:** Escape. Seltman photographed a bird in Elkhart in the fall of 1989. The

Smiths reported the bird again on 27 January 1990. This species is a common cage-bird, and all Kansas sightings involve birds that have escaped from captivity. This species does not appear on the Kansas checklist.

**Lesser Nighthawk**  
(*Chordeiles acutipennis*)

**Status:** Probable. The Seltmans and Linda Vidal heard the distinctive flight-trill of the Lesser Nighthawk on the night of 18 September 1993 at Point of Rocks. The bird was heard flying along the east edge of the point at close range; but because of total darkness at the time, no visual confirmation of fieldmarks was made. Many Common Nighthawks were also in the area. This is the only report of this species for Kansas. Lesser Nighthawks have been reported at Two Buttes Reservoir in nearby Baca County, Colorado, on several occasions with at least one specimen record (Andrews and Righter 1992); so this species will probably be confirmed for Morton County.

**Whip-poor-will**  
(*Caprimulgus vociferous*)

**Status:** Probable. A bird deemed too large to be a Common Poorwill with the tail pattern of a Whip-poor-will was flushed at the Cimarron NG Work Station by John Northrup on 9 September 1993, but it was seen too briefly for a positive identification.

**Acadian Flycatcher**  
(*Empidonax virescens*)

**Status:** Uncertain. A published report (KOS Newsletter, May 1977, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 5) included a question mark placed by the observer. This record should not be considered as valid since apparently some doubt remains about the bird's identity.

**Brown-crested Flycatcher**  
(*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)

**Status:** Probable. Sebastian Patti and others saw a bird identified as this species on one of the highline wires at the Cimarron NG Work Station on 25 May 1975. It was described as "singing its head off!" Members of this genus can be difficult to identify visually but the fact that the observers heard it singing lends credence to this record. This species occurs regularly in south Texas and occasionally wanders along the Gulf Coast as far east as Florida. This is the only report of this species in Kansas and it does not appear on the Kansas state checklist.

**Western Bluebird** (*Sialia mexicana*)

**Status:** Probable. On 11 April 1990 a male Western Bluebird was observed by Schwilling along the north river road about three miles east of state highway 27. This sighting by a highly experienced observer is considered valid. However, this species is considered hypothetical for Kansas and does not appear on the Kansas checklist.

**Gray Vireo** (*Vireo vicinior*)

**Status:** Probable. One found by Seltman, Cable, and Rader was subse-

quently photographed by Cable and seen by many KOS members on 5 May 1996. This species has been collected at nearby locations in Oklahoma and eastern Colorado. It has been expected to be found in Kansas.

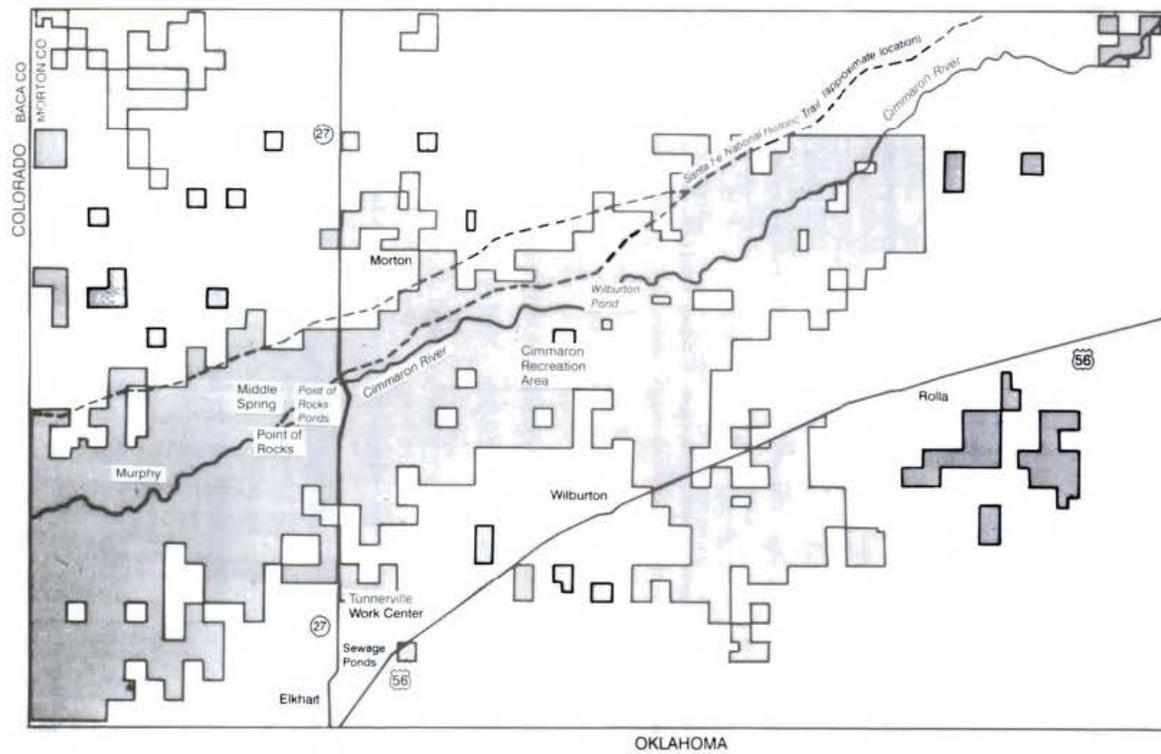
**Grace's Warbler** (*Dendroica graciae*)

**Status:** Uncertain. A published account of a bird believed to be of this species is in the KOS Bulletin (Vol. 22, No. 2, p.10). The sighting occurred along the Cimarron River on 29 April 1967, but the bird was poorly seen and not positively identified. A second report for 11 September 1992 was rejected by the KOS Records Committee. This species does not appear on the Kansas checklist.

**Black-chinned Sparrow**  
(*Spizella atrogularis*)

**Status:** Unlikely. A report of a Black-chinned Sparrow on 6 May 1990 was rejected by the KOS Records Committee. This species has shown no pattern of long-distance vagrancy and would be very unlikely in Morton County. No additional reports exist for this species in Kansas or surrounding states.

Part 4



*General map of Cimarron National Grassland, Kansas. Dark areas indicate federal lands.*

**Maps of the Cimarron National Grassland may be obtained from:**

**District Ranger  
Cimarron National Grassland  
242 Hwy 56 East,  
Box J,  
Elkhart, KS 67950  
Phone: (316) 697-4621**

## Part 4

# Finding Cimarron's Birds

### Preparation

Many first-time visitors to Cimarron NG have been overwhelmed by the size of the area. Miles and miles of pastures and agricultural fields combine with a long river corridor to provide an enormous challenge to someone wanting to "see it all." Kansas birders have found that by visiting just a few locations along the major roads one can probably see most of the bird species present in Morton County on a given day. A description of those sites follows.

Bird numbers in Morton County are highly variable depending on the season and the weather. Late winter and late summer can, at times, be very dull, especially if the region has received too little rain and the food crops are poor. Bird numbers may also vary dramatically from day to day and birders venturing out into the countryside on the "wrong" day may be disappointed. But at the peak of migration or during a western invasion, the birding can be exciting. During an invasion, hundreds of warblers and sparrows can be seen in a single day. The large checklist rivals those from famous wildlife refuges in the nation's interior and is growing rapidly. This is one place where the phrase "Anything is possible!" can almost be believed. No matter how many birds are seen, Cimarron NG affords many birders intimate looks at many species that are considered rare or elusive elsewhere in North America.

### When to Visit

Birders who are unfamiliar with the birds of the High Plains and who want to see Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Cassin's Sparrow, and other grassland specialties, will probably want to visit Cimarron NG in

spring or early summer when breeding birds are the most conspicuous. Birders wanting to see vagrants or western migrants will probably want to plan a fall visit. Spring migration is best from 15 April through 10 June. Late-season migration lasts longer and can be good from 15 August through 15 November. The Cimarron NG Christmas Bird Count, usually conducted sometime around New Year's Day, provides an excellent opportunity for someone to see the wintering birds of the area. Birders looking for a particular species can time their visit according to the occurrence dates and high count dates found in this book.

### Weather

The weather can be extreme in southwestern Kansas and is characterized by wide temperature swings, high winds, and sudden storms. Sunburn and dehydration can be a problem for birders in summer and hypothermia can occur in winter. Wear appropriate clothes and take along plenty of food and drink.

### Driving Hazards

Many birders have damaged their cars or gotten stuck while birding Morton County by failing to recognize their automobile's limitations. The main roads through Cimarron NG are well maintained and can be negotiated with a passenger car almost every day of the year, but they can become very muddy following heavy rain or snow. Deep ruts and large rocks on some roads require drivers to remain alert. Many lesser roads are also open to the public but can only be safely driven with high clearance vehicles, preferably those

with four-wheel drive. Unimproved tracts through the sandhills south of the Cimarron River as well as the Turkey Trail east of state highway 27 and the Cimarron River stream bed east of the Wilburton Crossing are all open to the public but can be very challenging. Unless you have an excellent four-wheel drive vehicle and considerable off-road driving experience, it is best to proceed on foot.

### Hiking Hazards

The most enjoyable method of birding Morton County is on foot. In fact, it is the only way you are likely to find many birds along the river. But hikers need to be prepared for some problems that may arise. Good shoes are a must as this area is a paradise for plants with stickers, spines, and needles. Long pants are recommended even in hot weather. Loose soil and rocks on many slopes make walking difficult and somewhat dangerous. Some birding spots are so seldom visited by other people that if you fall or become stranded you cannot count on being found. Use the same caution you would when hiking in a wilderness area.

Prairie rattlesnakes (*Crotalus viridis*) are common in the area. Birders may be the most likely Cimarron visitors to encounter this reptile because the rocky outcrops and brushy draws that are its primary habitat also provide good birding opportunities. As local folks say, it is foolish to walk around in this area without keeping one eye on the ground in front of you. Bites from these rattlesnakes usually pose little threat to human life but can cause painful swelling and permanent tissue and nerve damage in the area of the wound. Health complications are worse in children, so youngsters should be supervised at all times during warm weather.

### Emergencies

Towing services and car repair are available in Elkhart, and Morton County Hos-

pital on the west side of Elkhart can treat most medical problems. Morton County has excellent cellular phone service; so if your car quits or if you need medical care, help is only a phone call away.

## Best Birding Stops

### Elkhart Cemetery and Shelterbelt

**Location:** The Elkhart Cemetery is on the north edge of town along the northernmost street that connects state highway 27 and U.S. 56.

**Description:** The cemetery is a good place to look for birds during migration and in the winter. Red-naped Sapsucker, Red-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, and Mountain Chickadees have all been recorded here. The shelterbelt across the street to the north is also on city property. Horses are sometimes allowed to graze here so the fence may be electrified, but access is unrestricted. This shelterbelt appears unremarkable, but it has produced a long list of rarities in recent years. A male Pyrrhuloxia was here for several months in 1993. A wide diversity of flycatchers, thrushes, warblers, and sparrows has been recorded here. Barn Owls are often present in the juniper trees.

### Elkhart Sewer Ponds

**Location:** The sewer ponds are north of the Elkhart Cemetery. To get there, turn north on the dirt road just west of the cemetery, jog left and back right and continue to the parking area and walk-through gate that have been specifically provided for birders.

**Description:** These cement-lined evaporation ponds are the largest body of water for many miles in every direction. They act like a magnet for migrating waterbirds. The duck and shorebird list is impressive. Red Phalarope and Sabine's Gull have both been recorded here twice. Because many migrants often stop very briefly, it is sometimes productive to make more than one

trip to these ponds on a given day to check for new arrivals.

### **Cimarron NG Work Center**

*Location:* Local residents and birders who regularly visit the area know the facility as "the Work Center." It lies 2.5 miles north of Elkhart east of state highway 27. Birders may park at the entrance but must leave room for other vehicles to pass through the gates.

*Description:* The Work Center is the maintenance headquarters for the Forest Service ranching operations. The large plantings of junipers and pines provide refuge for many birds in winter and can attract migrants as well. Birders are welcome to walk around the buildings. Several records of Scrub Jay, Canyon and Green-tailed Towhees come from here. All the finch species have been seen here and large numbers of sparrows can be expected in winter. Townsend's Solitaires are normally present from September through April, and Curve-billed Thrashers sometimes reside here. The first Pyrrhuloxia for Kansas was found here in October 1989.

### **Middle Spring**

*Location:* Middle Spring is reached by turning west from state highway 27 about eight miles north of Elkhart and just north of the Cimarron River. Follow the winding road about two miles southwest. The road is well marked with signs.

*Description:* The willows and cottonwoods that line this small spring-fed stream create a classic migrant trap that has produced many rarities. A new foot trail around this area has enhanced access for birders. Flycatchers seem to be especially drawn to this location. Cassin's Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and western empids have all been seen here. A Great Kiskadee was at Middle Spring for about two weeks in late May 1995. This is a good place to look for rare warblers and sparrows.

### **Point of Rocks**

*Location:* Point of Rocks is about one mile west of Middle Spring.

*Description:* Point of Rocks is the most prominent outcropping of rocks in Morton County. A walk around the rimrock can occasionally produce good birds. Rock Wrens nest here and can be seen from April through October. The shrubs that cover the slopes and ravines are the place to look for elusive migrants such as Sage Thrasher, Green-tailed and Canyon Towhees, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and MacGillivray's Warbler. Greater Roadrunners have been seen here several times. The river below the point has also produced many rarities. Cassin's Kingbirds are regularly seen here during September. Point of Rocks is a good place to watch and listen for birds migrating overhead and along the Cimarron River corridor.

### **Boy Scout Area**

*Location:* This area is reached by turning east from state highway 27 about eight miles north of Elkhart just north of the Cimarron River. Follow the winding road northeast for 4.5 miles. An inconspicuous trail about a half mile east of the cattle guard on the main road leads down to the river, or one can continue on to where the road comes close to a fence, park the car, and walk.

*Description:* Nicknamed the "Boy Scout area" because of the large numbers of scouts that formerly gathered for camp-outs here, this section of the Cimarron River has long been a favorite of Kansas birders. The riparian habitat is some of the best in Morton County and this may be the most likely place to see Ladder-backed Woodpecker. A walk east along the north edge of the flood plain leads to a high soil embankment created by a meander of the river. Barn Owls reside in the many holes in the bank but may be difficult to see. Greater Roadrunner, Rock and Bewick's Wrens, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow have been

seen along the cliff and the first Canyon Wren for Kansas was found here in 1992. Mixed flocks of migrants often move through the underbrush; a good strategy is to follow the flock until all of the birds have been identified. Most of the passerines on the county checklist have been recorded here at least once.

### **Forest Service Campgrounds and Fishing Ponds**

*Locations:* The Point of Rocks Fishing Ponds are west of state highway 27 on the road to Middle Spring. The Cimarron Recreation Area and the Mallard and Wilburton Ponds are along the south river road east of state highway 27.

*Description:* All of these locations have water and cattails and afford birders the opportunity to look for waterfowl and marsh birds. Wintering Marsh Wrens can be expected.

### **River Crossings**

*Locations:* The Western Crossing is a low-water crossing two miles east of the Colorado line or about five miles southwest of Point of Rocks. The Cimarron River Picnic Area is just east of the state highway 27 bridge. The Wilburton Crossing is five miles north of Wilburton.

*Description:* All of these spots provide easy access to the Cimarron River and are good places to hike. The Western Crossing has few trees but can still be good in migration. Ash-throated Flycatchers have been nesting in boxes along the fence line south of the river for several years. The Cimarron River Picnic Area is accessible in all weather and leads to the head of Turkey Trail. The Wilburton Crossing is probably the best of the three for general birding.

### **North Fork**

*Location:* This birding area is reached by driving 14 miles north of Elkhart on

state highway 27 and then five miles west on a gravel road. From this point an unmaintained track leads north 1.5 miles to a dense stand of trees. Park by the windmill and walk north and west through the trees.

*Description:* This spot is not for everyone. The road can be very bad and is usually impassable in wet weather, and walking is difficult. However, this isolated riparian area has proven to be an excellent migrant trap through the years and may produce unusual birds at any season. The road leading west from state highway 27 often produces Long-billed Curlews. Mountain Plovers should be watched for in this part of the county.

### **Lesser Prairie-Chicken Blinds**

*Location:* The Forest Service places two observation blinds each spring for people to view prairie-chickens. The locations of the blinds may change year to year. Currently, one viewing area is reached by driving two miles north of Elkhart then 2.5 miles west. From this point drive north one mile, jog left at the windmill and then continue north for a short distance. An active lek is on the east side of the road here. The second viewing area is reached by driving a little more than three miles north of Wilburton, then turning east on a winding road for a little over a mile. An active lek is usually near the road here.

*Description:* Each blind is a portable wooden structure with bench seats and openings through which to view the prairie-chickens. It is best to arrive well before dawn to avoid disturbing birds on the lek. Photography opportunities are excellent from these blinds. Some birds normally return to these leks at sundown each day. Birders traveling to Cimarron NG specifically to see these birds should contact or visit the Forest Service office along U.S. 56 in Elkhart for current information.

## Part 5

# Managing Cimarron National Grassland

The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act identified a need for government presence in the grassland ecosystems of the United States. The Act created the basis for the national grassland system, but it does not determine the means for daily or even annual management actions. Specific management actions derive from clearly defined policies. These policies are determined through a process that includes professional planning within the Forest Service augmented by public review and comment. The results are published in a document that undergoes periodic review and revision. The review-revision process typically occurs at about 10-12 year intervals, but by law must be done by year 15. The policy document for guiding Cimarron NG management is the *Pike and San Isabel, Cimarron and Comanche Land Management Plan*. Approved in 1982, the document would normally be due for review and revision in 1997; but budget constraints will probably delay the process until 1998 or 1999.

Planning for resource management requires that all users and user groups who use the resource be identified. The multiple use concept fundamental to the USDA Forest Service mission then mandates that all uses be accommodated as productively as possible.

People use Cimarron NG primarily for livestock grazing, mineral extraction, research, education, and recreation. Five important factors collectively explain the high recreation value of Cimarron NG:

1. Cimarron NG accounts for approximately one third of all public land in Kansas.
2. Cimarron's expansiveness allows people to spread out from other recreationists.
3. Cimarron NG offers the largest, longest stretch of public land along the Santa Fe Historic Trail.
4. Diverse opportunities exist for both big game and small game hunting.
5. Being close to three major ecoregions enriches the bird life of Cimarron NG, and the nature of birding attracts birders to such areas.

These factors present certain recreation opportunities that create a regional appeal extending beyond the local communities. The geographic area encompassing southeastern Colorado, the Oklahoma panhandle, the Texas panhandle, and southwestern Kansas is sparsely populated but people from all over this area identify Cimarron NG as a recreation destination. Birders particularly target Cimarron NG as a destination because of its blended avifauna. This interest stimulates the local economy, a claim easily demonstrated by a real event. When the first Canyon Wren known to occur in Kansas was found along the Cimarron River in Cimarron NG, the sighting was reported to the Kansas rare bird hotline. Within days, birders were using local motels, restaurants, and gasoline stations. The bird stayed for five months, and local merchants came to appreciate the business generated by birds and birders.

Though hunting accounts for most recreational use on Cimarron NG, birding qualifies as the fastest growing recreation use in terms of popularity and numbers of visitors (Joe Hartman, personal communication). All these people, in pursuit of their chosen recreation, exert some pressure on resources and facilities. As interest in any given recreation grows, the pressure ex-

erted will necessarily increase, too. The demand for potable water, restrooms, camping sites, road maintenance, and other services requires attention from resource managers. Additional attention may also accrue from conflicts among users and user groups.

Conflict occurs when one set of interests interferes with another set of interests. Wildlife management, for example, creates some conflicts among user groups. Access to certain areas requires seasonal restrictions to protect breeding. Livestock grazing must be restricted at certain seasons to allow enough vegetation to recover for the next year's nesting cover. Livestock grazing presents ample opportunity for conflict, too. However, Cimarron NG benefits from negotiating with a single private grazing association. Sharing costs among affected user groups has also encouraged cooperative resolution of potential conflict. Assuming a gate that is too difficult to open won't get closed, the grazing association works to install gates that both open and close easily, which improves access across grazing allotments for everyone. Oil companies work with the Forest Service and grazing association to install cattle guards at heavily used fence crossings. Trespassing seldom causes problems at Cimarron NG. The public land is more consolidated with fewer private inholdings than most national grasslands, and good public roads reduce the need to cross private land to reach public land. Further, local people realize the economic benefits their communities derive from the birding public, so private landowners nearly always grant permission to courteous birders.

Because recreation figures so prominently in public use of Cimarron NG, appropriate attention has been devoted to the facilities essential to support that recre-

ation. Basic facilities such as improved roads, parking areas, restrooms, potable water, improved campsites, picnic tables, and trails not only enhance recreation experiences for people, but they also protect the public resources from over-use. Specifically, public interest in the Santa Fe Historical Trail and in birding prompted a complete recreation plan update in the early 1990s. Since then, the Forest Service built a recreation complex with a group-use site, picnic ground, and 14-unit campground with handicap access. The Cottonwood Picnic Area was then rebuilt. Middle Spring Picnic Area, which ties into the Santa Fe Historical Trail, was upgraded. The Forest Service put in restrooms, picnic tables, and a walking trail. The trail was installed largely because of birding traffic. It was needed for protecting the resource by concentrating birders and birding foot traffic out of the area that birds use and need. These improvements will take care of the main recreation needs into the future, though sanitation facilities are needed at the fishing ponds. According to Forest Service assessments, these recreation facilities are designed to accommodate increasing use and can handle approximately 50 percent more use than they now receive.

Cimarron NG lies far off the main traveled roads. Its finest features appeal to only a select portion of the American public. These points guarantee Cimarron NG will never attract the crowds so familiar at larger National Parks and National Forests. The birding public that does visit Cimarron NG has established a productive relationship with the Forest Service. The information gathered by birders and shared with the staff at Cimarron NG has enhanced the ability of the Forest Service to refine its resource management. Recreational birding has earned its niche in the management formula.

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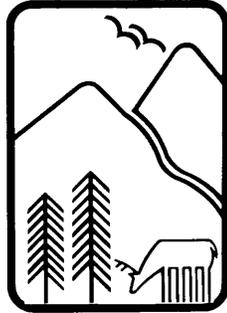
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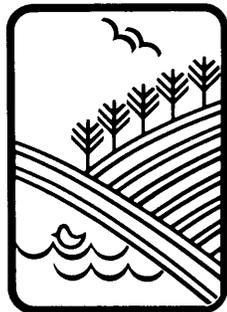
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## Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station

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Research programs at the Rocky Mountain Station are coordinated with area universities and with other institutions. Many studies are conducted on a cooperative basis to accelerate solutions to problems involving range, water, wildlife and fish habitat, human and community development, timber, recreation, protection, and multiresource evaluation.

### RESEARCH LOCATIONS

Research Work Units of the Rocky Mountain Station are operated in cooperation with universities in the following cities:

Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Flagstaff, Arizona  
Fort Collins, Colorado\*  
Laramie, Wyoming  
Lincoln, Nebraska  
Rapid City, South Dakota

\*Station Headquarters: 240 W. Prospect Rd., Fort Collins, CO 80526