

The background of the cover is a photograph of two shorebirds, likely sandpipers, standing in a shallow, wetland area. The birds have long, straight bills and mottled, brown and white feathers. They are positioned in the middle ground, with one bird in the foreground and another slightly behind it to the right. The water is calm, and the background shows a soft, out-of-focus horizon line.

**BIRDS** in

**northwestern Arkansas**

**an ecological perspective**

**Joseph C. Neal**

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Photograph of Joe Neal on back cover by Danny Jones during a NWAAS field trip to Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on May 10, 2009.

The author's bird images were collected during field trips in northwestern Arkansas (except for nighthawk, from the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma):

Hudsonian Godwit and Stilt Sandpiper during spring migration at University farm in Fayetteville (front cover); Great Horned Owl fledglings in same location (p. 2); Common Nighthawk in native prairie (p. 3); Baltimore Oriole nest on a windy winter day at Maysville (p. 4); Eastern Meadowlark nest with eggs at Wilson Springs in Fayetteville (p. 9); Marsh Wren in bur-marigold flowers at Lake Sequoyah (p. 80); fledgling Loggerhead Shrike near the state fish hatchery at Centerton (p. 86).



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## Introduction

This ecological perspective is a contemporary snapshot of timeless vitality connecting birds and people in northwestern Arkansas. We share a complex ecotone where forests of eastern North America intermingle with grasslands more typical of western North America. Inbetween flow many fine streams. It's a good place to see birds.



Over a century of bird data for northwestern Arkansas (nWAR) is summarized in the following pages. Core observations are from Washington and Benton counties, with many observations from Madison, Newton, Carroll, Boone, plus the Ozarks portions (as distinguished from the Arkansas River Valley portions) of Crawford, Franklin, and Johnson counties. This includes the western and northern border regions that Arkansas shares with Oklahoma and Missouri, extends eastward to include the upper and middle portions of the Buffalo National River and the Ozark National Forest (NF), and southward through the Boston Mountains section of the Ozark Plateaus north of the Arkansas River Valley.

The Prairie Region of nWAR formed on eroded remnants of the Springfield and Salem Plateaus and reflects ecological conditions of the Tallgrass Prairies. The Mountain Region formed primarily on the Boston Mountains and is exemplified by the Ozark NF. It expresses ecological conditions typical of the forests of eastern North America. The Urban Region is composed of towns and cities built on former prairies and includes the larger water impoundments.

We have a long history of bird studies. Howell (1911), Smith (1915), Wheeler (1924), Black (1935), Baerg (1931, 1951), James and Neal (1986), Neal and Mlodinow (1988) all included nWAR data. Baerg also utilized the field notes of Dean Crooks whose work in Benton County would otherwise have been largely unavailable.

Bird occurrence data includes thousands of individual records on index cards. Doug James and others have curated these data for Arkansas Audubon Society (AAS). Those files continue to expand. With

support from financial contributions from my long time friend Eleanor Lincoln Johnson of Fayetteville, and later the AAS Board of Directors, I worked with Richard Stauffacher of Fayetteville to have all bird records since the publication of *Arkansas Birds* (James and Neal 1986) entered into a database readily available on the web site maintained by Arkansas Audubon Society. Since 2002, the data in these files has been augmented by the lively, online birds of Arkansas discussion list set up and managed by Kimberly G. Smith of the UA-Fayetteville.

Winter bird distribution is annually sampled on Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), typically in mid to late December. Most of these data are drawn from the Urban Region. I have examined more than four decades of the Fayetteville CBC and consulted three other CBCs in western Arkansas. The Buffalo River (west) CBC in the Boxley-Ponca area of Newton County was conducted 1978-1987. There was a count at Siloam Springs in Benton County 1976-1983. Members of the Disorganized Bird Club initiated a count centered on the Crooked Creek valley at Harrison in Boone County starting December 19, 2001. It continues.

The five Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) consulted provide a snapshot of birds during June, the typical nesting season. Farms and forest are well mixed on two routes in Newton County: Compton and Lurton. In addition, these routes provide peeks at summer birds along the Buffalo National River. Forests (hardwood and shortleaf pine-hardwood) are sampled on the Ozark NF route (Johnson and Pope counties) and in the Boston Mountain route (Franklin County). Even though they are largely outside our specific geographical area, I considered these BBS routes because they broadly illuminate avian distribution and abundance in our

Forest Region. The BBS with the most open country is Avoca in Benton County. Avoca BBS has undergone vast change; it is at the epicenter of regional population growth.

Since northwestern Arkansas includes one of the largest national forests in the eastern US (Ozark NF), I make frequent references to forest management. The management of forests on both private and public lands is a complicated and sometimes contentious issue. In terms of how birds are affected by forest management, I have extensively drawn on the data presented in Thompson et al. (1995). No claim is made here that this is *precisely* what to expect in our Forest Region, but carefully collected data can be a rational departing point in discussions.

Starting in the 1990s, the USDA Forest Service undertook an extensive annual inventory of landbirds (La Sorte et al. 2007). Data for the southern US have been analyzed and presented for the period 1992-2004. These data include landbird point counts for the Ozark NF, quite useful in discussions about forest birds.

My views of the habitats used by birds in the western Arkansas Ozarks can be summarized as follows:

Almost all original, unplowed Tallgrass Prairie has been eliminated. The now much degraded (botanically-speaking) former prairies in this Prairie Region are extensive. Our Urban Region is constructed on land that was formerly Tallgrass Prairie. With the exception of a few small, protected remnants, “prairie” is today pasture, city, and highway. Given a little breathing space, these former prairies can be surprisingly resilient. Extensive non-native grasslands remain.

Water development projects have created habitats that did not exist here prior to the 1930s. Ponds, small lakes, and expansive reservoirs serve our Urban Region. They provide habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Protection of water quality has necessitated acquisition and protection of tens of thousands of acres of woodlands adjoining reservoirs.

Our Forest Region has been extensively logged. Maturing second growth forest occupies at least as many acres as it did historically. The expanse of the Ozark NF guarantees a good future for many bird species and provides abundant opportunities for birding.

Hardy native shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) forests were harvested early to build our cities. Due primarily to successful wildfire suppression and a lack of planned regeneration, predominantly

shortleaf pine stands have extensively reverted to predominantly hardwood stands growing up and dominating the remnant pines. Many pines planted today are non-native (to the Ozarks) loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*).

Modern folks in northwestern Arkansas would be surprised to learn that pine abundance is now only 15 to 53 percent of what was present in the mid-to late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Guyette et al. 2007). This habitat loss, including the loss of quality pine stands present in the western Ozarks in the past, has major impacts on bird species extensively dependent upon pine (Eddleman et al. 2007). The loss of pine forest habitat maintained in an open condition by fire impacts many wildlife species including birds, especially those that are ground-dwelling or ground-foraging (Masters 2007). Extensive second growth pine habitat is now localized in a few areas. These include the Ozark NF and the Beaver Lake area of eastern Benton, northern Madison, and Carroll counties.

The rugged nature of the Boston Mountains has hindered its economic development—a good thing for birds. The Ozark NF occupies much of the area—another good thing for birds. These forests are part of the vast Central Hardwoods region (Fitzgerald et al. 2002). The Central Hardwoods contains over 15% of the world’s nesting populations of Eastern Wood-Pewees, Acadian Flycatchers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Yellow-throated Warblers, Blue-winged Warblers, Prairie Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, and Summer Tanagers. The Central Hardwoods contain even higher percentages of the following: Worm-eating Warbler and Field Sparrow (20%), Kentucky Warbler (28%), and Whip-poor-will (35%).

In the 19th century, prairies in a floristic sense were still common here. Maps produced from compilations of historical sources illustrate nWAR’s chief prairie areas (James and Neal 1986: Fig. 3-2 and map included in Dale 1986). Civil War era prairies in Washington and Benton counties are presented as Figure 1 in Miller (1972) and for Benton County in a technical book from the 1890s (Simonds and Hopkins 1894). The Benton County book included descriptions of Osage Prairie (now Bentonville-Rogers-Centerton), Beatie Prairie (Maysville), Round Prairie (Cherokee City), Lindsley’s Prairie (Siloam Springs), as well as 5 smaller prairies, including one unnamed (Norwood Prairie on the Benton-Washington County line just west of the Wedington). Miller (1972: Figure 1) shows the extensive native grasslands in the Fayetteville area and in western Washington County generally. There were many other prairies in the area, such as Prairie

Township at Hindsville in Madison County, Baker Prairie in Boone County, plus the Civil War battlefields of Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove.

These prairies were diverse and included lowland prairie along the floodplains of streams. They were seasonally wet and provided natural marsh habitat. While the upland prairies were heavily modified for agriculture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hydric soils of the lowland prairies stalled development until recent years. The controversy in Fayetteville over the Wilson Springs property (between I-540 and Dean Solomon Road) during the period 1990-2004 was focused on (1) the fate of the former seasonally wet prairies bordering Clabber Creek, (2) the Arkansas Darter, a rare fish in spring runs flowing into Clabber Creek, and (3) a surprisingly diverse bird community, including Henslow's Sparrow (Mlodinow 2002, Neal and Radwell 2002).

One of our most productive birding places, the University Agriculture Experimental Farm in Fayetteville, is a former prairie. Even in 2008, fields and small woodlots there are graced with the legacy of obvious prairie mounds, though these are steadily disappearing. One grassy spot – you can just imagine 150 years ago it may have been a lek for Greater Prairie-Chickens—is occupied by a collection of farm equipment, some of it of antique vintage used to break the dense prairie sod, grade down the big mounds, and fill shallow depressions between. In another former prairie (state fish hatchery at Centerton), the entrance is marked by an antique grader that served the same purpose, leveling mounds to make way for pastures and towns.

Commercial development of former prairies in Fayetteville (alongside Clabber Creek and nearby property along Mud Creek) amounts to a last chapter in our natural history. Future generations will be shocked to learn that marsh-associated birds (rails, bitterns, several wetland sparrow species) once used habitats a stone's throw from I-540 and within sight of Northwest Arkansas Mall. For additional background on this controversy, see Wagner (2002a, 2002b).

On a more positive note, Woolsey Wet Prairie, wetlands mitigation associated with Fayetteville's westside wastewater treatment facility, has proven a good place to find many birds associated with open, virtually treeless grasslands and seasonal wetlands. Least Bitterns are found there during migration. Restoration and management efforts at Woolsey have been directed by the energies and enthusiasms of Bruce Shackelford of Environmental Consulting Operations, Inc.

The drumbeat of development in the Rogers-Bentonville-Lowell-Centerton area is a last chapter in the natural history of the Osage Prairie. This once extensive native grassland occupied at least 25-30 square miles. Fields of Indian grass and big bluestem grass are now covered with asphalt and manicured lawns. The 10 acres of the Searles Prairie Natural Area in Rogers provides mute witness to the past. Did anyone note the last Greater Prairie-Chicken?

On the other hand, former prairies and prairie woodlands within Pea Ridge National Military Park include examples of all the prairie types associated with northwestern Arkansas and the associated woodland and riparian habitats (Shugart and James 1973). Also included is an extensive warm season grass restoration associated with the Leetown battlefield. Proactive habitat management at Pea Ridge is designed to restore and maintain Civil War era vegetative conditions, a great thing for native birds and birders.

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Chesney Prairie and Baker Prairie Natural Areas), floristically-speaking, nWAR unplowed prairie habitat is lost. However, beyond the busy pace of the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers-Bentonville metro area, there are workable examples of (non-native) grasslands part of poultry and cattle farms that continue to attract many species of grassland birds.

Precious remaining acres of unplowed Tallgrass Prairie are exemplified by protection and restoration efforts underway at Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs (for example, see Gough 2007). Joe Woolbright, a Siloam Springs native and founder of Ozark Ecological Restoration, Inc., is reviving ecologically damaged portions of these protected areas while facilitating research and tours (Neal 2009). Chesney's native grasses have produced numerous interesting records of rare birds, including wintering Short-eared Owls. It is hard to imagine how we could understand the region's birdlife without Chesney as reference point, not to mention Woolbright's energetic, hands-on example of how to save and restore a now rare habitat.

Martha Milburn of Harrison generously provided a substantial donation in the ultimately successful effort to add 22 acres of unplowed native prairie to Chesney that were owned by the Couch family. She has also been active and generous in similar work in Harrison, including a land purchase to limit commercial development impacting Baker Prairie.

While some natural bird habitats have disappeared, others have been created. The bulk of the shorebird records come from the state fish hatchery at Centerton in Benton County. The C.B. "Charlie" Craig

hatchery was built in a wetland on the former Osage Prairie. Migrating shorebirds once paused to feed and rest in the shallow water and surrounding muddy fields of spring runs and temporary rain-fed ponds typical of poorly drained fields in the Springfield Plateau (Smith et al. 1991). Drained fishponds at the hatchery concentrate this effect, providing birds with quantities of soft-bodied prey. This spot is a magnet for birds and birders (Neal 2003). Unfortunately, the Urban Region is catching up and smothering this unique Important Bird Area.

There are no natural lakes in nWAR. However since the 1930s, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, Corps of Engineers, cities and towns, and private landowners have constructed ponds and reservoirs. Birders in the Harrison area frequently visit Bull Shoals, an impoundment of the White River whose dam was completed in 1951. In 1966, the Army Corps of Engineers created another impoundment of the White River behind Beaver Lake dam. Each impoundment provides habitats for water birds. Adjoining public lands provide habitat for forest birds. Impoundment construction has expanded our local bird list. For example, Dean Crooks and other early 20<sup>th</sup> century birders had no opportunity to see loons here. By contrast, three species of loons have now been reliably identified at Beaver Lake.

Free-flowing streams have been lost to dam projects, but others remain. Public areas like the Buffalo National River and Devil's Den State Park on Lee Creek combine forested stream bottomlands with hillside and hilltop forests conducive to forest-dwelling birds. The Buffalo River escaped live burial under a reservoir as a result of a citizen-lead fight against proposed dams. The epic story of conservation against long odds has been well told by Smith (1967), Compton (1992), Smith (2004), and others. A few cities in our area have enacted riparian zone protection ordinances that buffer negative impacts on streams associated with our Urban Region and also provide habitat for birds.

The Ozark NF provides maturing second growth oak-hickory forest that was heavily cut over during the logging boom of the late nineteenth century. Timber cutting today also results in early succession habitat for birds. In the 1990s, Chestnut-sided Warblers were discovered nesting in regenerating clearcuts of the Ozark NF.

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**Birds in northwestern Arkansas: an ecological perspective** includes every species of wild bird with reliable data available as of June 2009. Relatively

extreme dates of early arrival and late departure are listed, but the most likely time of finding them falls inbetween. Names and phlogenetic order follows that published by the American Ornithologists' Union in 1998 with amendments through July 2008 (the most current list is available on the AOU website). In most cases, I open the species accounts with an indication of the bird's **STATUS** followed by **DATES** of occurrence in nWAR. My choices are based upon my fieldwork, published sources, and data from the Arkansas Audubon Society file. In short, my conclusions are arbitrary. For example, there is nothing sacred about choosing the fourth week in October as a "late" date for catbird. They are never common here in late October and there are good records later than October 22. Changing global climate is resetting many such conclusions.

In the case of birds that have been found in all seasons, I refer to them as **residents**, though I don't mean to convey the idea that individuals present in summer are necessarily the same birds in winter. The species in question have been found in all seasons, though not necessarily the same birds.

**Transients** are birds that pass through, but are otherwise mainly absent. Birds that migrate into the area and are primarily present during the nesting season are **summer residents**. On the other hand, **winter residents** migrate into nWAR and remain during our cold months.

I have often used the term **local** to indicate that the bird does not seem to be widely distributed. Instead, the records I have in hand and my field experience indicate they are most likely found only in a few locales. They may be common or rare there. I am surprised to find them elsewhere.

I also have often included a statement about how numerous the bird appears to be when an observer visits appropriate habitat in the proper season. I have roughly followed general standards promoted by the American Birding Association and the Arkansas Audubon Society in its field lists:

A bird is **common** if it can be found most days in moderate or large numbers in appropriate habitat at the right time of year.

The term **fairly common** implies the bird is probably found on most field trips in appropriate habitat and season.

A bird is **uncommon** if it is harder to find, but still expected at times in appropriate habitat and season.

A **rare** bird is one that we usually find each year, but the numbers seen are low and it is a surprise, though not totally unexpected.

An **irregular** or **irruptive** species is one that has been found with frequency over the years, but it may not occur every year and numbers when present are highly variable.

Many species accounts include notations about Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) and Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). Consider this example involving Killdeer in winter: "The Fayetteville CBC mean was 47.1 (n=39, range 6-286)." The number of Killdeer is presented as the mean for all years considered. The number of years is then expressed as "n = 39." The last numbers represent the range of observations, from the lowest count, 6, to the highest count, 286.

This doesn't tell you how many Killdeer you are likely to see on a given day or in a given year, but it does provide some idea of what to expect at mid-winter in the Fayetteville area when parties of observers are out for the day. It tells you that Killdeer can be found basically all winters in appropriate habitat, but were much more common in years when 286 were seen than in years with 6. Data from the Breeding Bird Survey are presented in a similar way.

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Finally, let me mention briefly the careers of three ornithologists who make northwestern Arkansas their home and birds their business.

Much of what we know about our avifauna is directly attributable to the life work of ecologist, teacher, and mentor, Douglas A. James of the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, Department of Zoology (now Biological Sciences). Beginning in the early 1950s, Doug and others compiled an extensive card file of bird records for the state, including the Ozarks. This file served as the basis for a summary of the occurrence of birds in Arkansas (James and James 1964). These records, plus Doug's own research and that of his many students, formed the core of *Arkansas Birds* (James and Neal 1986). His former students populate natural resource management agencies in Arkansas and far beyond.

There are legions of Arkansans who first discovered the joy of birding and an interest in all aspects of natural history on a Doug James field trip. I count myself fortunate among them, now going on 30 years. Other than his obvious and numerous academic achievements, Doug's career is a unique and creative example of bringing together professionals and private citizens in positive efforts for environmental commonsense.

Kimberly G. Smith, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, Department of Biological Sciences, began his career as an ecologist with publication in the

prestigious journal *Ecology* of a ground-breaking study, "Distribution of summer birds along a forest moisture gradient in an Ozark watershed" (1977). More than 30 years and many ecology-oriented bird papers later, he is currently preparing the statewide atlas of Arkansas breeding birds, which includes blocks from throughout northwestern Arkansas. This extensive citizen-science project will advance our understanding of nesting birds and habitat characteristics in Arkansas. Simultaneously, he moderates the online Arkansas Birds (ARBIRD-L) discussion list, a popular social network.

Like Doug James, Kim has ridden herd over many graduate students, now adding their own unique contributions to the unfolding story of birds and people in nWAR and elsewhere.

The numerous contributions of records and data analysis by Chicago native Michael Mlodinow are obvious in the species accounts. He has certainly been our single most active field ornithologist since moving to Fayetteville in the early 1980s. He has published some of his analysis and contributed a huge number of observations available from Arkansas Audubon Society through its online database. He has used his skills and understanding of math and statistics to analyze much of his field data. Mike is the quintessential "patch birder." He systematically returns to the same spots (patches), birding them in a similar way each time. This allows him to make data-enriched assumptions about how frequent certain birds are in specific seasons and in specific habitats. Mike presently writes the seasonal review of bird records for *Arkansas Birds*, published by Arkansas Audubon Society.

Taken together, careers of these ornithologists provide a fair picture of just how complex and interesting a relationship we have with birds in northwestern Arkansas.

Mirroring the diversity among birds themselves, birders are a varied lot. Whoever we are, and whatever our interests, we are perpetual students, coming together in our bird studies. In this process, we learn a great deal about the planet and ourselves. I see **BIRDS in northwestern Arkansas: an ecological perspective** as an ongoing project, not an endpoint. It's a record of the past and a point of departure.

--Joseph C. Neal June 24, 2009





**Order *Anseriformes***  
**whistling-ducks, swans, geese, and ducks**

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna autumnalis***  
 STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: Primarily in fall, with one spring record.

Our initial Black-bellied Whistling-Duck record involved a single bird at Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove on November 11, 1994. Terry Stanfill observed and photographed two birds during the period late August to September 2003 and saw two again at about the same time in 2004. Both observations were at the same small pond near Gentry in Benton County. A single bird was present for at least several days at a large pond on U of A farm in Fayetteville during late September 2005. Mike Mlodinow called me after seeing the bird and I obtained images of it on September 24. The only spring record involved 13 identified by David Chapman at Lake Fayetteville on April 3, 2007.

**Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons***  
 STATUS: Uncommon but regular transient; DATES: February 22 to April 9+ and September 28 to November 17+.

White-fronted Geese overfly nwAR during the typical goose migration periods. They can be seen or heard overhead, often mixed with Snow Geese and other goose species. Flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese estimated at 200 to 240 birds were seen in two locations in Washington County on March 2, 1986. An estimated 500 in 5 flocks passed overhead on October 16, 1999. Numerous flocks

overflew nwAR on October 15, 2008, just ahead of the first cold front of the season.

There are a few records of low numbers of birds on recent Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts (peak of 6 in 2003). A few birds have both wintered and summered with domestic waterfowl.

**Snow Goose, *Chen caerulescens***  
 STATUS: Common and occasionally an abundant transient; much less common winter resident; DATES: October 5 to April 11+.

We see flocks of both the white and blue forms of the Snow Goose. Spring passages are associated with strong warm fronts, often in late February and early March. Wave after wave of birds, with flocks of hundreds or even thousands, are associated with huge cold fronts in November.

The distinctive gabbling can be heard as they pass overhead during migration. For example, on November 1, 2003, I was birding the perimeter of Razorback Park golf course in Fayetteville. From about 1:30-2:30 pm at least 19 separate flocks flew south. Each flock had 200-500 birds of both the blue and white forms. I estimated that I saw 10,500 geese fly over, give or take a few thousand, in that hour.

Lower numbers visit during winter. Small numbers (typically 5 or less) have been seen on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count; 72 in 1989 is exceptional. An estimated 900 birds (both white and blue) were present in fields near Maysville on January 20, 2007. A few birds have become more or less resident at lakes or ponds where they flock with domestic waterfowl.

**Ross's Goose, *Chen rossii***  
 STATUS: Very uncommon transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 10 to April 18+, with scattered observations throughout the year.

A single individual was observed regularly on a farm pond near Fayetteville between December 12, 1973, and April 18, 1974. A bird banded in Canada in 1979 was found dead on about October 27, 1983, on a pond near Springdale. Since 2001, 1-2 birds have become resident among a few Snow Geese and domestic geese and ducks at Lake Atalanta in Rogers. The 8 seen by Doug James at Centerton on March 4, 1992, were among 550 Snow Geese grazing in a pasture south of the hatchery. Four were associated with a flock of at least 900 Snow Geese at Maysville on January 20, 2007. There were 3-4 in a small mixed flock that included 5 goose species at Centerton on March 2, 2008. There are now many additional records of single birds at Centerton, the Vaughn area, and elsewhere.

### **Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii***

What we now call Cackling Goose was formerly classified as a small-bodied form of Canada Goose. Along with the larger Canadas, they have seen off and on over the years here during migration and winter.

After Cackling Goose was elevated to full species status in 2004, the first local record for *hutchinsii* involved two birds with Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese in a field at Centerton on March 12, 2005. Subsequently, there have been sightings in fall, winter, and spring. The birds made their first appearance on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count in December 2005: approximately 60 were loosely associated with a flock of 180 Canada Geese at the U of A farm for several weeks, including count day, December 18, 2005. Three were seen at the University farm on November 6, 2006. There have been additional sightings, including 40 in a mixed species flock at Centerton on March 2, 2008.

### **Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis***

STATUS: Common; DATES: Resident observed in all seasons on larger ponds and lakes.

Canadas have been found on the Fayetteville CBC most winters since the early 1960s, but not with regularity and in relatively high numbers until the mid to late 1980s. Numbers since that time have increased with the growth of resident flocks.

Most of these geese are presumably associated with birds that historically nested in central North America, primarily north of Arkansas (Giant Canada Goose Committee 1996). Breeding Canada Geese in this region were largely extirpated by around 1900. The comeback evident in nWAR is associated with wildlife management efforts that have included extensive releases of Canadas in both Missouri (1949-1991) and Arkansas (1970-1990). Birds in nWAR could have their origins in the releases by Arkansas Game & Fish Commission in the western Arkansas Rivey Valley. On Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts during the 1960s and 1970s, they were found in only 7 of 20 years and never more than 10 birds. Numbers have steadily climbed, with more than 300 on the Fayetteville CBC since the late 1990s and 2,075 on the 2000 count.

The sights and sounds of these large birds flying in formations over busy and rapidly growing nWAR are welcome, and for birders and nature enthusiasts generally, preferable to traffic noise and endless multiplications of parking lots and 24-hour superstores. On the other hand, fecal matter associated with growing flocks is a nuisance in places like golf courses.

### **Trumpeter Swan, *Cygnus buccinator***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter resident; recent records involve released birds and possibly their offspring.

Doug James and others identified one bird at Beaver Lake on February 10 & 14, 1991. Amy Davis reported two at Siloam Springs February 2, 2005; red collars on these birds indicated they were from an Iowa flock. Don Nelms photographed two birds on the Boxley mill pond in Newton

County on December 15, 2005, and 2-3 birds returned the following winter. Four adults and one cygnet were seen at Boxley by Jane Anderson on December 28, 2007; none of these birds had neck collars. It seems possible that some of these birds could be associated with Trumpeter Swans that now winter yearly at Magness Lake near Heber Springs in Cleburne County (Mosby 2002). Iowa-reared swans were released at Boxley in January 2008 (Massey 2008) and three had taken up residence on the pond as of fall 2008. There have been additional sightings in more places (e.g., Lake Harrison, Bob Kidd Lake, a large farm pond near Fayetteville), though all such sightings are complicated by the difficulty of reliably separating juveniles of Trumpeters and Tundras.

### **Tundra Swan, *Cygnus columbianus***

There are at least three records. Charlie Wooten identified three birds on the state fish hatchery ponds at Centerton November 19-29, 1981. Douglas James and Albert Flaig saw one on Beaver Lake February 10 & 14, 1991; it was associated with a Trumpeter Swan. The third and most recent observation began with Joanie Patterson and Donald Ouellette, who saw three swans on SWPECO Lake (Eagle Watch Nature Trail) near Gentry on December 18, 2008. Terry Stanfill (and subsequently others) photographed these birds. The three swans were seen off and on by many observers through at least January 2009.

### **Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa***

STATUS: Common in summer, very uncommon in winter; DATES: Resident that has been observed in all seasons.

Wood Ducks occur along the larger streams and swampy, forested sections of impoundments. They have been seen in every month, but are scarce especially during the coldest months of winter, December and January.

They begin to return to northwestern Arkansas during warming trends, mid- February and the first half of March. I saw at least 35 birds flying to roost along the Illinois River in Benton County on March 8, 2007. Since they are cavity nesters, they can be found along rivers and ponds where there are mature trees with natural cavities. I see Wood Ducks annually in early June on Boxley mill pond in Newton County. Often there are 2 or 3 broods of ducklings, escorted by adults, and easily seen from the highway, at least when you first drive up.

Especially high numbers may congregate on lakes during October and November before fall migration. Rarity of Wood Ducks at midwinter is supported by data from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count where it has been found on only 7 of 40 counts, with a peak of 5 in 1977. There was also only a single Wood Duck reported on the Siloam Springs CBC (1979).

### **Gadwall, *Anas strepera***

STATUS: Common winter resident; DATES: August 22 to May 2+.

Gadwalls are abundant migrants and winter residents appearing on almost any pond or reservoir where there is shallow water with emergent vegetation. They are

one of the most common and widespread ducks present in winter here. A few individuals are among the early dabbling ducks that reach nwAR (often by early September), but we don't typically find big flocks until October: approximately 375 at Lake Sequoyah on October 23, 2005, indicated a major migration influx. There were 397 at Lake Fayetteville on November 11, 1995.

Numbers reported on Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville were low until the 1970s, but have increased thereafter, with several counts involving 300+. The Fayetteville CBC mean was 75.0 (n=39, range 0-362).

Gadwalls remain among the most numerous of ducks in nwAR at least until the end of March. There were approximately 400 at Centerton on March 9, 2003, and 300 there as late as March 30, 2004. These records reflect migration peaks. Some birds linger: two males and two females were at Lake Elmdale on June 6, 1992.

#### **American Wigeon, *Anas americana***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 12 to May 15+.

American Wigeons are regular transients and fairly regular winter residents in nwAR, though the number of birds involved never is very high. Since 1961, we have found them on about three-fourths of Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts: the CBC mean is 9.3. However, since the early 1990s, peak counts on the CBC have included 52 (1998), 55 (2002) and 57 (2004). These are considerably higher than counts in the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Kimberly G. Smith noticed that wigeons frequently were present on ponds at the Paradise Valley Country Club within the Fayetteville CBC circle, making it a good place to visit on count day.

Wigeons declined in the early 1980s (3.5 to 1.8 million) during a widescale drought in the prairies where they nest. Subsequently the population steadily increased to over 3.1 million by 1997, owing to improved habitat conditions during the mid-1990s in western North America and a continued expansion of the breeding range eastward (Mowbray 1999).

#### **American Black Duck, *Anas rubripes***

There are a total of seven reports between October 29 and March 3. All but one observation for this species--whose population has been in decline for several decades--occurred prior to 1963. In addition, there are several observations in nwAR of hybrids with black duck and Mallard characteristics. Mike Mlodinow has observed several of these hybrids at Centerton and I saw one associated with Gadwalls on a farm pond near Siloam Springs on November 20, 2008.

#### **Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; uncommon summer resident; DATES: present in all seasons.

Mallards are among the most common and widespread of the waterfowl in nwAR. They are often present

in high numbers at mid-winter and can be seen standing on ice in severe weather.

Most Mallards depart western Arkansas during spring (typically during mid to late March) for breeding areas to the north, but some nest. Whether these nesting birds are "truly wild" greenheads (that remain behind after the usual migration period) or alternatively, are at least partially domesticated, is a popular topic for animated discussion among local birders.

Overall, Mallard population levels are highest between October and March. They are scattered around all kinds of lakes and farm ponds as long as the weather is mild. Mallards seem to tolerate all kinds of weather, but during long spells of ice and snow, they concentrate in a few places with open water. Here, they can be seen standing on ice, waiting their opportunity to forage in small openings. Kimberly G. Smith and I saw 180 standing on ice at the former Lake Francis on December 27, 1983. There were 920 at Bob Kidd Lake December 25, 1990. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean is 151.9 (n=39, range 0-404).

Very few of the sizeable population present here in March remain to summer. I personally assume they are at least partially domesticated, rather than being "pure" wild birds. Whatever their status, they nest here on an annual basis and we see broods each year in places like the state fish hatchery at Centerton.

#### **Blue-winged Teal, *Anas discors***

STATUS: Common transient; rare summer resident; DATES: July 8 to November 28+ and February 20 to May 14+.

Blue-winged Teal are the first "puddle ducks" to reach northern Arkansas during their southward migration in July. Mudflats, ponds, and open areas along streams provide suitable habitat. Single birds or perhaps a few more may drift into nwAR during July, but we don't typically find flocks until mid-August. They become very common after late August or early September. The approximately 175 at Centerton on August 25, 2007, indicated a big influx as did the estimated 480 on mudflats at Lake Sequoyah on September 10, 1989. Most depart to the south upon the arrival of freezing weather in late fall, but there are occasional sightings into December.

Moderating weather in March includes the return of Blue-winged Teals, as they head north. We see flocks of these transients from about mid-March to the last of April or early May. Mike Mlodinow and I counted 60 at Centerton on March 26, 2006. I counted at least 130 in a flooded former prairie field at Siloam Springs April 10, 2008. The 40 seen at Centerton on May 1, 2004, was a high number so late in the migration period.

The bulk of the breeding range for Blue-winged Teal lies just to the north and west of nwAR (including parts of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma), and there is also a nesting population to the southwest (Rohwer et al. 2002). Therefore, it's not altogether a shock that Blue-winged Teal nest here on occasion. An adult female with 10-12 ducklings was at Centerton July 6, 1993. Bruce Shackleford photographed 2 adult females and 18 half-grown ducklings at

Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville on June 24, 2008. There are additional late May and June observations that might involve nesting.

**Cinnamon Teal, *Anas cyanoptera***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: February 21-May 12

This common bird of the West is a rare transient here with 7 spring records. All observations involved 1-4 birds.

**Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata***

STATUS: Common transient, fairly common winter resident; DATES: August 23 to May 25+.

Shovelers are dabbling ducks that prefer the more shallow areas of the larger lakes and farm ponds in our former prairie region. They use their specialized bill to strain food (like small invertebrates) from the surface water.

Shovelers are among the earliest arriving of the transient ducks in nwAR. During fall, small numbers can be observed during the first half of September, with the first flocks by early October. For example, the 20 shovelers at Centerton on October 2, 2004, were that season's first flock. Shoveler numbers pick up in early November. During a big mixed-species waterfowl influx on November 7, 2003, Mike Mlodinow and I counted 71 at Bob Kidd Lake, 50 at Centerton, and at least 10 on Lake Fayetteville.

During winter they can often be found during mild weather, but the numbers are usually lower than during migration. As is the case with many duck species, habitat conservation and improvement on northern breeding grounds have led to increases in numbers reaching northwestern Arkansas. This is reflected on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Shoveler numbers were very low during the 1960s-1980s, with none many years at mid-winter. During the 1990s, numbers increased dramatically, with shovelers almost always found, and some peak counts reaching 94-95 birds by the late 1990s. A total of 337 were on ponds at Fayetteville's Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment plant on December 6, 1997. There were at least 35 shovelers on the Siloam Springs City Lake on January 18, 2009, when the lake was drawn down to very low levels.

The 22 at Centerton on April 16, 2005, was a good spring count. There are several observations of 1-3 birds in June.

**Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and somewhat rare winter resident; DATES: August 22 to April 14.

We generally see few pintails in nwAR. They occur regularly in higher numbers in flooded wetlands and extensive agricultural fields of the Arkansas River valley, immediately south of nwAR. This extensive flooded field habitat is largely lacking in the western Ozarks. Our sightings typically involve low numbers, often in the range of 1-5 (there is an older record of 76 on Lake Fayetteville in the first half of February). Since 1961, pintails have been found in only 10 years of the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Peaks include 12 (1969) and 8 (1983).

**Green-winged Teal, *Anas crecca***

STATUS: Common transient, fairly common winter resident; DATES: August 20 to April 18+.

There is an overlap in the migrations of our two common teal, green-winged and blue-winged. Blue-winged arrive first and typically depart before real cold weather. Green-winged remain and are therefore the usual wintering teal in nwAR. Both teal species occur in similar habitats in the fall, before winter. We find both in the shallows of farm ponds, the fish ponds at Centerton hatchery, swampy shallows of lakes, and even shallow pools along rivers. The females of the two teal species look enough alike that when we spot them well blended with shorelines we have to spend some time studying the subtle plumage differences to come up with correct identifications. Of course, the males of the two species are clearly marked and the elegant plumage of male Green-winged Teals rivals that of the more famously attired male Wood Ducks.

Since the early 1960s, Green-winged Teals have been reported on about half of Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts, with a few CBC records of over 30; the big peak was in 2006, when 102 were found within the count circle. At Lake Sequoyah in Fayetteville, 153 were counted on December 3, 1989. Green-winged Teal can be observed here through the early part of spring. The 25 (including males and females) that Richard Stauffacher and I observed at Centerton on March 16, 2002, marked a peak in the northward migration. There are several May and June records of single birds.

**Canvasback, *Aythya valisineria***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and winter resident; DATES: October 26 to May 2.

Canvasbacks migrate through and generally overwinter in western Arkansas on an annual basis. Many sightings involve just a few birds and occasionally as many as a dozen or so. Doug James made a good count of 14 at Hiwasse in Benton County on January 2, 1997.

Canvasbacks have been found on 28 of 47 recent CBCs at Fayetteville. At least seven birds were counted in 10 years, but they were completely missed (0 found) on 18. The peak counts (30 in 1969 and 81 in 1976) both occurred before the breeding population went through a period of very low numbers. This population low between 1982 and 1995 resulted in Canvasbacks being placed on various "blue lists" for species of concern (Mowbray 2002).

In recent years we have seen Canvasbacks at a spring fed pond along highway 102 in Centerton. I saw 12 birds there on January 26, 2009. In winter, Canvasbacks dive for preferred foods like the tubers of submerged plants (Mowbray 2002). Presumably, this and similar ponds, host such preferred foods.

**Redhead, *Aythya americana***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and very uncommon winter resident; DATES: October 26 to April 19+.

Redheads are never truly common in nWAR, with most observations involving just a few birds. But we do experience occasional fall migration peaks. Mike Mlodinow and Jennifer Russell counted 64 at Centerton on November 1, 1996. The 42 Redheads at Bob Kidd Lake on November 7, 2003, were part of an enormous raft of waterfowl that included approximately 2,000 diving duck species; there were at least 20 Redheads at Lake Fayetteville on the same day.

The highest number reported for the winter season was 31 at Lake Elmdale on December 12, 1993. Redheads show up in low numbers on about half of Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts; the peak was 26 in 1993. There are only scattered sightings after mid-March. There is also one extra-seasonal observation.

### **Ring-necked Duck, *Aythya collaris***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 13 to May 4+.

These handsome birds arrive with fall cold fronts, often in late October and early November. A total of 266 Ring-necked Ducks were on ponds at Fayetteville's Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment plant on November 26, 1995. This marked a big fall influx. Ring-necked Ducks prefer larger ponds and shallow lakes with emergent or submergent plants. They dive for plant foods, primarily seeds and below-ground plant parts (Hohman and Eberhardt 1998).

They have been found most years during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Low numbers during the 1970s and early 1980s improved considerably during the 1990s, with a peak of 273 in 1995. Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman counted 337 at Lake Wedington on December 30, 1995.

We still find relatively high numbers through March. The day's total for birding at Lake Elmdale, Lake Fayetteville and hatchery ponds at Centerton was 96 for March 27, 1983. There were still 187 at Lake Elmdale on March 13, 1994. Numbers are declining sharply by April: 6 at Centerton on April 15, 2007, was a relatively high count so late in the season.

### **Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila***

STATUS: Uncommon to somewhat rare transient and winter resident; DATES: October 28 to April 7+.

In my first "stab" at a useful annotated bird list for nWAR (Neal 1983), I didn't even mention Greater Scaup because then there were zero records for it here and I had no experience in distinguishing the two scaup species. Slowly, we began to accumulate reliable observations, a credit to the experience of others with sufficient field identification skills who realized they had been missed (Neal and Mlodinow 1988). Since the mid-1980s, we have steadily accumulated sightings. It is now clear that low numbers (often 1-2) regularly stop on larger lakes and ponds.

Separating the two species provides much entertainment, of a serious nature, for nWAR's birders during migration and winter. The serious part involves the fact that there is apparently a long-term

rangewide decline of Greater Scaup: "At a distance, Greater Scaup are often indistinguishable from Lesser Scaup, and their similarity is a major challenge to waterfowl managers, who require accurate population information for each species to set harvest limits and develop management policies. Unfortunately, because of identification difficulties, the 2 species are combined during aerial (and most ground) population surveys, so changes in populations of either species are obscured—especially those of Greater Scaup, whose numbers are overwhelmed by the more abundant Lesser Scaup" (Kessel et al. 2002).

Lake Atalanta in Rogers has been a relatively reliable spot for Greater Scaup observations. A flock of up to eight spent much of the winter, observed from December 1985 to mid-March 1986; nine were there January 21, 1989. Eight Greater Scaup were identified at a 10-acre floodwater retention structure in Bentonville (bounded by SE 17<sup>th</sup> and Phyllis, just off Moberly Manor Drive) on February 11, 2007; 6 were there on December 1, 2007, and 25 on March 2, 2008. Mike Mlodinow counted 28 at Beaver Lake Dam State Park on March 17, 1990. There have been reports of 1-4 birds on seven Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since 1991 (half of the counts), and additional reports from lakes and larger ponds. There is a very late observation for May 12, 2007, at Centerton.

The difficulty in separating the two scaup species, especially at distance or under harsh weather conditions, certainly contributes to the relatively few records. For example, on November 7, 2003, during a huge surge of migrating waterfowl, a single female Greater was identified on Bob Kidd Lake and a single male on Lake Fayetteville—but one must wonder if there were others among the high numbers of Lesser Scaups present on the same lakes (see below). It's easy to see why, in looking at masses of migrating scaup at distance and bobbing in rafts, we would prefer a very good view, a fine spotting scope, and a world of patience, to reliably separate the species. It's possible to see and study the interesting and subtle physical differences in more intimate settings.

### **Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis***

STATUS: Common and sometimes abundant transient and usually common winter resident; DATES: October 13 to May 9+.

This is the common scaup we see in western Arkansas. The huge raft of Lesser Scaup estimated at 1,500 on Bob Kidd Lake November 7, 2003, indicated a big fall influx. At least 200 were at Lake Fayetteville on the same day. Such large flocks of scaups and other duck species are seen regularly during the fall migration.

Lesser scaups have been reported on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts, with highest numbers in the 1990s, including 212 in 1991 and 108 in 1995. Since 1961, we have recorded 10 or fewer Lesser Scaup on 17 counts, including 5 counts when we found none.

The 228 at Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment plant on March 23, 1995, also indicated a spring peak, as did 80 on April 14, 2007, at Lake Fayetteville. There are several summer observations of up to 4 birds.

**Surf Scoter, *Melanitta perspicillata***

STATUS: Rare transient, primarily in fall; DATES: October 11-November 26 and April 14.

The first scoter of any species I ever saw was at Lake Fayetteville on a typically stormy second week in November. It was a big dark duck out in the middle of the lake with what appeared to be two white patches on the side of its head. According to Peterson, nothing but a female scoter fit the pattern, but I had no experience with scoters and besides, I said to myself, it couldn't be a scoter, because 25 years ago we had almost no Arkansas records for any kind of scoters. But Surf Scoter it was (November 10, 1981). A second one appeared 10 days later. I found another one at Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove, November 19, 1983. Again, it was a stormy day, this time with wind and rain. My observations and note taking (for a documentation form) were made while squatting under an umbrella on the dam: umbrella held in one hand, the other attempting to keep in focus a diving bird, and trying to stay warm and dry in the excitement.

We have seen a few Surf Scoters most falls since. Most of our observations have involved 1-2 birds. There were 6 at Bob Kidd Lake on October 27, 1990. David Chapman found a male at Lake Fayetteville on April 14, 2007.

**White-winged Scoter, *Melanitta fusca***

STATUS: Rare fall transient; DATES: November 5-December 9.

Four records. Mike Mlodinow found 2 immatures on December 9, 1994, and 1 immature on November 5, 2000, both at Bob Kidd Lake. Jason Luscier and others found an adult at Centerton on November 9, 2003, and the bird was seen as late as November 16. A single bird was seen during a Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trip to Bob Kidd Lake November 5, 2006.

**Black Scoter, *Melanitta nigra***

One record. Mike Mlodinow, with Paige and Mary Bess Mulhollan, observed a male Black Scoter at Centerton on November 10, 2006. Mary Bess Mulhollan took photographs. This bird was still present on the following day.

**Long-tailed Duck, *Clangula hyemalis***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 16-March 17.

Most observations involve single birds, or occasionally two, and many sightings occur during December. Four were found on Lake Fayetteville on December 16, 1979, and five were there January 27, 1980. Overall, Long-tailed Duck has been found on only 4 Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts dating back to 1961. Sightings have been widely scattered, primarily on larger bodies of water (Beaver Lake, Bull Shoals, Lake Fayetteville, Lake Atalanta, etc), but also on a big settling pond at Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment

plant in Fayetteville and on a fish pond at Centerton. Single birds I saw from several places on Beaver Lake in early 2009 (January 9-February 19) were loosely associated with Common Goldeneyes.

**Bufflehead, *Bucephala albeola***

STATUS: Common migrant and winter resident; DATES: October 26 to April 24+.

Migrating Buffleheads arrive in nWAR from their northern breeding grounds typically from the second week in November and thereafter, with a big peak in numbers during mid to late November. An estimated 200 were present on Bob Kidd Lake November 7, 2003, and at least 100 on Lake Fayetteville the same day. An amazing 400+ were observed at Lake Fayetteville on November 13, 1997. Buffleheads visit all kinds of larger ponds and lakes during fall and spring migration.

Flocks of a dozen or more birds remain throughout most winters. A small flock spent the winter of 2008-2009 at the Centerton fish hatchery. Buffleheads, however, were absent during the severe cold of December 1983-January 1984, returning again with milder weather. They have been observed most years during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, with peaks exceeding 100 birds during the 1990s. A few extra-seasonal records involved an apparently injured bird.

**Common Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula***

STATUS: Fairly common and widespread migrant in low numbers on larger impoundments and fairly common locally in winter, especially at Beaver Lake; DATES: November 14 to April 18.

Goldeneyes are seen during migration on all kinds of lakes and on occasion, even ponds. By mid-winter we are most likely to find goldeneyes only on the larger lakes and especially Beaver Lake. The only large flocks have been reported on Beaver Lake, where 40 or more birds have been seen on many occasions at mid-winter. The total was 206 seen from Beaver Lake Dam State Park on December 26, 1989. I counted 130 in a cove from the Lost Bridge North Park on Beaver Lake January 7, 2008. Goldeneyes have been found on about half of Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts, with a peak of 30 in 1975. At Siloam Springs, the peak was 33 on the 1981 CBC.

**Hooded Merganser, *Lophodytes cucullatus***

STATUS: Fairly common migrant, uncommon winter resident; rare during nesting season; DATES: observed in all seasons, but primarily October-February.

We find Hooded Mergansers on all kinds of ponds, lakes, and rivers, mainly during migration and winter. There were 31 at Fayetteville's Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment plant pond on November 11, 2003, an indication of the fall influx. During a major duck migration, 15 were at Bob Kidd Lake and 30 at Lake Fayetteville, both on November 11, 2004.

Hooded Mergansers were observed irregularly during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count until the late

1990s. Since then, they have been reported on most counts and in higher numbers. The 21 found on the 2005 Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count was a peak; Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman counted approximately 65 in the same area on the following day. These high numbers could be a result of the extremely mild weather through December 2005, allowing them to winter further north and in higher numbers than they typically do.

There are also approximately a dozen summer records of juveniles or occasional adults (on ponds at Centerton, but also elsewhere) and an adult female with young on Beaver Lake. Seven were found at Lake Fayetteville May 31, 1992, and an adult female was there on May 26, 2005.

#### **Common Merganser, *Mergus merganser***

STATUS: Somewhat rare transient and winter visitor in low numbers; DATES: October 26 to April 18.

Common Merganser's rarity in nWAR is indicated by the fact that it has been found on only 7 Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts. The highest number recorded was 11 birds in 1963. Common Mergansers were found on the Siloam Springs CBC in 1979 (7) and 1981 (2). On December 26, 1989, 27 were counted from Beaver Lake State Park in Carroll County. The 4-5 birds found on December 14, 2003, on Lake Sequoyah remained until at least February 14, 2004.

#### **Red-breasted Merganser, *Mergus serrator***

STATUS: Uncommon transient, very rare winter visitor; DATES: November 1 to May 28+.

Red-breasted Mergansers regularly appear in nWAR with the advent of real cold weather. They usually remain on our wooded lakes for a few days before continuing south toward the coast, where most are found during winter. During fall, this involves mid-November and thereafter, often during the same period when other migrating diving ducks (scaup, redheads, etc) are present on larger impoundments. Most observations of Red-breasted Mergansers involve small flocks of a few birds up to seven or so. Mike Mlodinow saw 7 at Beaver Lake dam on November 3, 1991. I saw 14 on Lake Fayetteville November 23, 1983. These observations provide an indication of the migration peak through nWAR. There are only scattered sightings of single birds after the fall migration.

Prior to 2005, the only Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count record was one bird in 1982. On December 18, 2005, Kim Smith and his Fayetteville CBC party counted 21 on a large pond. Written documentation was provided for this unusual winter record. There were also Hooded Mergansers on the same pond. There are a few other winter season records of single birds.

There are several records of small flocks around mid-April indicative of the northward migration period. For example, there were 12 on Lake Frances (now drained) on April 15, 1984. Mike Mlodinow and I saw 6 at Lake Fayetteville on April 15, 2007. JoAnne Rife saw 6 at Lake Bull Shoals on April 16, 1991. There is also a June-July record at Centerton.

#### **Ruddy Duck, *Oxyura jamaicensis***

STATUS: Common fall transient and relatively uncommon spring transient; uncommon winter resident; DATES: October 7 to May 15+.

Flocks of up to two dozen birds are not unusual at Lake Fayetteville after the arrival of big cold fronts in November. The fall migration in 2003 was just amazing. An estimated 360 Ruddy Ducks were at Bob Kidd Lake November 7, 2003, and an astounding 1,200 at Lake Fayetteville on the same day.

Most Ruddy Ducks depart nWAR by early winter, but at least a few remain most years. They are found on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts, but the number observed is almost always fewer than 10; the 86 counted in 1997 was a peak. Historical data maintained by National Audubon Society shows that the principal mid-winter distribution in the state is in eastern Arkansas on the Mississippi Alluvial Plain and to the south.

The spring migration period seems to involve numbers like those present in the winter, with little noticeable influx. There are also a few summer season observations of single birds.

### **Order Galliformes grouse, turkey, and quail**

#### **Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus***

STATUS: Extirpated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but more recently subject to a reintroduction effort that appears to have failed.

The 19th Century pioneer literature of northwest Arkansas included references to this "wood hen" (see, for example, Neal 1958 and Donat 1974:12). This population seems to have been extirpated by around 1900. Professor F. L. Harvey of the University of Arkansas considered it very scarce in the Fayetteville area in 1883 (Howell 1911).

During the 1980s, wild-trapped birds from other regions of North America were released near Ponca in Newton County and near Hagarville in Johnson County in an attempt to establish a wild population on the Buffalo National River and Ozark National Forest (Arkansas Game & Fish data). Unlike wild turkey reintroductions, this effort hasn't flourished and Arkansas Game & Fish has largely abandoned this effort. It's possible a few birds remain somewhere in the Ozark National Forest (M. Widner, personal communication, 1/25/08).

#### **Greater Prairie-Chicken, *Tympanuchus cupido***

Extirpated from Arkansas. In the 19th Century, prairie-chickens were resident in the open grasslands of western Arkansas (Ellis 1957, Neal 1958). They disappeared early. Albert Lano (1921) was greatly surprised when a bird was killed west of Fayetteville in 1919. Dean Crooks reported the last one from northwest Arkansas (Baerg 1951), undoubtedly from the native (before fescue) grasslands of Benton County. This loss undoubtedly resulted from unregulated hunting plus conversion of its grassland habitat

to the production of wheat, a crop that covered as many as 100,000 acres in northwest Arkansas during the period 1870 to 1920 (see also discussion in Smith and Petit 1988:34). Flocks can still be seen on preserved prairie remnants in the Missouri Ozarks (Wilson 1984; Jacobs and Wilson 1997:93) and in eastern Oklahoma in places like the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska in Osage County (Reinking 2004).

**Wild Turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo***

STATUS: Fairly common local resident in extensively forested areas; DATES: all year.

The original turkey population was greatly reduced by unregulated hunting, forest clearing, and widespread fire suppression that degraded remaining habitat (Widner 1998). In a major effort by Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, the all but extirpated local population was augmented by releases starting in 1932. The release of wild birds trapped in southeastern Arkansas since the 1950s (James, et al. 1983) has successfully restored turkeys on public lands and elsewhere with suitable habitat. Releases have been concentrated on public lands, like the Ozark National Forest, where bird densities are in the range of 6-15 per square mile (Widner 1998:44). Doug James and his students found 3 flocks totaling 109 birds between Boxley and Ponca in Newton County on December 4, 1998. There were 9 turkeys on the Crooked Creek Christmas Bird Count in 2001.

Groups like the National Wild Turkey Federation urge the use of prescribed burning to improve habitat for this bird, as well as other animals and plants that flourish in habitats shaped in part by fire.

**Northern Bobwhite, *Colinus virginianus***

STATUS: Now absent from many grassland habitats where it was once common; locally common only where suitable habitat persists; DATES: all year.

Bobwhites have radically declined throughout the western Ozarks, largely as a result of habitat loss and widespread fire suppression. They are still fairly common locally in extensive grasslands, abandoned pastures, forest edge, and similar habitat, such as in the native and non-native grassland in and around Chesney Prairie and Baker Prairie Natural Areas. They are rare and basically extirpated from the expanding urban corridor between Fayetteville and Bentonville.

Winter coveys of bobwhites were once abundant on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Totals of over 100 birds were frequent into the mid-1990s (1994=109, 1995=45), but plunged to 0 on some counts thereafter. The proximate cause is rapid human population growth and consequent radical habitat change within the Fayetteville CBC circle. But it's not just "growth" that has reduced bobwhites. Even in the countryside where farms rather than freeways are the norm, bobwhite numbers are depressed. Bobwhites are still reported in on the Crooked Creek CBC in Boone County (20-29 birds for the period of 2002-2004).

The Compton Breeding Bird Survey route in Newton County covers a broad range of habitats once very

bobwhite-friendly, including small farms, extensive grasslands, and much forest edge habitat. Between the late 1960s and late 1980s, bobwhite tallies on the Compton survey often ranged 20-30 birds, with a peak of 45 in 1967. Numbers have plunged since the early 1990s, with no counts exceeding 12 birds. The widespread practice of clean fencerows isn't suitable for bobwhites and other native species requiring cover and travel corridors. As in the case of turkeys, fire that once helped shaped brushy, open habitats with suitable food plants, including open, park-like pine and hardwood forests, is now largely absent, even in rural areas where small fires were frequent in the past. The best remaining habitats involve the still extensive grasslands of former prairies.

In their study at Pea Ridge, Shugart and James (1973: Table 1) found bobwhites across a range of grassy early succession habitats, with peak numbers in woody field and forest edge plots. Masters (2007, figures 3 and 4) shows how restricted habitat available to bobwhites is in forests with and without fire. The difference is huge, with only a modest amount of available habitat in forests protected from fire (as are most forests in nwAR) compared to expansive habitat in forests that are open and park-like as a result of frequent fire.

The take home message is clear. If we want bobwhites, we must restore fire and native grasslands to our ecosystems in nwAR.

**Order Gaviiformes  
loons**

**Pacific Loon, *Gavia pacifica***

Two records. Charles Mills identified one near the dam site on Beaver Lake in Carroll County on November 21, 1991. We found a single bird in the Rocky Branch area of Beaver December 29, 2002, and it was observed in the same area as late as March 2, 2003. On the last date we had wonderful views as it flew across the water relatively close to us and near a Common Loon. Compared to the Common Loon, the Pacific exhibited faster wing beats and was obviously smaller.

**Common Loon, *Gavia immer***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and winter resident overall, but locally common in low numbers at Beaver Lake; DATES: September 7 to May 20+.

Common Loons are typically observed on the bigger reservoirs with deep water, but are also seen during migration on small lakes and even larger ponds. They are never truly common in northwestern Arkansas, but they are present regularly in low number during migration and winter. Rob Dobbs saw a single bird at Lake Wedington on the very early fall date of September 7, 1993. Overall, we see few loons until big cold fronts in the second half of October into November. The fall migration in 2003 produced some relatively high numbers. At least 10 were present on Bob Kidd Lake on November 11 and at least 12 on Lake Fayetteville the same day. A group of us visiting Beaver Lake counted 11 off



Rocky Branch and Twin Coves on November 10, 2007. These observations reflect peaks in the southward fall migration.

We observe many fewer loons during winter. Records are sparse on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: 1968(1), 1979(1), 1985(1), and 1998(2). We make a few mid-winter trips each year to Beaver Lake in search of deep water birds like loons. Often, we find a few visible from the area around Rocky Branch and other Corps of Engineers parks on the lake's lower end (e.g., dam site park, Indian Creek). However, the numbers seen are low. In their visits to Table Rock Lake, JoAnne and Earl Rife found loons regularly in Long Creek Arm of Table Rock Lake, at mouth of Cricket Creek, near Cricket Creek Boat Dock. JoAnne noted the birds were typically in the larger more open waters, rather than in the narrow branches.

The much higher numbers (hundreds) of loons wintering on Tenkiller Lake in eastern Oklahoma attracts us to that area because we are likely to see many loons, with a chance to find up to four species wintering there in recent years. This suggests that compared to Beaver Lake, Tenkiller has a more abundant small fish population. "Seasonal, spatial, and annual variability is due to shifting abundance of small fish" (Mcintyre and Barr 1997).

The northward migration of spring is noted here from late March into early May. Beginning in at least late February, loons begin to molt drab grays of winter, exchanging these feathers for the rich black and white checked pattern on their backs. Thus, loons passing through in the spring often exhibit much, if not all, of the summer plumage. These migrants make brief stops on the smaller lakes and ponds. I saw 2 Common Loons at Lake Wedington March 25, 2005. The three at Lake Fayetteville on April 8, 2005, were in brilliant summer plumage, as was a single bird on a state fish hatchery pond at Centerton, May 1, 2004. There is also a summer record of a non-breeding individual at Beaver Lake.

#### **Yellow-billed Loon, *Gavia adamsii***

Mike Mlodinow identified this bird just above Beaver Lake dam site in Carroll County on November 17, 1991. This is the only record for Yellow-billed Loon in Arkansas. It was photographed on November 19 and seen as late as November 30.

### **Order Podicipediformes grebes**

#### **Least Grebe, *Tachybaptus dominicus***

One record. Mike Mlodinow and Jacque Brown observed a Least Grebe at the state fish hatchery in Centerton on August 3, 2008. Brown collected images. This was the first state record for Arkansas. It was subsequently viewed by many others and was last observed on August 7.

James et al. (2008) speculated this grebe may have strayed into Arkansas as a result of displacement associated with Hurricane Dolly in late July. Very high winds were associated with Dolly's passage through northwestern Arkansas.

#### **Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident, but seen in all seasons; DATES: primarily September through April.

Most observations of Pied-billed Grebes involve transients and winter residents. In migration they utilize all sorts of ponds, but most winter records involve larger impoundments.

The fall migration peak has been noted between the second week in September into early November; 250 at Lake Fayetteville on October 17, 1999, marked a peak. The 80 birds seen by Jason Luscier and Abby Darrah at Bob Kidd Lake on November 6, 2007, were also indicative of a fall peak in migration.

While they are generally present throughout the winter, severe weather forces them to seek open water habitat elsewhere. Observers on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count find them almost every year; mean 10.3 (n=39, range 0-33).

The 115 at Lake Fayetteville April 14, 2007, marked a spring peak. Non-breeding individuals have summered at Lake Fayetteville, Lake Atalanta in Rogers, and Lake Elmdale. Mike Mlodinow found probable evidence of breeding at Lake Elmdale in northern Washington County during several years in the 1990s, including adults with possibly three broods on July 16 and 24, 1994.

#### **Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auritus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and locally common winter resident; DATES: August 24 to April 24+.

Small flocks of Horned Grebes, often five or fewer birds, can be found on larger bodies of water throughout nwAR during migration. Big winter season flocks can be observed on Beaver Lake at the dam site, Rocky Branch, and especially in the Slate Gap Road area. Counts ranging from 64 up to 500 have occurred in these areas from mid-November to mid-March.

They are rare during winter elsewhere in nwAR: they were found only 4 times during Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville. There are scattered summer records of non-breeding birds from Bull Shoals and Beaver Lake.

#### **Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis***

STATUS: Very uncommon transient and rare winter resident; DATES: September 2 to June 1.

Our observations of this grebe from the far northwest are scattered between September and early June. They are never common here, as is the case with Horned Grebe. Early to mid-November is typical for fall arrivals. Most observations involve 1-3 birds. The six at Beaver Lake on November 4, 1995, was a high count. Most birds have passed through by late April, but there are later records, including a single bird seen at the Centerton hatchery on June 1, 1995.

#### **Western Grebe, *Aechmophorus occidentalis* and *Aechmophorus* species**

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 4 to March 15.

There have been approximately 12 records of large *Aechmophorus* grebes that fit plumages of the Western/Clark's Grebe type since 1981. At least 2 of these records--from Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove--help to delineate migration periods: November 7-14, 2003, (fall) and March 13, 1984 (spring). The bird reported in 1984 fit the general pattern of Western Grebe.

On January 21, 1981, members of the Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society saw two birds of the Western/Clark's type at Rocky Branch on Beaver Lake. Details on the plumage of the 1981 birds are not available. A single bird that wintered on Beaver Lake in 1994-1995 was of the *Aechmophorus* type, but couldn't be further identified. I saw and photographed a definitive Western Grebe on several occasions in the Slate Gap area on Beaver Lake January 7-February 19, 2009. It was always among or near large rafting flocks of Horned Grebes.

### **Order *Pelecaniformes* pelicans, cormorants, and darters**

#### **American White Pelican, *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and rare winter visitor;  
DATES: March 15 to May 18+ and September 13 to November 20+.

There are few sights more inspiring than flocks of white pelicans in nearly synchronous soaring flight as they migrate over the grasslands and forested mountains of western Arkansas. Observers have reported big flocks on several occasions during both the spring and fall. For example, Don Nelms photographed hundreds of birds in three flocks as they soared over Newton County on March 15, 2008. Over the years I have found them regularly during fall migration in the broad, open shallows of Lake Sequoyah near Fayetteville. The 600 at Lake Sequoyah on September 18, 1989, remained several days and a few birds remained several more weeks after most had departed. A flock of at least 105 birds remained for several days at Lake Sequoyah, November 11-12, 2008. The eight birds I saw soaring over Maysville on December 1, 2008, may have been tardy fall migrants.

There are a handful of single bird records at midwinter, including five observations of single birds in late December during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. There are also several summer records (non-breeding), including the 75-80 observed by Mike Bivin as they soared over Fayetteville on August 14, 1992. Very high numbers involving hundreds and even more than one thousand have wintered in recent years on the Arkansas River just south of the Ozarks. Small flocks of non-breeding pelicans also summer along the river. On a breezy day, that's only a short flight to northwestern Arkansas.

#### **Double-crested Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax auritus***

STATUS: Primarily a common transient; in fall often lingers into early winter; DATES: August 13 to December 20+ and March 15 to May 28+.

This fish-eating bird gathers in flocks on impoundments, especially during fall migration. They are especially numerous in October and November. An estimated 500 flew over Chesney Prairie NA on September 26, 2004, and an estimated 80 over the same place October 15, 2005.

Early winter records are primarily from Lake Sequoyah, but they also linger on SWEPCO Lake at Gentry (Terry Stanfill, personal communication). No cormorants were reported on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count until 1984, but have been found regularly since, with a 1999 count of 47.

An estimated 100 flew over Chesney on April 1, 2006, indicating a spring peak. There are also a few additional scattered records.

The increase in cormorant numbers is no doubt related to higher nesting success resulting from environmental protection, especially control of chemical pollution severely detrimental to fish-eating birds. Unfortunately, population growth has produced conflict with fish hatcheries and fish farmers. Birds are now being legally shot, sometimes in high numbers (Spencer 1993).

#### **Anhinga, *Anhinga anhinga***

One record. Mike Mlodinow saw one at Center Point Lake at Centerton in Benton County on June 15, 1991.

#### **Magnificent Frigatebird, *Fregata magnificens***

One record. A single bird was seen during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird count on December 21, 1967. This bird is sometimes blown far inland from the Gulf Coast by storms.

### **Order *Ciconiiformes* herons, egrets, ibises, and vultures**

#### **American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: March 20-May 25+ and September 3-October 17+.

Overall, records are scattered in all seasons, and for most months, but most involve transients during spring and fall. Naturalist Dean Crooks of Rogers found it nesting in Benton County on seasonally wet prairies (former Osage Prairie) that have long since been developed (Baerg 1951). Many reports are from the state fish hatchery at Centerton, prior to the recent (2003 and thereafter) frenzied housing development near the hatchery. When the bird is found, the habitat is usually open, marshy ditches, edges of impoundments, and other low-lying, open, well-vegetated areas.

Recent records of single birds include one flushed from marshy vegetation at Fayetteville on March 30, 2002, and May 8, 2004. Location of each of these recent sightings was marshy vegetation in the Clabber Creek bottomlands near Dean Solomon Road. Not all observations involve marshlands: Judith Griffith photographed a transient at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on March 21, 2007.

Marshy habitats at Woolsey Wet Prairie (adjacent Fayetteville's westside wastewater treatment facility) have yielded observations of single birds since 2007,

including one that apparently wintered 2008-2009. These habitats have been enhanced by restoration efforts directed by Bruce Shackelford of Environmental Consulting Operations, Inc. I saw single birds at Stump Prairie near Siloam Springs May 9 and 13, 2009. The records from Stump involved a cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) pool reclaimed as part of the prairie restoration efforts by Joe Woolbright of Ozark Ecological Restorations, Inc.

Many observations since 2002 (and previous ones at the Centerton hatchery) have involved seasonal wetlands with abundant evidence of the presence of the Osage burrowing crawfish (*Procambarus liberorum*). Crawfish are an important element in this bittern's diet (Lowther et al. 2009).

#### **Least Bittern, *Ixobrychus exilis***

STATUS: Rare transient with most observations in spring;  
DATES: April 27-June 20 and August 1-October 15.

Many of our Least Bittern observations have come from the state fish hatchery at Centerton in Benton County where we made regular trips, especially in spring, to look for shorebirds. Bitterns are found in low-lying marshy vegetation. Additional observations have also involved marshy vegetation along lake edges and Woolsey Wet Prairie at Fayetteville, where I saw one October 15, 2008, and April 27, 2009. There are more recent sightings at Woolsey Wet Prairie.

While nwAR is on the western edge of the nesting and migration range for Least Bitterns, Arkansas is generally well within its breeding range (Gibbs et al. 1992). The birds have nested in the Arkansas River Valley and on the coastal plain (James and Neal 1986). There is no evidence that Least Bitterns nest in the Ozarks of nwAR, but Abby Darrah and Jason Lusier saw two June 10, 2009, at Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area in the Arkansas River Valley near Dyer.

#### **Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: present all year.

Great Blues nest primarily in colonies in tall trees like sycamores in undisturbed forested river bottomlands. There have been nesting colonies on Lee Creek, Osage Creek, White River, Illinois River, Ventris Creek at Beaver Lake, Lake Sequoyah, Middle Fork of the White River, Richland Creek and elsewhere. Small colonies with up to 40 or 50 nests are typical, but smaller colonies and even single nests are sometimes seen.

They utilize nesting sites year after year, but these sites are easily disturbed. A man and his two sons killed more than 30 adults at the Osage Creek heronry in 1982. He was subsequently arrested after neighbors reported the shooting (Ivy 1981).

I visited a colony with approximately 40 nests on Butler Creek, west of Beaver in Carroll County on March 15, 2003. The colony was potentially in the path of highway construction on Arkansas 178. Local residents lead by Beverly and Duane Kepford went to bat for the Great Blues.

During the winter 2004-2005, Robin Devine of Fayetteville found a new colony on the main fork of the White River where it flows into Lake Sequoyah east of Fayetteville. I visited this site with her on March 19, 2005. We counted approximately 25 nests. At that time, the Great Blues had started to nest; birds were still feeding a few young in nests into mid-July. One nest was in use by Great Horned Owls attending two downy nestlings that day.

Great Blue Herons are present throughout the winter and are found most years on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: the mean was 11.2 (n=39, range 0-28).

#### **Great Egret, *Ardea alba***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; rare during nesting season;  
DATES: observed in all seasons.

Great Egrets are seen during spring migration from early March into May. They are most numerous in fall, with a peak from mid-July through October. They wander widely through open habitats at this time. They can be observed along rivers and lakes, ponds, and on mudflats. A total of 36 were counted at the state fish hatchery in Benton County September 6, 2003. At least 60 flew over Chesney Prairie Natural Area in Benton County on October 3, 2005. There is also a recent mid-winter record from Centerton.

There are sparse records throughout the summer, including a few birds presumably nesting in mixed-species rookeries with other herons and egrets. Summer records suggestive of local nesting have been obtained from Fayetteville, Bob Kidd Lake, Lake Sequoyah, Lake Elmdale and Lake Harrison (July 14, 1999). At least two nests were associated with a Great Blue Heron rookery at Lake Sequoyah during the 2009 nesting season (A. Scaboo, personal communication). Great Egrets are present during the nesting season at Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area near Dyer, in the Arkansas River Valley immediately south of the Ozarks.

#### **Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula***

STATUS: Uncommon transient in spring, fairly common transient in low numbers during late summer and early fall; rare in breeding season; DATES: April 1 to October 20.

We see transient Snowy Egrets along pond edges in all kinds of open area (like the state fish hatchery in Benton County and elsewhere). Usually these are singles, but 10 were at Bob Kidd Lake from at least September 12-October 3, 1987.

There are nwAR mid-summer records suggestive of nesting, including low numbers of Snowys in rookeries with Little Blue Herons and Cattle Egrets. Presence of birds all summer in the Illinois River bottoms at Lake Frances (now drained) suggests birds may have nested there in the mid-1980s (Neal and Mlodinow 1988:46); 14 were counted in a heronry near Fayetteville in 1989. They have nested in a large, mixed-species rookery just northeast of Van Buren in Crawford County and are present in summer at Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area in the Arkansas River Valley near Dyer, AR.

#### **Little Blue Heron, *Egretta caerulea***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and local summer resident;  
DATES: April 9 to October 26.

Little Blue Herons are at least fairly common as transients and overall are most numerous during late summer and early fall as they wander and forage along streams and impoundments.

The first known local nesting occurred in 1985 when 100 or more adults with young in nests were observed in a heronry near Lincoln on May 17. Cattle Egrets were nesting in the same colony. The site was an old field regenerating with small trees. Nests were placed in winged elms and cedars adjacent a poultry farm. Two hundred adults with about 15 nests were found at Fayetteville in late June 1987. The birds returned to a new nesting site at Fayetteville in 1988 and moved in response to deliberate disturbance. Approximately 633 adults were counted in the Fayetteville nesting area on May 7, 1989. Vegetation at both Lincoln and Fayetteville was cut to keep Little Blues and Cattle Egrets from nesting in future seasons. Doug James counted 265 birds roosting-nesting on August 2, 1993, with Cattle Egrets.

Little Blue Herons are also present during the nesting season at Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area near Dyer, in the Arkansas River Valley immediately south of the Ozarks.

#### **Tricolored Heron, *Egretta tricolor***

STATUS: Very rare transient; DATES: 4 spring observations and one in the fall.

A single Tricolored Heron was observed by Russell Graham and others at the state fish hatchery in Benton County on July 2-3, 1987. Mike Mlodinow documented the presence of one at Lake Fayetteville April 7, 1994, and Lake Sequoyah April 10, 1994. A single bird was present in spring 2000 (no date) at SWEPCO Lake in Benton County near Gentry (observed by Terry Stanfill and photographed by David Nolan). Pat Valentik found one at Lake Leatherwood west of Eureka Springs on May 25, 2003.

#### **Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis***

STATUS: Common transient and local summer resident;  
DATES: April 9 to October 27+.

While Cattle Egrets may be seen in almost any open country habitat, they are most often observed in pastures associated with cattle. The first Cattle Egret nesting record for nwAR was in 1984 when a colony with 37 nests was found near Lincoln (see the Little Blue Heron account). More than 100 adults were observed at this site on May 17, 1985 (same location as nesting Little Blue Herons, above). More than 1000 Cattle Egrets roosted in this colony in late August 1984 (Neal 1987). At least 3,500 were roosting at Bob Kidd Lake on September 27, 1987. There are also a few, scattered November sightings of fall migration-associated stragglers.

#### **Green Heron, *Butorides virescens***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 3 to October 18+.

Green Herons are found in summer along the forested edges of streams, reservoirs, and ponds. During migration they can be seen at water sources in more open areas. During late summer and early fall they gather in small flocks of a dozen or so at places, like the state fish hatchery in Centerton, where aquatic prey like frogs, small fish, etc. is abundant. Green Herons remain common or fairly common through much of September. Sightings thereafter involve scattered individuals. A single bird was seen at the former trout farm in Johnson (Washington County) December 14, 1991, during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count.

#### **Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax***

STATUS: Unclear, but apparently a somewhat rare transient and possible rare summer resident; DATES: April 9 to October 26+.

Most observations are of single birds, and most of these have involved spring and fall, and presumably transients. Seven flew over Fayetteville on April 15, 2000. Four were at Centerton on May 8, 2005. In 1985, adults and immatures (a total of at least three birds) were at Centerton between late August and late October. Two were observed at Lake Elmdale on August 4, 1990. There is also a record of 5 at Lake Fayetteville October 3, 2007. One adult was at Centerton on June 19, 1988 and two lingered as late as December 4, 1987. Northwestern Arkansas is well within this heron's breeding range (Davis 1993).

#### **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, *Nyctanassa violacea***

STATUS: Somewhat rare transient and summer resident;  
DATES: April 20 to October 5+.

These birds are seen during summer, singly or in pairs, but never in high numbers. Presence around impoundments and along forested streams in summer suggests that nesting here involves isolated pairs. During late summer and fall as many as three adults have been seen at the Lake Sequoyah dam site. Frank Reuter saw 2-4 in the Berryville area (Carroll County) at King's River April 28, 1987. Jack and Pam Stewart saw one bird in Newton County along the Buffalo River, just upstream from the Erbie Campground, on June 8, 2004. Terry Stanfill saw one along Flint Creek from the bridge adjacent Ozark Academy in Benton County on June 24, 2007, and Joyce Shedell saw one there on June 10, 2008. This bird was subsequently viewed until at least mid-October. Doug James saw a single bird at Fayetteville on the unusual date of January 8, 1991.

In the 1950s, Doug James used to see them foraging for the abundant terrestrial crayfish that inhabit former lowland prairie habitats here. His specific observations involved the University campus in Fayetteville along Razorback Road north of 6<sup>th</sup> Street. This area has been subsequently developed into facilities for sporting events and parking. Though I have no specific data supporting my hypothesis, it seems reasonable to think that extensive development of these former lowland prairies would negatively impact this species, since crawfish provide an important food source.

These birds were found during the course breeding bird atlas projects in the Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 45) and to a lesser extent in the Oklahoma Ozarks (Reinking 2004: 51).

**White Ibis, *Eudocimus albus***

Two records. A White Ibis was seen on August 3, 1991, at Devil's Den State Park and was still present until at least August 11. A single bird at Lake Sequoyah on September 2, 1989, was still present on September 13.

**Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus***

Two records. A single bird was identified at Lake Frances (now drained) near Siloam Springs on August 26, 1986. Another was found at Centerton May 22, 2002. A single bird associated with nine White-faced Ibises was seen well on May 24, 2002, at Centerton (presumably the same bird of May 22).

**White-faced Ibis, *Plegadis chihi* and *Plegadis* species**

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: April 15 to May 24 and September 21 to October 16.

This is the commonest of the ibis species seen in nwAR. White-faced Ibises have been identified at the state fish hatchery in Centerton on at least 6 occasions since 1991. Single birds were seen May 4-5, 1991; May 6, 1995; and April 15, 2000. There were 9 on May 24, 2002, and 13 on May 8, 2005. The lack of fall records, and the general rarity of Glossy Ibis here, suggests that many of the *Plegadis* species may involve White-faced Ibis.

In non-breeding plumage, Glossy Ibis and White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi* are difficult to separate. Of birds identified only as *Plegadis* species, there is a single record for spring: May 4, 1994, and four fall records September 21-October 16. These observations are from Centerton in Benton County, Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove, and the former War Eagle Minnow Farm in Madison County.

**Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: Present in all seasons.

While Black Vultures are generally less numerous than Turkey Vulture in northwestern Arkansas, they are present here throughout the year. A population has been known for years from Rudy in Crawford County and at Devil's Den State Park, around Beaver Lake, along the Buffalo River, and elsewhere.

For several years, I have observed a nest on a rocky outcrop of the Wedington Ridge in the Ozark National Forest. Apparently paired adults were at the outcrop in early January and 2 eggs were present by February 27; young still with some downy white feathers remained in the outcrop at mid-May. At Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County, a nest in a cliff grotto above Piney Creek held two eggs on March 20, 2009.

Black Vultures are also common along the Buffalo National River (10 birds at Boxley April 7, 2007).

During a float trip between Maumee and Rush June 26-29, 2006, 1-4 birds were regularly observed as they soared above the valley. Black Vultures are also seen regularly in the Cricket Creek area of Table Rock Lake in Boone County, and near Lincoln Lake where 30 were kettling on September 13, 1987.

Relatively high numbers are associated with winter roosts. A total of 45 birds were in a roost with Turkey Vultures above the White River south of Sonora in Washington County on December 15, 1984. During the 1960s and 1970s reports of Black Vultures on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count were irregular with none reported or only low numbers. Since that time, however, both vultures have been counted at a winter roost adjacent Lake Sequoyah and along a bluff line within the count circle, with peaks of 92 in 1999 and 100 on December 15, 2002. Black Vultures were also recorded on the Buffalo National River (west) CBC, though not every year. Relatively high numbers have been reported on the Crooked Creek CBC, ranging from 43-116 during the period of 2001-2004. Frank Reuter reported 45 kettling near Berryville in Carroll County on January 6, 1990.

**Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: Observed in all seasons.

Turkey Vultures are widespread throughout nwAR. They are also seen as they soar above towns in low numbers. My data from the former prairie region in western Benton County shows that, apart from known roost sites, they are most numerous from late August through early November, when kettles of TVs including 20 or more birds are common. For example, 55 soared in 3 loose kettles near Chesney Prairie Natural Area on September 19, 2008. The estimated 40 at the state fish hatchery in Centerton on October 20, 2007, was an exceptionally high number for the hatchery and may represent a southward migrating flock grounded by gusting south winds that day.

Relatively high numbers are attracted to hayfields when cutting and bailing results in considerable mortality to animals trapped and killed in the fields. This is a big lure for these carrion-eaters.

Vultures concentrate in winter roosts with the onset of cold weather. These roosts form where high south or southeast-facing cliffs, or groups of tall snags, facilitate exposure to morning sun and soaring. Numbers may be high in these locales during much of the winter, depending upon weather severity. Numbers of Turkey Vultures observed on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count have increased since the mid-1980s, with 100 or more (up to a peak of 206 in 1994, 210 in 2002, and 300 in 2008) reported in 9 count years since 1986. High numbers are also recorded on the Crooked Creek CBC (Harrison), with data from 2001-2004 involving 140 to 205 birds. Visitors to Devil's Den State Park see groups of vultures (both species, but primarily TV) perched in tall snags that have good exposure to morning sun in winter.

The nwAR population drops during severe weather of mid-winter, especially during December and January, but roosts in nwAR may otherwise persist through winter into the start of spring. An estimated 200 or more went to roost near Maysville in Benton County on March 21,

1985. The 15 or more over Chesney Prairie NA April 1, 2005, probably marked nesting season onset.

### **Order Falconiformes hawks and falcons**

#### **Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus***

STATUS: Uncommon but regular transient at lakes, larger ponds, and rivers; rare in summer and winter; DATES: March 16 to May 29+ and August 19 to November 21+.

Migration peaks have been noted at area lakes in April and September (Neal and Mlodinow 1988: 47). Most observations involve single birds. JoAnne and Earl Rife observed 3 on the Long Creek Arm of Table Rock Lake in Boone County on April 25, 1997. They noted that the birds were perching in snags that stand in water.

No nests have been reported to date. Two birds were seen repeatedly in summer of 1981 in the Prairie Creek area of Beaver Lake. Two were at Rocky Branch on Beaver Lake July 19, 1986. In 1990, single birds were at Beaver Lake on June 22 and August 3. One was at Lake Siloam Springs in Benton County on December 26, 1992.

#### **[Swallow-tailed Kite, *Elanoides forficatus*]**

There are three questionable second-hand records. In his bird list for the Winslow area of Washington County, Smith (1915) stated the following: "The only record that I can recall during my stay in the mountains was that of a single bird, observed by a farmer near Winslow, on October 8, 1913. Old residents were well acquainted with it, and described it to me minutely..." Baerg (1951) received a report involving two birds in Newton County on July 10, 1949. There have been no records since.

#### **White-tailed Kite, *Elanus leucurus***

One record. Ellen Neaville saw this kite at Rogers on March 23, 2001. She saw the bird perched, heard its vocalization, and had two good looks as it flew. She noted that the tail had distinct wide white edges and was gray in the middle.

#### **Mississippi Kite, *Ictinia mississippiensis***

STATUS: Rare transient in spring and fall; DATES: May 10-early June, and August 17-October 10.

Most reports in the file have involved single birds scattered around nWAR. In 1985, a single bird was seen repeatedly along the White River near Durham, Washington County, from May 23 to early June, during an emergence of periodical cicadas, but there is no evidence this bird nested. In fall 2006 there were several records in Fayetteville, including three birds seen by Kelly Mulhollan, Donna Stjerna and myself, August 18-20. Baerg (1951) published two records of single birds seen by Dean Crooks at West Fork and Harrison, both in 1939. Since 2005, a pair has nested at Fort Smith, just to the south, according to Sandy Berger.

#### **Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident, rare in summer; DATES: present all year, but primarily early November to mid-March.

Bald Eagles are most numerous during the period of real cold weather, mid to late November to late March. Single birds are observed beginning in the first week of November with the population building towards midwinter, with January as eagle month (highest numbers). The pattern reverses in spring: 40 seen at Maysville on March 18, 1985, dwindled to 4 on March 25 (personal communication, D. James, J. Fitzgerald, C. Riley).

Terry Stanfill, who has watched eagles for years in the Gentry area, says that he doesn't see eagles there in fall until there is a good cold spell with frost or freezing. In spring, the birds all depart with the coming of a good warm front lasting at least 3 days.

During winter they are seen at lakes throughout nWAR and flying overhead almost anywhere. An easily accessible spot for viewing wintering eagles is the Eagle Watch Nature Trail adjacent SWEPCO Lake in Benton County (see details in Neal and Mlodinow 2005). They are common in winter in the poultry producing areas of western Benton County and Carroll County. During the 1980s, poultry farmers removed dead chickens from their barns and disposed of them in fields for carrion-feeding birds, including eagles. Such was the case at one time at Maysville in Benton County where 115 were seen on January 22, 1986; 49 were present in a similar situation near Durham in Washington County on January 2, 1986. Poultry companies have prohibited the practice of dumping dead chickens in fields. However, high numbers of wintering eagles are still present here. A total of 71, for example, were counted in a roost northwest of Decatur in January 2001. Up to 400 used this forested river bottom roost during winter 2004-2005 (Rogers 2005; Douglas James, personal communication) making it one of the largest such roosts in the lower 48 states. There are concentrations elsewhere, like the 60 birds reported by JoAnne Rife in the Green Forest and Berryville areas of Carroll County during midwinter 1991. Relatively high numbers have also been observed near Lead Hill, just south of the Sugar Loaf arm of Bull Shoals Lake in Boone County. Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society has sponsored popular eagle watch weekend featuring boat rides for spotting eagles perched along Beaver Lake. Midwinter tallies along Beaver Lake have ranged from a low of 50 in 1995 to a peak of 229 in 1992 (data from midwinter Bald Eagle Count for 1987-2000, reported by Alan Bland, Park Ranger, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

While primarily a winter resident, Bald Eagles are present throughout the year and nesting has been confirmed near Maysville, near Huntsville in Madison County, both in 1997. A nest with one nestling was observed at Beaver Lake in July 2006 (Putthoff 2006) and a second nest was suspected. I saw two adults along the Buffalo National River between Maumee and Rush June 26-29, 2006, suggestive of a nest in that area. There are several additional reports of nest activity elsewhere, including several nests

seen in the Gravette area of Benton County in 2008 (Jacque Brown and Arthur Evans, personal communications).

The heartening story of the Bald Eagle's escape from extinction is illustrated by data from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. The birds were virtually absent from the count during the 1960s and 1970s, and only began to be found with regularity from 1979 and thereafter. The highest number to date on the Fayetteville count was 16 adults and 6 immatures in 1985. Nine were seen on the Fayetteville CBC of December 19, 2004.

#### **Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient in low numbers and uncommon winter resident; DATES: August 26 to May 8+.

We find harriers in low numbers in very open grasslands, especially in our former prairies. Over the years I have been most successful in finding them in grassy seasonal wetlands associated with former prairies, presumably because these have relatively high rodent populations. Occasionally the southbound fall transients show up in nWAR by late summer or very early in fall, but they aren't regular until the second half of October. In very good habitat they are fairly common through the fall, sometimes into the second half of December. Most are gone by the onset of winter in late December.

Data from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count shows that in 28 years (starting in 1961) observers have been able to find only 1 or none at all. This is likely because southbound transients have departed nWAR. The high counts involving 6-8 harriers all occurred before the mid-1980s. After this time, rapid population growth in the Fayetteville-Springdale area eliminated much of the open country habitat required by harriers. However, there are years when harriers are atypically numerous. The Fayetteville CBC peak was 10, in 2000, even with the loss of so much open field habitat. Four harriers seen in the Maysville area December 25, 2006, included two adult males, unusual here in mid-winter. As many as a dozen were observed in low, brushy fields near Maysville during winter of 1986-1987, presumably attracted by an abundance of rodent prey in these fields.

Additional sightings in late May and in summer could be related to a few known instances of nesting in Sebastian and Crawford counties, south of the Ozarks region, in the Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997) and northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004).

#### **Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus***

STATUS: Fairly common winter resident, rare summer resident; DATES: observed in all seasons with highest numbers from late September through May.

Sharpies are present throughout the year, including a small nesting population. Kim Smith saw a pair copulating and vocalizing on the U of A campus in Fayetteville March 30, 2005. A nest found in Newton County June 29, 1994, was approximately 35 feet up in a shortleaf pine and held three young. There are nesting season records for several counties in nWAR, especially Newton and Pope. Leif

Anderson of the USDA Forest Service documented a series of nests in the Ozark National Forest 2000-2002. They are reported in low numbers on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts; 7 in 1982 was a peak.

Both of the *Accipiter* hawks catch birds around feeders and so are often seen in town, and unfortunately, they mistakenly and often fatally slam into plate glass windows in pursuit of feeder birds.

#### **Cooper's Hawk, *Accipiter cooperii***

STATUS: Fairly common winter resident; uncommon but increasing summer resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Cooper's Hawk has gone through severe population fluctuations in nWAR. In the past it was common (see Baerg 1951), but the population plunged thereafter and there were few nesting season records in two decades up to the 1980s. Data from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count shows this fluctuation. Between 1961 and 1980, observers found no Cooper's Hawks in about half of these years and the maximum number was two birds. Observations have increased since the early 1980s. They have been found on almost every count since, with as many as 8 (1999) and 7 (2006). Nesting has also returned in nWAR.

For example, two birds near Durham in Washington County on May 23, 1985, appeared to be performing courtship rituals. Immature birds near Elkins, Washington County, on July 30, 1986, indicated local nesting. During the period 1985-2005, summer records have become increasingly numerous and nests have been observed in parks, forested neighborhoods, etc. In 2004, I found three fledglings perched together in one tree at the University farm August 11. In 2005, I observed an adult male and female engaging in courtship activities including copulation near Veterans Park at Lake Fayetteville on March 13 and found an apparently finished nest 75 yards away March 18. The nest was approximately 60 feet up in a post oak. Birds were sitting tight on the nest on April 8 and thereafter. Subsequent leaf out of hardwood trees obstructed further observations except for an occasional long tail over the nest's lip and an adult flying close by. This nest is three-fourths of a mile from NW Arkansas Mall, near the lake with its boats, and alongside the popular Two Turtle mountain bike trail. The area is generally forested, which seems to suit these hawks, since breeding season observations at Lake Fayetteville date back at least a decade. There are numerous other breeding season observations elsewhere in Fayetteville and in our region. An active nest (bird apparently incubating) discovered by David Chapman May 9, 2008, on the north side of Lake Fayetteville was also situated near a popular trail, city street, and close to a residential neighborhood. Sally Jo Gibson observed a nest with two young at Harrison in 2006.

#### **Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis***

A specimen was taken at Winslow on November 2, 1926 (Black 1935). Baerg (1951) reported one collected near Fayetteville during the winter of 1928-1929. Documentation was placed on file for a bird taking poultry

from a yard next to a farmhouse at West Fork, Washington County on December 24-25, 1982.

**Red-shouldered Hawk, *Buteo lineatus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed all year.

One of the pleasures of late winter birding (late January-March) is seeing pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks as they soar in tight circles above, giving loud, repeated “kee-ya, kee-ya” calls—courtship time for Red-shouldered Hawks. On February 15, 2007, I watched a male fly to a female perched on a stout post oak limb, with the male giving the kee-ya calls as they copulated. Since the 1980s, nests have been found at various places in Fayetteville, including neighborhoods (Mt Sequoyah and Markham Hill), cemeteries (Evergreen and Confederate), and parks (Wilson Park). What these areas have in common is mature forest cover.

Adult birds have been seen on nests as early as the first week of March. One nest built high in a mature pine near the swimming pool at Wilson Park in Fayetteville during the 1990s was still being used during the 2005 season. I saw the bird sitting tight on the nest March 27, 2005. Birds on a nest at the Bob and Sara Caulk place on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville began incubating by at least March 8, 2005, and feeding hatchlings by April 15.

Judging from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count data, these birds have increased here since the early 1960s. The number seen was often 0 or 1 on half of CBCs during the 1960s-1980s. Since the early 1990s, they have been found each CBC and in numbers often in the range of 3-5; 10 were found on the 2005 count.

Film maker Carl Hitt (carl@carlhitt.com) produced a documentary based upon his 2003-2006 observations of Red-shouldered Hawks in Wilson Park (Hitt 2008).

**Broad-winged Hawk, *Buteo platypterus***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident in extensive, mature forested habitat; DATES: March 30 to October 25.

This hawk is at least a common migrant in all kinds of mature forest habitat, with first arrivals in late March or early April. Joyce Shedell videotaped a rare dark morph Broad-winged near Highfill in Benton County April 25, 2004.

During summer the birds are present in areas with extensive mature forests such as the Ozark National Forest, Buffalo National River, and Devil’s Den State Park. They were common along the Buffalo National River on June 26-29, 2006, during a float between Maumee and Rush.

The fall migration typically peaks with the same kinds of cold fronts that bring monarch butterflies on their southward migration. At least 40 passed through Fayetteville September 21, 2001, within days of a major passage of monarch butterflies. At Ponca in Newton County, Jack and Pam Stewart counted 120 or more overhead in less than five minutes on September 29, 2007.

**Swainson’s Hawk, *Buteo swainsoni***

STATUS: Very uncommon, local summer resident; DATES: March 20-September 28+.

This western hawk reaches the easternmost extremes of its regular breeding season occurrences on the prairies of eastern Oklahoma. Our summer records from nwAR suggest that the former prairies of western Arkansas also remain attractive. Bob Sanger (and subsequently others) observed a finished nest with 2 adults seven miles west of Fayetteville in Washington County on April 8, 1986. Apparently no young were reared in the nest. Summer sightings have occurred basically every year since, often in western Benton County. Locations include Centerton-Vaughn, Cherokee City (former Round Prairie), Maysville (former Beauty Prairie), Pea Ridge, and elsewhere. Most of these summer sightings involve 1-3 birds. In 2008, I performed an informal survey in western Benton County, and found adults at Chesney Prairie Natural Area (August 12 & 31, September 28), Maysville (August 17 and September 21), Bloomfield (August 31). I observed an adult associated with two fledglings near Vaughn in Benton County on August 19. There are also summer records for the bordering Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 81). In Oklahoma the birds are apparently regular breeders only in the western part of the state (Reinking 2004: 101). Jacque Brown photographed a bird in juvenile plumage at Centerton on the very late date of December 7, 2007.

**Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed all year.

Red-tailed Hawks are common all year, especially in extensively open areas. We see the fewest overall from March through September, when most if not all birds present are part of the nesting population. Starting in late September-early October, nwAR receives a notable influx of migrants from other areas of North America including the far reaches of the continent. Overall, they are most numerous during the period of cold weather, November through February. An unusual concentration of 50 was seen in a field near Fayetteville on February 12, 1982; many of these must have been migrating.

Transients and wintering birds show extreme variation in plumage, ranging from very light to almost totally black. Harlan’s Hawk, a dark red-tailed subspecies, is fairly common during winter (fall arrival early October, spring departure, early April) and is sometimes misidentified as Rough-legged Hawk. An important research paper on Harlan’s Hawk (Wood 1932) was based in large part on specimens caught with pole traps by poultry farmers in nwAR in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Another dark subspecies occurs in the region in winter, the western Red-tailed Hawk (subspecies *calurus*). In winter we also see a red-tail subspecies formerly named Krider’s Hawk that is mostly white. Another very white hawk that might be mistaken for Krider’s, is the light morph of Harlan’s, not to mention other light plumage variations of first winter red-tails. For us in the binocular brigade, it’s an interesting (if sometimes confusing) scene, in winter, in the former prairies of nwAR.

Red-tailed Hawks are common on Christmas Bird Counts in nwAR. The Fayetteville CBC mean was 59.4 (n=39, range 0-225); the count of 225 in 1994 was double



most other peaks. There are also common on the Crooked Creek CBC (Harrison) with numbers ranging from 14-43.

Nesting is widespread during March, but incubation has been noted as early as late February. Joe Woolbright and I observed seven nests with birds apparently incubating in Benton County on March 21, 2009. I have observed many nests over the years in stout forks of hardwood trees (e.g., post oak) often in groves within generally open areas. This nesting habit conforms to historical patterns in which Tallgrass Prairies included woodlots surrounded by grasslands generally referred to in pioneer times as barrens or oak barrens. Even with conversion of Tallgrass Prairie habitat to pastures and hayfields of non-native species like fescue, our red-tails seem to have adapted to hunting prey available in these greatly altered landscapes. Many oak barrens remain outside developing urban areas. Red-tails are common in such areas and provide a living link to our region's ecological history.

#### **Rough-legged Hawk, *Buteo lagopus***

STATUS: Rare winter visitor; DATES: November 5 to February 15.

Rough-legged Hawks make rare winter appearances in western Arkansas. There have been no solid observations of these birds for over 10 years. On a lucky day we have found a single bird during winter trips primarily marked by sightings of many other hawk species, including some plumages of Red-tailed Hawks that look enough like light phase rough-legs to give us a real start and totally fool newer birders not used to the amazing red-tail diversity here in winter. There are some seasons, however, that defy the rule of great rarity. For example, Siloam Springs CBCers reported four rough-legs in 1979. Kimberly G. Smith and I came close to that CBC tally over the course of a long winter day's loop through western Washington and Benton counties on December 27, 1983. Ice and snow were everywhere and ducks were standing on iced-over ponds. When the day was over, we had tallied 57 Red-tailed Hawks of the *borealis* subspecies, 6 red-tails of the *harlani* subspecies, 2 red-tails of the *calurus* subspecies. We also saw 8 American Kestrels, 2 harriers, and 1 Bald Eagle. The great treasure of that amazing day was 3 Rough-legged Hawks, all of the light plumage type. One of these rough-legs was in the broad grasslands of the former Norwood Prairie west of Wedington, and the other two were in large open former prairie fields near Siloam Springs. We have also seen rough-legs in the Maysville area, including a dark phase bird two miles east of Maysville on January 15, 1987, and thereafter.

In recent years I have made trips to bird the prairies in eastern Oklahoma immediately to our west, especially the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska. I have seen a number of rough-legs there in winter. Birds in the western Arkansas Ozarks might involve eastward movements related to weather or food supply.

#### **Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos***

STATUS: Very rare winter visitor; DATES: October 18 to March 8.

Golden Eagles are much rarer here than Bald Eagles, though Bald Eagles in subadult plumages are sometimes mistakenly identified as Golden Eagles. We have had only 6 reliable observations in the past two decades. Almost all involved single birds. Frank and Joanna Reuter saw 2 at Berryville in Carroll County October 22, 1988. Mike Bivin saw two from Fly Gap Mountain in Franklin County November 11, 1996.

#### **American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; local summer resident; DATES: present all year.

Our small kestrel nesting population is found in open grassland habitats with only scattered trees or buildings, often associated with former prairies, especially those in Benton County. However, they also nest in more urban settings with open areas that were historically much more open. In the past they nested on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville in cavities of mature trees, in the eaves of Old Main (before its renovation), in a deteriorated wooden martin box, and more recently at University farm where Tom Green of Arkansas Archeological Survey noticed them going in and out of a cavity by March 1, 2005. Like the campus, old farm places in open country provide requisite cavities.

Terry Stanfill has kept track of kestrels around the SWEPCO power plant near Genry in Benton County. In 2006, he saw 9 adults around the plant on June 11; he'd seen the first kestrel fledgling on May 24, hopping around transformers. During the summer of 2005, Mike Mlodinow and I made an informal effort to find breeding season kestrels. In Washington County we found them at the U of A farm, on Markham Hill in Fayetteville, and at the former Norwood prairie on the Washington-Benton County line. We found them in a minimum of 12 places in Benton County: Chesney Prairie, Center Corner on Highway 264, Centerton, Elm Springs, Decatur, Gentry, at the Regional Airport (Highfill), Cherokee City, former Beaty Prairie near Maysville, and Lake Bentonville. The birds were also seen at Hindsville in Madison County, and Baker Prairie in Carroll County. Our coverage was spotty; no doubt there were others as well.

Kestrels are most numerous here during winter. They are reported in good numbers annually during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count; the CBC mean was 31.1 (n=39, range 4-73). Terry Stanfill saw 7 kestrels on the SWEPCO plant grounds on December 4, 2005.

#### **Merlin, *Falco columbarius***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: September 8 to April 23.

Most of our Merlin observations are in dead winter, December-January. On November 15, 2007, I watched in fascination as a Merlin flew straight and swift a few feet above a broad open pasture, its target a mixed species blackbird flock foraging on the ground in the former Beaty Prairie just outside Maysville in Benton County. Blackbirds began to flush as the Merlin approached. The Merlin then darted suddenly upwards into the mass of fleeing blackbirds.

In the same general area, on January 1, 2003, Mike Mlodinow and I watched a Merlin that we first saw perched on a snag overlooking an expansive open field. It pursued blackbirds at the start, then swiftly crossing State Line Road into Oklahoma, chased a huge flock of Horned Larks. I photographed another Merlin at Chesney Prairie NA on December 24, 2006.

The generally pale coloration of each of these falcons indicates they are derived from the prairie form *richardsonii*. Northwestern Arkansas forms part of this bird's winter range (Wheeler 2003: 450). Two Merlins were reported on the 1969 Christmas Bird Count at Fayetteville, at a time when that count circle was much less developed than it is today. Areas like Maysville, and other former prairies in nwAR, provide suitable winter habitat for Merlins and other falcons, as long as these habitats remain predominantly open grassland.

#### **Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: April 5 to May 21 and September 17 to October 14+.

Our peregrine observations are divided between spring and fall. There is also a January record. Peregrines are observed in extensively open areas, typically former prairie grasslands. Several of these reports have involved Peregrines stooping on shorebirds at the state fish hatchery in Benton County.

During spring 2006, single Peregrines were seen as they stooped on shorebirds at the hatchery on April 30 and May 7. During spring 2009 I saw a peregrine at Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville on April 27 and another on the former prairies at Lowell on May 1.

#### **Prairie Falcon, *Falco mexicanus***

STATUS: Rare winter visitor; DATES: November 11 to February 3.

Most of our observations have been from Benton County and most involved December and January. Irene Camargo and I saw one perched on a tall snag in the open grasslands near Chesney Prairie Natural Area on January 17, 2003. A single bird that flew over the Centerton hatchery November 11, 2006, presaged what was to be the highest number of Prairie Falcons recorded for nwAR—up to that point. Mike Mlodinow and I counted 3-4 (including two at once) at Maysville on December 26, 2006, and 2 in the same area January 6, 2006.

Extensive grasslands and prairies of eastern Oklahoma (e.g., Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska) form the normal eastern edge of this bird's winter range (see Wheeler 2003: 523), but western Arkansas is little more than a short hop for these big falcons. The unusual records for winter 2006-2007 may have been related to severe weather in the west. For example Denver International Airport was closed by a three-foot accumulation of snow just before Christmas 2006. An extended drought during 2006 that affected eastern Oklahoma could have impacted the prey sought by these big falcons. The falcon influx was obvious to us, but the reasons for it are not so obvious.

None of this would apparently account for a series of sightings of single birds in the Wet Prairie area north of Maysville in December 2007. The discovery of a Northern Shrike in that area in December 2007 (a first state record) encouraged visits from keen and skilled observers from around Arkansas. Many of them failed to find the shrike, but they often came away with what Kenny Nichols termed "a consolation prize," which was a Prairie Falcon LaDonna Nichols picked out on December 26, 2007.

### **Order *Gruiformes* rails, gallinules, and cranes**

#### **King Rail, *Rallus elegans***

Three records. Dean Crooks saw a King Rail in Benton County, but this published record was undated (Baerg 1951). Single birds were observed at the state fish hatchery in Benton County on October 10, 1983, and April 10, 1991. These are the only records from the Ozarks.

In the past few years, King Rails have been regularly found at Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area near Dyer, just to the south of the Ozarks, in the bottomlands of the Arkansas River Valley. David G. Kremetz (Unit Leader Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Department of Biological Sciences UA-Fayetteville) and several of his students (including Abby Darrah and Jason Bolenbaugh) have made field trips to Frog Bayou, finding King Rails and other marsh obligate birds there in recent years. Another of his graduate students, Leah Scott, has recently undertaken a study of marsh birds at Frog. Management efforts by Arkansas Game & Fish Commission at Frog are associated with the Wetlands Reserve Program.

#### **Virginia Rail, *Rallus limicola***

STATUS: Rare transient; more numerous in spring than fall; DATES: April 1-May 13 and October 12-November 14+.

Our Virginia Rail records involve single birds. We usually see or hear them in marsh-like vegetation, but other records illustrate the hazards of migration in a region that has lost most of its former lowland prairie grasslands and seasonal wetlands. Elizabeth Adam found a dead bird in a store parking lot at Fayetteville on August 31, 1987. Bruce Roberts found a live, but injured bird in a storage facility lot near Bentonville on May 1, 2005. Calvin Bay reported a single bird in his strawberry patch in western Fayetteville April 30, 2008. The single bird seen by Mike Mlodinow in the Clabber Creek bottomlands at Fayetteville January 8, 2004, provides the only winter record.

#### **Sora, *Porzana carolina***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; DATES: March 26 to May 26+ and August 24 to October 31+.

Soras are flushed from well-vegetated edges of marsh-like ponds or ditches in extensive open areas and in open fields with dense wet grass. The early arrival date is from the Eagle Watch Nature Trail in Benton County, where Terry Stanfill saw a single bird on March 26, 2006. Otherwise, there are no observations until the second week in April.

There were at least 10 in the former grasslands at Wilson Springs in Fayetteville May 3, 2002, and 24 on September 23, 2000, at Centerton.

Peak numbers like these provide a view of the past: Soras must have been very common during migration in our former wet, lowland prairie grasslands. These have been drained, leaving only relatively small patches of favorable habitat.

In addition to the above observations, Russell Graham found a single bird in Madison County June 23, 1987. There is a single record for November 10, 1991.

#### **Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus***

Three records. I photographed an adult in a marshy pond immediately north of the state fish hatchery at Centerton, Benton County, on June 17, 2006. This is the only recent record and it was not seen after this date. Baerg (1951) published the report of one bird at Fayetteville on October 30, 1936, and one at Lake Wedington October 7 and 13, 1949. Moorhens nest in marshes well to the north and south of nWAR, but we apparently provide little in the way of attractive habitat for migratory stopovers.

#### **American Coot, *Fulica americana***

STATUS: Abundant transient and winter resident; DATES: September 5 to May 20+.

We easily see coots, usually close to shore, among lily pads and other aquatic vegetation on reservoirs and larger ponds throughout nWAR. They are often the most common water bird in sight. If you watch them closely, coots occasionally perch near the shoreline on a log. During these times their lobed toes are visible; they obviously lack the webbed feet of ducks.

The abundance of coots in nWAR is a direct result of lake construction, just as the dearth of other rail species, like Virginia Rails, is partially a result of seasonal wetland loss.

Highest numbers are present here from about mid-October through April. The approximately 850 plus on Lake Fayetteville October 23, 1984, was a migratory peak in numbers, as was the estimated 1,325 on November 16, 2003, and 1,900 November 8, 1997, both counts at Lake Elmdale near Springdale. I saw an estimated 1,400 at Bob Kidd Lake on November 2, 2007. Coots have been a stable and predictable feature of the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count since the 1960s, with a peak CBC count of 942 in 1997.

Wintering Bald Eagles take advantage of this ready food source. Visitors to Lake Fayetteville have seen eagles stooping to take coots there. David Chapman posted a sighting on the Birds of Arkansas discussion list (February 2, 2009) concerning his observations at Lake Fayetteville: the eagle made at least thirty diving stoops, stopping short and causing the coots to rise in a mass response. The eagle then entered the water but without a coot. Finally it entered the water then rose with a coot in its talons.

Single birds have been seen on several occasions during the summer months at Centerton, Lake Atalanta, Lake Bentonville, and elsewhere.

#### **Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis***

STATUS: Very rare transient.

Sandhill Cranes migrating through western Arkansas from their breeding areas to the north reach the Gulf Coast during the period October to January (Tacha et al. 1992). In Missouri they are considered rare migrants, primarily through the western part of the state, from about mid-October to mid-November (Jacobs 2001). In Oklahoma, they are much more common as migrants in the western one-half of the state, but there are scattered records from northeastern Oklahoma as late as December 11 (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992). The three records for nWAR fall into this pattern.

Rose Ann Barnhill and others in her party observed a Sandhill Crane during the Fayetteville CBC on December 14, 2003. Barnhill has considerable experience with cranes in Belize and her observation was documented. Six flying cranes at Fayetteville on December 5, 2005, were observed (and documented) by Mary Bess Mulhollan. Art Evans and others saw 20 birds in an upland field near Gravette in Benton County on December 8, 2007.

### **Order *Charadriiformes* plovers, sandpipers, gulls, and terns**

#### **Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola***

STATUS: Somewhat rare transient not seen in some years; DATES: April 22 to May 26+ and August 12 to November 3.

Most observations are in May and October and involve single birds. This plover is found in typical mudflat habitat attractive to shorebirds (mudflats along pond margins at Centerton and mudflats when lakes are drawn-down), but also in open crop fields and pastures. Mike Mlodinow saw 41 at Centerton on May 26, 1994. There is also an observation involving one bird on June 1, 2007.

#### **American Golden-Plover, *Pluvialis dominica***

STATUS: Fairly common transient in spring and uncommon transient in fall; DATES: March 4 to May 19+ and September 9 to December 3.

The northward movements of this long distance migrant include regular stops in nWAR. Clay-rich soils of our former Tallgrass Prairie habitats hold spring rains, forming ephemeral, shallow playa-like ponds in pastures and hayfields. This provides suitable migration stopover habitat for golden-plovers headed for the wide-open spaces of the arctic and subarctic tundra in the far north. The open flats of drained fish hatchery ponds at Centerton also provide suitable habitat, with the annual migration peak there in the first three weeks of April (Smith et al. 1991). At or near Chesney Prairie Natural Area, there were 71 birds in two flocks using flooded pastures on March 20, 2008, and 210 in the same flooded fields on April 3. Also at Chesney, 35 were observed in a recently burned field on April 2, 2006; there were at least 9 more nearby at the Siloam Springs airport. Birds were scattered in fields on the former Beaty Prairie at Maysville on March 15, 2008, with flocks of 11, 20, 9, plus a

single bird associated with Killdeer. Joe Woolbright and I counted 184 in a former prairie field near Vaughn, in Benton County, on March 21, 2009. The birds were still in the same area at least until April 12 (three weeks).

Many fall records involve single birds, but 12 were at Centerton October 19, 2002. An injured bird was there as late as June 7, 1997.

**Snowy Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus***

One record. Barry Haas and Susan Hardin found this bird at Centerton on May 5, 2001. This furnished the third record for Arkansas. Their discovery came during a joint meeting of Arkansas Audubon Society and the Wilson Ornithological Society in Fayetteville. When Barry and Susan returned to the meeting with the news, their report was initially greeted with friendly skepticism. Right in the middle of that discussion, Kenny & LaDonna Nichols called on their cell phone directly from Centerton to say they had the bird in their scope and had photographed it. Most of us skeptics soon adjourned to the hatchery and checked this great rarity off our state bird lists. The plover provided many enjoyable birding hours until it was last seen May 8.

**Wilson's Plover, *Charadrius wilsonia***

One record. Nigel Ball discovered one at Centerton on May 18, 1986. It was subsequently seen by others and photographed. It remained until May 24.

**Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus***

STATUS: Fairly common to common transient; DATES: April 11 to May 25+ and July 11 to October 22.

Semis are fairly common and sometimes common transients from late April to mid-May and during August to mid-September. Most reports are from the state fish hatchery at Centerton and involve only a few individuals seen on open pond flats. Peaks include 31 on April 27, 1995, and 87 on April 28, 1996. There are also 2 early June records.

**Piping Plover, *Charadrius melodus***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: April 23 to May 1 and July 4 to September 24.

Piping Plover is Federally-listed as a Threatened Species in the Great Plains region. Almost all observations involved single birds or occasionally 2. Most observations are from Centerton. Mike Mlodinow and Mike Biven counted 8 there on July 8, 1993. Birds migrating through the western Ozarks are presumably associated with populations that nest on the Great Plains that lie to the west and north of northwest Arkansas (Haig 1992). Stopover mudflats like those associated with drained ponds at Centerton are important to this declining bird.

**Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Some Killdeer are present in nwAR throughout the year. They flock at favorable locations during late summer and fall and remain together much of the winter, at least until onset of hard freezes, ice, or snow. We find them in all of the

typical habitats favored by transient shorebirds. They often form these flocks in very open, closely grazed pastures. One hundred or more may gather in especially favorable locations.

Regardless of the weather, the flocks begin to break up- with the onset of nesting in late winter and early spring. They nest in open places where there are "beaches" of gravel. These can include: gravel along country roads and drives, bare places in fields, flat graveled roofs, pond banks, etc. Killdeer that nested one year at the 112 drive-in theatre in Fayetteville were protected with a roped off space until the young hatched.

During winter Killdeer can be readily observed except during extended periods of extreme cold and freeze-ups at mid-winter. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 47.1 (n=39, range 6-286). Most of this variation between high and low counts is no doubt related to weather patterns since most Killdeer depart the western Ozarks during severe winter weather.

**Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus***

Stilts have been seen once (and probably twice) here. I saw and photographed a single bird at the Craig State Fish Hatchery in Centerton on May 25, 2005. Hatchery employees told me they had first noticed the bird the previous day. Furthermore, they had seen two birds the previous year—so apparently 2 records!

**American Avocet, *Recurvirostra americana***

STATUS: Rare transient seen most years; DATES: April 9 to June 2 and July 24 to November 3.

While avocets have been seen at the Centerton hatchery many times over the years, they are not specifically attracted to mudflats and may be seen in many other aquatic habitats, including the shallows of lakes and ponds throughout western Arkansas. Most sightings have involved 1 or 2 birds, but occasionally we also see small flocks. JoAnne Rife and others enjoyed the 12 avocets along Crooked Creek in downtown Harrison April 24, 1992. Rob Doster reported 18 at Lake Fayetteville on April 20, 2003. A spring peak was indicated by the 35 that David Chapman saw at Lake Fayetteville April 18, 2008.

The 15 at Bob Kidd Lake on October 22, 1984, was a good fall count as were the 11 at Bull Shoals Lake in Boone County August 24, 1999. Amy Edie and I saw 11 in the shallows at Lake Sequoyah on October 8, 2008. Mike Mlodinow and Jacque Brown counted 28 at the University farm pond in Fayetteville October 26, 2008.

**Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularius***

STATUS: Common transient; very rare winter visitor; DATES: April 1 to June 8+ and July 4 to October 25+.

Most Spotted Sandpiper sightings involve early April to early June and early July to mid-October. The major northward push through Centerton occurs from mid-April through May (Smith et al. 1991). During migration peaks, as many as 5 to 8 are seen regularly during a day at the Centerton fish hatchery. They are also commonly seen feeding along streams. There were 12 at the hatchery on May

14, 2004.

Northern Arkansas is immediately south of this bird's extensive breeding range. There are two old records of breeding in the Winslow area (Black 1935), but none since. Callahan (1953) listed Spotted Sandpiper as a common summer resident at Lake Wedington, but without details. Spotted Sandpipers have been found in the Missouri Ozarks in summer, including probable nesting in Barry County, Missouri (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:113). Scattered reports of single birds in June are not unusual. Were birds seen at Centerton on June 28, 2000, and June 21, 2004, heading north or south? These observations fall into the crack between the typical end of spring migration in early June and the beginning of fall migration in early July (Oring et al. 1997).

Winter records are rare. A bird remained during the winter of 1982-1983 at SWEPCO Lake in Benton County, perhaps because of the lake's high water temperature (Smith 1985). Single birds also turned up on the Fayetteville CBC in 1989 and 1992. I have also seen Spotted Sandpipers on several occasions at mid-winter at Tenkiller Lake in Oklahoma, just west of nwAR.

#### **Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; very rare winter visitor;  
DATES: March 28 to June 10 and July 4 to November 23+.

Solitary Sandpipers can be found in a variety of habitats, especially open mudflats of ponds and along forested streams. In past years, relatively high counts were obtained at the Springdale wastewater treatment ponds: 8 on April 27, 1988. There were 7 to as many as 12 birds there during the period July 25-September 13, 1987. Twelve were tallied at Centerton on September 4, 1988. We have also been finding them in good numbers along the edges of shallow ponds at Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville.

There are several observations of single birds in December. A single healthy bird was observed along a spring-fed stream and pond near Johnson on January 4, 1986, and was present and still healthy a month later.

#### **Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca***

STATUS: Fairly common transient observed in low numbers;  
DATES: March 1 to June 4+ and July 1 to November 25+.

Peak numbers at the Centerton hatchery have been noted from mid-March through April, and last week in August to first week in November (Smith et al. 1991). The 25 in flooded fields near Chesney Prairie Natural Area on April 3, 2008, was a relatively high number for nwAR. Mike Mlodinow saw 4 on June 26, 2003. These birds left the hatchery heading south, suggesting to him that they were fall migrants. There are several mid-winter records, including single birds on the 1966 Fayetteville CBC and at Centerton on December 26, 2003 (this bird had an injured foot).

#### **Willet, *Tringa semipalmatus***

STATUS: Very uncommon spring transient and rare fall transient;  
DATES: April 16 to May 17+ and June 21 to September 4.

We usually spot Willets on mudflats of shallow ponds and also standing in the shallow open edges of forested lakes. However, Sheree and Hank Rogers saw 22 standing far from any water on a grassy lawn in Harrison on April 30, 2009.

Highest numbers involve the last week of April and the first week of May. John Prather saw 97 at Centerton on April 23, 1999, and Mike Mlodinow counted 100 at the same place May 1, 1990. JoAnne Rife has found flocks in the Table Rock Lake area: 10 at Cricket Creek boat dock May 3 and 16 on May 10, 1997, in the Long Creek boat dock area. Frank Reuter counted 35 at Lake Leatherwood (Eureka Springs) on April 22, 2008. My observation of 20 Willets on June 21, 1990, involved the Arkansas Game & Fish hatchery pond on Beaver Lake.

#### **Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes***

STATUS: Common transient; DATES: March 13 to June 1+ and June 20 to November 16.

There are several big peak records involving flocks of 40 or more in late April and early May. Birders attending an Arkansas Audubon Society meeting on April 28, 2007, were treated to 170 at Centerton on April 28, 2007. There were 193, also at Centerton, April 27, 1995. I saw at least 500 birds pass overhead in migrating flocks of 10-50 at Chesney Prairie Natural Area on April 28, 2007. "Several hundred" were at Lake Sequoyah on May 9, 1960.

Fall peaks tend to be much lower, rarely as many as 12. The suggested break between spring and fall (above) is arbitrary. It's based upon the fact that observations after the big spring peaks tend to be singles (these are scattered in June); summary of migration records in Tibbitts and Moskoff (1999) supports this treatment. Mike Mlodinow counted 3 on June 20, 1993, and 11 on June 21, 2000. Both of these Centerton observations in the second half of June suggest southward-moving fall migrants.

#### **Upland Sandpiper, *Bartramia longicauda***

STATUS: Fairly common transient, more frequently observed in fall than in spring; DATES: April 3 to May 16+ and July 2 to September 21.

Upland Sandpipers are typically found or heard flying overhead in extensively open areas like former prairie grasslands and crop fields. Many sightings (and hearings) involve April and August. The 12 birds in a pasture in Benton County near Centerton on April 24, 1984, was a high number for spring, as were the 9 at Vaughn on April 12, 2009. Overall, these birds are uncommon in spring, with most sightings scattered between the first week of April and the second week of May.

Fall transients are more common. The 10 I saw in a recently mowed hayfield on the former Norwood Prairie on August 14, 2005, was a fall migration peak. During 2004, I had records of 1-3 birds on three occasions at Chesney Prairie Natural Area and adjoining fields (August 13, 14, and 21; with Chesney's land steward Joe Woolbright on the 14th) and three records at Centerton (August 20, 28, and September 6). At least 18 flew over Chesney on August 26, 2006.

Baerg (1951) stated that a "small flock" was seen in Benton County on June 30, 1940. Kimberly G. Smith was shocked to observe one southwest of Boxley in Newton County on June 30, 1973. Nesting is confirmed in the Flint Hills prairie region of northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004), including the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Osage County. Several of us on a field trip there June 20, 2009, saw at least 22 Upland Sandpipers. They are present (and nest) in the Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:115).

Former Tallgrass Prairie in nwAR has been converted to introduced, non-native grasses like fescue and bermuda, with predictable detrimental impacts on these grassland birds. In Missouri, Upland Sandpipers were frequently seen in low to medium height grasses, no taller than their backs, and lacking dense ground cover; they were uncommon in fescue pastures, even with heavy grazing, possibly because dense ground cover associated with this grass would impede movement (Skinner and others 1984:9-10).

#### **Eskimo Curlew, *Numenius borealis***

The spring migration path of this species formerly included the Tallgrass Prairie habitats in central North America (Gill and others 1998). This northward spring path likely accounts for the report by Professor Harvey of the University of Arkansas of one bird at Fayetteville on March 31, 1883 (Howell 1911). The 1880s marks the period in which Tallgrass Prairie habitats were widely altered by fire suppression and plowing, and when Eskimo Curlew populations plunged toward extinction. This grassland sandpiper shared migration habitat choices similar to those of other "grasspipers" like Upland Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden-Plover.

#### **Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus***

STATUS: Rare spring transient; DATES: May 14-23.

Two birds were at Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove on May 23, 1984. All other observations are from Centerton in Benton County: May 21, 1987 (1), May 14, 1994(3), May 14, 1997 (1), May 19, 1999 (1), and May 17, 2002, when Mike Mlodinow and I saw 6 overhead.

#### **Long-billed Curlew, *Numenius americanus***

One record. I found a single bird in a flooded field immediately southwest of Chesney Prairie Natural Area in Benton County on April 10, 2008. The bird appeared immediately following a night of heavy rains. It was viewed by others and photographed, but was not seen after April 10. The bird foraged heavily on terrestrial crawfish and large worms.

Long-billed Curlews spend the winter southwest of Arkansas and nest on the Great Plains (Dugger and Dugger 2002). The flooded field, formerly part of once extensive Tallgrass Prairies in the Siloam Springs area, hosted other shorebird species, including yellowlegs, American Golden-Plovers, Wilson's Phalaropes, and Pectoral Sandpipers.

#### **Hudsonian Godwit, *Limosa haemastica***

STATUS: Somewhat rare spring transient; DATES: April 14 to May 26.

Almost all observations of Hudsonian Godwits have been made at the state fish hatchery in Centerton. Flocks include: 26 on May 12, 1984; 10 on May 12, 1985; 22 on April 14, 1988; 35 on May 9, 1989; 28 on May 14, 1997; 41 on May 14, 1997.

Two birds I saw at the University farm in Fayetteville during International Migratory Bird Day on May 14, 2005, furnish a rare observation outside Centerton. This farm pond and associated mudflat is similar in many respects to the ponds at Centerton in that the landscape is very open and is a former prairie. Approximately 50 Stilt Sandpipers and 30 White-rumped Sandpipers were associated with the godwits at University farm (see the cover photograph). Hudsonian Godwits and numerous other shorebird species were also found at Centerton during this "fall out" event of May 14, 2005.

#### **Marbled Godwit, *Limosa fedora***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: April 13-May 13, July 21-August 13.

Mike Mlodinow has found this bird four times. Records of single birds include Lake Sequoyah on July 29, 1989, Centerton on August 13, 1989, and Beaver Lake State Park on April 13, 1991. The peak record involved 8 birds at Centerton on July 21, 2000. Kenny and LaDonna Nichols observed 2 at Centerton on May 13, 2005. The same couple, plus Dick Baxter, found 2 birds at a farm pond near Centerton on April 11, 2008, while looking for a Long-billed Curlew.

#### **Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres***

STATUS: Rare spring transient; DATES: May 14-June 4 and October 9-18 (one record).

Most Ruddy Turnstone observations involve 1 or 2 birds in breeding plumage, and all are from the state fish hatchery at Centerton. Peaks include 26 there on May 25, 1997, as reported by David Chapman and Mike Mlodinow, and 12 on May 17, 2002. The only fall record is that of October 9-18, 1983, also at the hatchery.

#### **Red Knot, *Calidris canutus***

Written documentation was placed in the Arkansas Audubon Society file for a single bird seen by a number of observers at Lake Sequoyah in Fayetteville on September 1-10, 1983. This was a fall when the lake was drained, exposing huge mudflats. Baerg (1951) considered "somewhat doubtful" the report of a bird in Benton County on April 30, 1947.

#### **Sanderling, *Calidris alba***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: April 28-May 28 and July 21-September 25.

Most Sanderling observations involve single birds, up to 3 on occasion. They have been reported from the state fish hatchery at Centerton, Springdale wastewater plant ponds, Lake Atalanta, and Lake Elmdale. Single birds were

seen regularly August 3-September 7, 1983, on extensive mudflats that formed when Lake Sequoyah at Fayetteville was drawn-down for maintenance. At the same location, 1-3 birds were seen August 29- September 19, 1982, and 1 on August 15, 1989.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper, *Calidris pusilla***

STATUS: Common transient; DATES: April 7 to June 17 and July 8 to September 29+.

This is one of the common “peeps” that can be found regularly during both the northward and southward migration. The big peak in spring occurs throughout May (Smith et al. 1991). Mike Mlodinow counted 187 on May 24, 1994; 282 on the same day in 1995; and 394 (with David Chapman) on May 17, 1999. The end of northward spring migration and the beginning of southward fall migration is confused by at least 4 scattered June records. On June 2, 1984, 30 birds were observed at Centerton and 4 were present there on June 16, 1998. A single bird with an injured leg was still at the hatchery on the unusually late date of October 27, 2007.

**Western Sandpiper, *Calidris mauri***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; DATES: April 13 to May 28+ and July 8 to September 29+.

This “peep” is never common in migration through nwAR. Migration peak counts include 24 at Lake Sequoyah in Fayetteville on August 31, 1963, and 20 at the state fish hatchery in Benton County on September 12, 1981. The 8 at the hatchery on April 29, 1993, indicated a spring peak. A single bird at Centerton June 9, 2004, was missing a foot. There is also an observation for October 29, 1989, approximately a month later than other fall records.

**Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla***

STATUS: Common transient and fairly common winter resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

The big northward push of spring occurs during May as evident in peak counts like 116 on mudflats at the state fish hatchery May 14, 1985, and 166 in the same place on May 4, 2003. Records of single birds at the end of May and during early June may be non-breeders remaining on their winter range (Cooper 1994).

Fall migration may begin as early as the end of June and certainly by early July; relatively numerous records for the first week in July typically involve single birds or occasionally 3. The 70 at Centerton August 28, 2004, was a good fall count.

Observations of fewer than a dozen birds at midwinter are typical. There are midwinter observations in at least the following places: Centerton, SWEPCO Lake near Gentry, Beaver Lake, wastewater treatment plants at both Springdale and Fayetteville, and Lake Elmdale near Springdale. The 15 at Centerton on December 24, 1998, was a good winter count. Mike Mlodinow, Amy Clifton, and I saw 32 at Centerton on December 4, 2004. Fluctuation in midwinter numbers associated with severity or mildness of the season

would be expected because western Arkansas is on the northern edge of this bird’s winter range.

**White-rumped Sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis***

STATUS: Locally common spring transient; very rare fall transient; DATES: April 21 to June 29.

Counts of over 100 birds have occurred on several occasions at Centerton during the period May 12 to May 28, and 193 were observed by Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman on May 17, 1997. During the big fallout day of May 14, 2005 (International Migratory Bird Day), I was surprised to see 10 white-rumps among other shorebirds in a flooded field with shallow pools in Fayetteville, and later, at least 30 on the mudflat margins of a big pond on the University farm in Fayetteville. It commonly lingers past mid-June. These late reports involve 1-2 birds.

There are two fall records: August 16, 1966, and November 8, 1989.

**Baird’s Sandpiper, *Calidris bairdii***

STATUS: Fairly common spring transient, uncommon fall transient; DATES: March 10 to June 11 and July 22 to November 16.

Baird’s Sandpiper occurs regularly though often in low numbers on mudflats associated with drained ponds at the Craig state fish hatchery in Centerton. Spring peaks ranging from 14-24 birds involve April 20 to May 5. The 9 on September 28, 1986, indicated a fall peak count. There are also other records, including most recently, Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville.

**Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos***

STATUS: Common transient; DATES: March 5 to June 16+ and July 9 to December 9+.

This “grasspiper” is found in numerous grassy, open habitats including drained ponds or pond margins, sewage lagoons, and low, wet pastures. Centerton spring migration peaks include: 92 on March 26, 1986, 263 on April 26, 2002, and 87 on May 25, 1994. I counted 47 associated with golden-plovers in a flooded field near Chesney Prairie Natural Area April 3, 2008.

Fall peaks include 180 on August 28, 1982, at Centerton. The count on August 21, 1989, was 189 on extensive mudflats exposed at Lake Sequoyah during a drawdown year. There are additional scattered records in late June and late December.

**Dunlin, *Calidris alpina***

STATUS: Very uncommon spring transient; uncommon but regular fall transient; DATES: April 19 to June 4 and July 22 to November 22+.

Sally Jo and J.O. Gibson saw approximately 50 Dunlins at Centerton on May 25, 1997. This is one of our latest arriving fall shorebird transients: sightings prior to mid-October are rare. There were 20 along the shoreline at Lake Elmdale on November 8, 2003. In addition, there is a December 4, 2004, record from Centerton.

Two birds at SWEPCO Lake near Gentry on January 18, 2004, and February 27, 2004, were either Western Sandpipers or more likely, Dunlins. I photographed a definitive Dunlin on mudflats at SWEPCO Lake on December 31, 2005. The abnormally high water temperatures at SWEPCO Lake may encourage these birds remain somewhat north of their usual winter range.

**Stilt Sandpiper, *Calidris himantopus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; DATES: April 29 to June 2 and July 11 to November 16.

Overall, highest numbers of Stilts occur during the second and third weeks of May. Centerton peaks include 93 there on May 13, 1984; 118 on May 14, 1985; 80 on May 9, 2000. Approximately 50 Stilts Sandpipers and 30 White-rumped Sandpipers were associated with two Hudsonian Godwits at University farm in Fayetteville May 14, 2005—just in time for International Migratory Bird Day. The 15 at Centerton on July 19, 1988, was a good fall count.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper, *Tryngites subruficollis***

STATUS: Rare spring transient, very uncommon fall transient; DATES: May 12-May 17 and July 27 to September 28.

A flock of 11 was observed on a dry flat area where grass was just sprouting at Lake Sequoyah near Fayetteville on September 16, 1982. At Centerton, Mike Mlodinow counted 16 on August 24, 2000, and Mike and Jimmy Woodard counted 20 there on September 9, 1990. Each of the four spring observations involved 1-2 birds.

**Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax***

One record. Mike Mlodinow and Rob Dobbs identified one at Centerton on April 22, 1994.

**Short-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus griseus***

STATUS: Very uncommon transient; DATES: April 30 to May 31 and July 6 to October 22.

Observers separate the two dowitcher species by their different calls and specific plumage characteristics. I always feel more confident about identifying Short-billed Dowitchers when I hear their tu-tu-tu calls.

The big northward push seems to occur here in the second week of May. The following high counts are from Centerton: 70 on May 15, 1986; 40 on May 13, 1989; and 215 on May 12, 1997. The 15 at Centerton on October 2, 1986, reported by Russell Graham, indicated a fall peak. There are also three records of the *griseus* race, as noted by Mike Mlodinow.

**Long-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus scolopaceus***

STATUS: Transient that is uncommon in spring (but note peak numbers) and fairly common in fall; DATES: March 26 to May 26+ and July 6 to November 21+.

Arkansas Audubon Society birders who visited the Centerton hatchery on April 28, 2007, hit a big shorebird peak in migration, including 155 Long-billed Dowitchers. Mike Mlodinow and I counted 87 Long-billed Dowitchers at Centerton on May 1, 2003, a big peak. There are also reports

of 51, 58, and 68 during the spring peak period, late April into the first two weeks of May.

A flock of 34, identified by keek calls, was at Centerton on October 23, 1984, and 54 were counted on October 7, 1990. There are additional records of single birds for June 21, 1998, and one that lingered at least until December 8, 1986.

**Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago delicata***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: July 17 to May 16+.

These "grasspipers" are widespread in wet, grassy or marshy places in open country and pond edges well vegetated with grasses and other emergent vegetation. Most observations occur between the end of September and the end of April. Data from fall 2004 trips to Centerton illustrate the fall influx reasonably well: first bird on August 20, as many as 7 by September 2; 25 on October 16; approximately 100 by October 31; approximately 130 by November 15.

Wilson Snipe probe deeply into mud with their long bills. As a result, severe weather characterized by prolonged freezes reduces feeding opportunities at midwinter. Many of the fall migrants then move south.

Snipe have been found during most Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville. While the usual number ranges up to 20 or fewer, there were 102 in 1976. The Fayetteville CBC also shows low years with only 0-2 snipes on 9 counts since 1961.

Joe Woolbright and I counted 331 in a flooded field near Chesney Prairie Natural Area in Benton County on March 20, 2008; this reflected a big spring peak. My spring 2004 records also illustrate the spring migration at Centerton: 6 on April 18 (including 2 birds engaging in courtship displays); 3 on April 24; 0 on May 1 – all birds had departed for their nesting grounds north and west. There are also two June records involving single birds.

**American Woodcock, *Scolopax minor***

STATUS: common transient, rare otherwise; DATES: observed in all seasons, but primarily in spring.

We see woodcocks mainly between mid-February and early April, because at this time males perform their spectacular nuptial flights where open fields with some bare ground adjoins forests, including pastures and regenerating patches within forests. In such places several males can be seen and heard performing at dawn and dusk during early spring, even when there is snow on the ground. Open fields along the north side of Lake Fayetteville have served as a regular site for those flights and have drawn appreciative audiences.

In the Ouachita Mountains to the south, Jack Davis uses his dogs to find woodcocks in a mixed pine and hardwood plantation adjoining Lake Nimrod in Yell County. Careful records he shared with me for 2006 and 2007 showed highest numbers during February into the second half of March, with the migration peak from about mid-February into early March. The situation is similar in nWAR. I led a field trip for Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society to the



Wedington Small Game area on March 15, 2009. We heard only one bird. Woodcock expert David Kremenz suggested that a warm front in the previous week probably encouraged most birds to continue migrating north. Future field trips there will occur in late February.

Among nesting records are an adult with four hatchlings near Ponca in Newton County on April 15, 1984, and an adult with four hatchlings in the Wharton Creek area of Madison County on March 31, 1985. Single birds were reported on the Fayetteville CBC in 1975 and 1995. Kremenz and others (1995) found that at night, wintering woodcocks were typically in forested habitat and less often in open fields.

**Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor***

STATUS: Fairly common spring and rare fall transient; DATES: March 26 to June 8 and July 2 to October 25.

Most reports of Wilson's Phalarope involve one or a few birds, especially during May. Centerton peaks include: 30 on May 2, 1984; 32 on May 20, 1985; 48 on May 19, 1997. The 5 on July 25, 1993, was a fall peak count.

**Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus***

STATUS: Very rare spring transient, and one fall record; DATES: May 14 to June 6; September 27.

Peak records include five on May 19, 1997 and three at Centerton on September 27, 1986.

**Red Phalarope, *Phalaropus fulicaria***

One record. A single bird was observed at Centerton on May 14, 1988.

**Black-legged Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla***

Max and Helen Parker and Doug James identified one at Beaver Lake on November 19, 1991. It was relocated again (presumably the same bird) as late as November 23.

**Bonaparte's Gull, *Larus philadelphia***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and local winter resident; DATES: October 17 to May 12.

Bonaparte's Gulls have arrived in northwestern Arkansas as early as mid-October, but we don't see them regularly until big cold fronts from mid-November and thereafter. During migration we see them on many smaller lakes, but with the arrival of real winter weather, sightings tend to be restricted to larger lakes.

The 180 at Beaver Dam State Park on December 12, 1992, was an excellent count. The 115 at Lost Bridge on Beaver Lake December 31, 1989, were apparently attracted to a large fish kill, according to notes provided by Russell Graham and Mike Mlodinow. I saw 155 in a raft visible from Lost Bridge North Park, January 7, 2009. Besides Bonaparte's, other birds in the raft included Ring-billed Gulls, Common Goldeneyes, and other duck species. I counted 342, in flocks of 10-30, as they flew into the Beaver Lake dam area from downstream (perhaps Table Rock Lake), from 7:30-9:20 AM, on January 14, 2009. This is a "good bird" for the

Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, with only a few observations over the years: 1973(1), 1995 (10), 1999(7), 2003(4), and 2006 and 2008 (count week records).

Russell Graham reported 50+ in the Prairie Creek area of Beaver Lake March 3, 1986. In 1984, counts of 6 to 30 birds were made regularly between April 1 and May 2 at Lake Frances (now drained) near Siloam Springs.

**Laughing Gull, *Larus atricilla***

STATUS: Rare transient; April 5 to May 4.

There are 4 observations for this common coastal gull of 1 or 2 birds between 1994 and 2001. Two of these sightings have something in common: a single Laughing Gull with a small flock of Franklin's Gulls. On April 28, 1996, Mike Mlodinow and Mike Bivin saw one with 5 Franklin's at Centerton. On April 23, 2001, Richard Stauffacher, Irene Camargo, and I had a similar observation. In my field notes I wrote that April 23 followed rain and a cold front that stopped the typical northward migration of spring, resulting in a lot of spring migration "fall out." The Laughing Gull, in smart summer plumage, was perched on the mudflats at Centerton with 10-15 Franklin's Gulls, which exhibited the amazing rosy blush of their nesting season breast plumage.

**Franklin's Gull, *Larus pipixcan***

STATUS: Somewhat rare spring and uncommon, but regular fall transient; DATES: March 22 to June 8+ and July 31 to November 13.

Franklin's Gull nests in the prairie marshes of the northern U.S. and Canada, and migrates through the prairie interior of North America to winter in Mexico and further south (Burger and Gochfeld 1994). Its migration path carries it through our former prairies. Note (below) how many of our nWAR observations are from the state fish hatchery at Centerton. We also find them in other favored birding locales. The hatchery occupies former prairie grassland in a very open country suitable for these migrants.

The southward fall migration is sometimes spectacular, especially in October. An estimated 200 were at Centerton on October 9, 1983, and we thought the true count might actually be double that figure. On October 14, 2006, Amy Edie and I saw at least 150 seeming to float above the fish hatchery ponds at Centerton. On October 19, 1985, 300 formed southward flowing kettles in the vicinity of Smith Field in Siloam Springs, with single birds and small flocks streaming south. The 14 we saw over Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove on November 11, 2002, was a high count late in fall.

Spring observations tend to peak in late April and May. There were 50 Franklin's at Centerton on April 23, 2001, and 14 there on May 1, 2003, reflecting spring peaks. Mike Mlodinow counted 12 at Centerton on June 8, 2007, and a single bird on June 13, 2004.

**Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis***

STATUS: Common migrant and winter resident; DATES: August 10 to May 16.

These gulls spend winter in nwAR. Typically, we see the first migrants associated with big cold fronts, though there are several records of single birds found during late summer. For example, the 85 birds we saw at Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove on November 7, 2003, reflected a fall peak for the influx of Ring-billed Gulls. (This was also a major peak day for fall waterfowl migration.) On the same day we also saw these gulls at Lake Fayetteville (2+), and Centerton (15)—also indicative of a major influx from their breeding areas to the north.

They are found with fair regularity during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, usually in low numbers. A big count (for nwAR) of 157 was obtained on the CBC of December 18, 2005, a result of discovery they are present at the Waste Management landfill at Tontitown. On January 2, 1984, Bob Lowe and I saw 48 Ring-billed Gulls standing on ice in the Prairie Creek area of Beaver Lake and another 60 later in the day. On Bull Shoals Lake, they occur regularly in the Sugar Loaf area near Lead Hill in Boone County. Flocks have been found on several occasions feeding on dead fish at the state fish hatchery and at Beaver Lake. The estimated 250-500 seen by Russell Graham and Mike Mlodinow at Lost Bridge Park on Beaver Lake December 31, 1989, was a high count for our area. They are also apparently present all winter at SWEPCO Lake near Gentry, and at the Wild Wilderness Drive-through Safari, also in Benton County.

#### **Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 3 to April 14+.

There are only about a dozen or so observations and all involve single birds. In addition to the above observations, there was a single bird at Beaver Lake on June 2, 1990.

#### **Sooty Tern, *Onychoprion fuscatus***

One record. Mike Mlodinow and Jacque Brown picked out nwAR's only record for this coastal species on September 6, 2008, from Rocky Branch on Beaver Lake. Sooty Terns are widely distributed well to our south in the Gulf of Mexico and elsewhere. They are subject to long-distance displacement by tropical storms (Schreiber et al. 2002). Such was the case in early September 2008 when Hurricane Gustav roared north from the Gulf, displacing many coastal species.

#### **Least Tern, *Sternula antillarum***

STATUS: Transient that is very uncommon, but also of fairly regular occurrence; DATES: April 20 to June 4+ and July 28 to September 7+.

Inland nesting Least Terns are Federally-listed as an Endangered Species. We see them annually in nwAR. Most sightings involve single birds at reservoirs or larger ponds. Five were at Centerton on May 20, 1988, and 4 at the same location August 6, 1989. There are at least 4 records of single birds at Centerton into in the second and third weeks of June. One was seen at Beaver Lake at the relatively late date of October 30, 1994. Least Terns nest on the Arkansas River south of northwest Arkansas (James and Neal 1986), in

Oklahoma (Reinking 2004: 159) and in southeastern Missouri (Jacobs 2001:144).

#### **Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia***

STATUS: Uncommon transient in low numbers in fall; many fewer records for spring; DATES: April 28 to June 6+ and July 8 to October 10.

Most sightings of Caspian Terns involve a few birds or small flocks, occasionally as many as a dozen individuals. Flocks seen in fall in the Ozarks usually include immature birds being fed by adults. A flock of 53 flew over Lake Sequoyah on September 16, 1982, and 27 were at Lake Frances (now drained) on September 2, 1986. There were 16 on May 12, 1990, at Centerton and 14 at Lake Elmdale on June 6, 1992. Three of these terns were foraging in the Horseshoe Bend area of Beaver Lake on June 21, 1990.

#### **Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; DATES: April 28 to June 6+ and July 11 to September 26.

This is the most numerous tern migrating through nwAR. Single individuals and small flocks are widespread. Big peaks involving upwards to 100 or more birds typically occur in mid to late May. For example, 57 were at Centerton on May 20, 2006. The 76 counted by Mike Mlodinow at Centerton on June 6, 1992, was a high number relatively late in the northward migration.

The flock of 50 Black Terns at the hatchery on August 25, 2007, was a good fall count. There are some interesting mid-June observations as well: 2 birds at Centerton on June 13, 2002, and 6 at Beaver Lake in the Horseshoe Bend area on June 21, 1990.

#### **Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: May 2-26 and August 12 to September 25.

This tern is easily confused with Forster's, which is much more common in migration here. Five birds were seen at the state fish hatchery ponds on May 12, 1985, and 12 there on May 23, 1992.

#### **Forster's Tern, *Sterna forsteri***

STATUS: Uncommon to fairly common transient; DATES: April 1 to June 8+ and July 9 to October 11+.

Forster's Tern is observed over open bodies of water. Spring peaks include: 22 on April 28, 1996, at Centerton and 14 at Lake Fayetteville May 4, 1994. Fall peaks include 11 at Centerton on July 29, 1982, following the passage of a heavy rainstorm, and 20 at Lake Sequoyah on September 29, 1980. Among June records are two at Bob Kidd Lake on June 8, 1986 and four at Centerton on June 26, 1990. One was at Bob Kidd Lake on December 15, 1990. David Chapman saw one at Lake Fayetteville on December 10, 2007.

#### **Royal Tern, *Thalasseus maximus***

One record. Doug James, who is thoroughly familiar with the much more common and similar-looking Caspian Tern, closely observed a Royal Tern at the state fish

hatchery in Centerton on September 4, 2008. This coastal species occurs inland on occasion, especially after tropical storms (Buckley and Buckley 2002). Such was the case in early September 2008, when Hurricane Gustav reached Arkansas. There was also a Royal Tern in southern Arkansas during this time.

### **Order Columbiformes** **pigeons and doves**

#### **Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Rock Pigeons are found in especially high numbers around feedlots and feed mills, benefiting from plentiful waste grains. They can also be seen in more "natural" habitats like the picturesque bluffs above the Buffalo River. Wherever found, their graceful flights and cooing add much to the delight of the outdoors, a compensation to keep in mind in the face of poisoning and other killing methods used to reduce their numbers in urban areas. Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts typically involve hundreds up to the 1,310 in 1994.

#### **Eurasian Collared-Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: now observed in all seasons.

Our first record dates to 1989: Martha Milburn had one in her yard at Harrison in Boone County June 25-August 1, 1989; it was found dead on August 17. Subsequently the birds have been seen regularly in at least Washington, Benton, and Boone counties. One was observed for the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count in 2002, and Amy Clifton counted 60 at the Tyson feed mill in Springdale on December 14, 2003, during that year's CBC. We are now finding them regularly in the poultry-producing areas of Benton County, no doubt a result of plentiful waste grain available throughout the area. I counted a minimum of 39 at a dairy farm near Vaughn in Benton County on December 1, 2007. They are also tallied on the Crooked Creek CBC (5-6 on recent counts). There is an interesting description of the initial records for Arkansas and how it was determined these were not escaped cage birds (James and others 1994).

#### **White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica***

Two records. Donald and Barbara Holt identified one in their yard in Fayetteville; it was present from November 18-December 5, 2000. Kelly Chitwood observed one west of Fayetteville on February 17, 2007.

#### **Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Mourning Doves nest throughout nwAR and they start early: Jack Mobly and Doug James found a nest at the UA-Fayetteville in which eggs were laid by about February 7, 1992. Post-breeding season flocks begin to form during July, and large flocks numbering in the hundreds can be seen in stubble fields and other open fields with waste grain during late summer and fall. We see them in high numbers at the

University farm in Fayetteville.

There were easily 200 or more around Chesney Prairie Natural Area at Siloam Springs on August 6, 2005. Joe Woolbright, a Siloam native and Chesney Prairie land steward, said huge flocks were an annual event. These birds are almost always recorded on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Counts of 100-200 are common; the mean was 115.6 (n=39, range 0-413).

#### **Passenger Pigeon, *Ectopistes migratorius***

Extinct. It was once a plentiful transient and winter visitor last reported in about 1900 (see Howell 1911, Schorger 1955). Passenger Pigeon bones were recovered from the cellar of the historic Ridge House in Fayetteville during archaeological work (Journey 1978).

#### **Inca Dove, *Columbina inca***

STATUS: Apparently rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: August 24 to December 25.

One bird was found dead at Fayetteville on December 3, 1972. Another bird was seen in Fayetteville from October 22, 1990, to January 8, 1991. Robert Doster and Lisa K. Mosely identified and photographed an adult male on August 24-25, 2002. Harold J. Hill photographed one in Fayetteville on December 25, 2002. Mike Mlodinow saw one at Fayetteville October 21, 2007.

### **Order Psittaciformes** **parrots**

#### **Carolina Parakeet, *Conuropsis carolinensis***

Extinct. Carolina Parakeet was not seen here after the 1870s or 1880s (Howell 1911, McKinley and James 1985).

### **Order Cuculiformes** **Cuckoos and roadrunners**

#### **Yellow-billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus americanus***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 25 to November 6.

During summer these cuckoos nest at the forest edge or in forest openings. It often selects a cedar or a small tree covered by vines as nest site. During 1985, I observed seven nests with eggs or young at Durham southeast of Fayetteville from late May to mid-August. The nests were all 12 feet or lower, and were in cedar trees (3), oaks (2), hackberry (1), and winged elm (1). A rat snake ate the contents of one of these nests and a windstorm in early June destroyed another. In his studies in the Winslow area, Black (1935) found young in "about five different nests on September 11, 12 and 16, all of the young still being in quills."

They are found on Breeding Bird Surveys throughout nwAR. On the Ozark National Forest BBS in Johnson County, the mean was 14.2 (n=9, range 6-28). Forest management studies (Thompson et al. 1995) showed them in stands managed with a variety of treatments, with highest numbers in mature forests. Breeding season point counts

from the Ozark NF showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**Black-billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus***

STATUS: Rare spring transient; very rare summer resident; very rare fall transient; DATES: April 20 to October 19.

Spring records are mostly during May. Fall sightings are scattered between late August and mid-October. Baerg (1951) published two nesting records. A nest was found at Harrison in 1958. Two birds were present at Lake Elmdale on May 30, 1992, and a bird was seen well (and also heard vocalizing) at Lake Fayetteville June 3, 2001. Black-billed Cuckoos were found during the course of the Missouri Breeding Bird Atlas in the Ozarks bordering Arkansas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:125).

**Greater Roadrunner, *Geococcyx californianus***

STATUS: Uncommon to locally common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

It is easy to almost never see a roadrunner. They are typically found along roads or in pastures where there is a mixture of forest and farm clearings or in lightly developed areas of towns. They occur around farm places and in some areas the birds are seen daily over years. Otherwise, sightings tend to be by chance.

Winters in the late 1970s apparently decimated them in the Ozarks (Evans and Probasco 1982). Severe weather reduces the prey upon which roadrunners depend. Reports since the late 1980s suggest they rebounded. Roadrunners were found on each Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count between 1963 and 1972, with a peak of 5 in 1972. None were found on any count again until 1981. Since that time, most CBC tallies have involved 0 or 1 bird, but 4 were seen in 1991. Roadrunner totals involve 1-3 on the Crooked Creek CBC. Mary Pledger of Boone County told JoAnne Rife about a series of nests at the base of Gaither Mountain. She saw 3 adults and 5 fledglings there on May 26, 1996.

**Order *Strigiformes*  
owls**

**Barn Owl, *Tyto alba***

STATUS: Very rare visitor; Dates: observations in all seasons.

Baerg (1951) published one report for Washington County. A specimen was collected near Rogers in the summer of 1958. A single bird was at Sonora in Washington County on April 2, 1957. A bird was noted during summer on a study site in Benton County (as reported in Shugart and James 1973). One was observed in Benton County north of Siloam Springs on December 24, 1989. Mike Mlodinow saw one in Fayetteville on October 18, 1998, and another on March 11, 2004. Abby Darrah saw one at Razorback Park golf course in Fayetteville February 17, 2008.

**Eastern Screech-Owl, *Megascops asio***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: heard or seen in all seasons.

Adults with fledglings have been seen flying at dusk in Fayetteville in late May and early June on several occasions over the years. Roosting birds can be found almost anywhere with mature tree cavities. Large boxes, like those put up for Wood Ducks, are used by screech-owls in even a small woodlot in town. In several different years I've had birds in large boxes in my yard in Fayetteville. On sunny days at midwinter they perch at the box entrance, seemingly heedless of the stir this causes for vigilant jays, titmice, and other smaller birds. A few are reported on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts (peak of 6 in 1997 and 2005). Red plumaged birds of southern populations are the screech-owls mostly commonly found here, but there are also records of gray plumaged birds associated with northern populations.

**Great Horned Owl, *Bubo virginianus***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: heard or seen in all seasons.

This big owl is king where broken woods are mixed with open farmlands. In the Arkansas Ozarks it nests in old Red-tailed Hawk nests and probably those of crows. A hawk's nest in spring 1982 became an owl's nest the following two years. At Lake Fayetteville, I saw an adult on the nest on January 22, with two hatchlings on January 29, and young owls climbing out of the nest on February 27. In 2005, I saw a nest in a Great Blue Heron colony at Lake Sequoyah near Fayetteville that held two downy young on March 19 (it seems the owls chose a heron nest before the herons returned to the colony site). A nest in a mature post oak west of Bentonville held two large nestlings on April 2, 2005. During the course of the 2005 International Migratory Bird Day, I saw two fledglings accompanied by an adult in a pine woodlot at the University farm in Fayetteville on May 14 (see image inside front cover). Great Horneds are tallied each year on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, with peaks of 11 (1973) and 10 (1994).

**Barred Owl, *Strix varia***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: heard or seen in all seasons.

Barred Owls are denizens of mature forest. They are recorded in small numbers (often in the range of 1-3) on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts (if there is an owling party). The peak was 8 in 1973. There have been no formal surveys for Barred Owls here, so quantitative data is lacking. However, I have often seen or heard them without special effort during walks on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville, at Lake Sequoyah, at night in the Wedington Unit of the Ozark NF, and at the Buffalo National River. I have never failed to hear them at Lake Wilson in Washington County where I often go to find them during the Fayetteville CBC.

I had the good fortune to find a nest in 2005 at Lake Fayetteville. I was walking on the Two Turtles trail in good daylight on March 13 looking for an early Black-and-white Warbler. I found no Black-and-whites that day, but I heard a Barred Owl calling. It sounded unusual, sort of hollow, as though coming through a pipe. Finally I discovered the source of this strange singing. It came from within a

hardwood snag whose top had been broken in a storm. The top of the snag was about 25 feet high; part of the owl's wing protruded from a long crack. In subsequent trips I again could see part of the incubating adult's wing and a second adult owl perched in a cedar near the nest. A fully feathered owlet was perched on top of the snag by May 6; I could just see the top of a second owlet's head.

**Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus***

STATUS: Very rare winter visitor; DATES: October 18 to April 4.

Albert Lano, an early day Fayetteville ornithologist, considered this owl a fairly common winter visitor (Black 1933). Specimens of four owls, collected from Benton and Washington Counties, in 1924, 1925, 1930, and 1935 are in the University of Arkansas Museum collection. Douglas James found four birds in a pine grove east of Rogers on April 4, 1959. Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger and Sheree Rogers provided convincing written documentation for a bird found during the course of the Crooked Creek Christmas Bird Count on December 19, 2007. I have neither seen nor heard a Long-eared Owl in nwAR in three decades of field work here.

**Short-eared Owl, *Asio flammeus***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 1 to March 28.

Short-eared Owls remind me of Northern Harriers, both in their general appearance and in their behavior of low flight over broad, open grassy fields. Of course, we see harriers in the daylight, and the nocturnal owls only if we are lucky to flush them from their roosts in dense grassy vegetation. The presence of both of these species (and prey) is dependent upon suitable, high quality open field habitat, which in nwAR is often former low-lying prairie grasslands, what I have termed seasonal wetlands with tall grasses and other cover.

Baerg (1951) attributed an "invasion" of Short-eared Owls involving the period (December 4- March 25) to a heavy infestation of cotton rats. This behavior of congregating in the area of an attractive food source is a well known characteristic (Holt and Leasure 2006). At Siloam Springs, Joe and Vivian Stockton received and provided care for birds injured after impacts with automobiles in 1980, 1982, and 1985. These birds were from Springdale and from Carroll County. An injured bird was found on the east side of Fayetteville on November 1, 1985. A single bird was seen during a snowstorm at Rogers on December 15, 1987.

The following are recent sightings, all of single owls: Clabber Creek bottomland fields at Fayetteville on February 18, 2001; tall dense native grasses at Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs December 24, 2003, and January 1, 2007; state fish hatchery at Centerton on March 12, 2005; University farm at Fayetteville November 6, 2006; Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville, December 10, 2006; and December 16, 2007, at Stonebridge Meadows golf club just east of Fayetteville. A single bird was seen well during a Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trip to Chesney Prairie January 10, 2009. Jacques Brown found one

March 28, 2009, a snowy day at Centerton.

In Missouri, Short-eared Owls roosted in medium-to-tall grasslands that were either moderately grazed or idle (Skinner and others 1984:14).

**Northern Saw-whet Owl, *Aegolius acadicus***

Two records. A single bird was observed near Shores Lake in the Ozark National Forest of Franklin County on January 30, 1967. There is also a documented observation in Boone County on December 25, 1997.

**Order *Caprimulgiformes*  
goatsuckers**

**Common Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 24 to October 19+.

Nighthawks are common in extensively open areas (see image on "Contents" page) where strong outdoor lights concentrate insect prey. Small loose foraging flocks may be swirling above big parking lots during spring and summer. In fall, nighthawks pass through in large flocks, often with more than 100 individuals, between late August and early October. A total of 250 migrated southward over Fayetteville on August 27, 1987, during the passage of heavy rainstorms. The 20 over Chesney Prairie near Siloam Springs on October 4, 2008, was a high number so late in the season, as were 96 at Fayetteville on October 12, 1985.

There are also two observations of single birds in mid-November, but no vocalizations were heard. The assumption is that these were Common Nighthawks, but another nighthawk species could not be eliminated.

**Chuck-will's-widow, *Caprimulgus carolinensis***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 14 to September 13.

This and the following species are often called "whip-poor-wills" by those unfamiliar with the distinctions in their songs. "Chucks" usually inhabit the dry open woods near open farmland or other types of forest clearings, especially those in bottomlands, low hills, and low ridges. Two eggs are laid on leaves, often under a cedar or other small tree. In 1984 and 1985, six clutches of eggs or new hatchlings were observed between May 24 and July 17 during the course of a research project conducted on low, forested hillsides near Durham southeast of Fayetteville.

**Whip-poor-will, *Caprimulgus vociferus***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: March 28 to September 22.

"Whips" usually arrive in the Ozarks before "chucks." Their calls may be heard almost anywhere, including yards in towns, during spring migration. During the breeding season they are common in the upland forests where there are farms and other types of clearings, often seen and heard along gravel roads through the Ozark National Forest and elsewhere. The ranges of "whips" and

“chucks” overlap, and it is not unusual to hear both species singing in places like campgrounds at Devil’s Den State Park.

### **Order Apodiformes** **swifts and hummingbirds**

#### **Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 24 to October 25.

Early swifts (“scouts”) may reach northwestern Arkansas in late March, but the spring influx – and big concentrations of flying insects—occurs around mid-April and thereafter. An estimated 300 swifts entered a Fayetteville chimney on April 13 and over 1000 entered a chimney near the Washington County Courthouse on April 24. Both records mark heavy spring migration movements.

Swifts commonly nest in open chimneys in homes and older buildings. They will also use artificial “chimneys.” Plans for swift houses and other information are available from Driftwood Wildlife Association in Austin, Texas.

During the fall migration, hundreds and even several thousand may be observed as they fly into chimneys for nighttime roosting. In mid-October, over 1000 roosted in a chimney at a Fayetteville church.

#### **White-throated Swift, *Aeronautes saxatalis***

A single bird was seen and described by several experienced observers as it flew near a high bluff above the Buffalo River in Newton County on December 19, 1981.

#### **Green Violetear, *Colibri thalassinus***

There are three records of single birds seen in mid to late summer, July 6-September 5. A single bird visited a feeder at the home of Sue and Dan Burlingame north of Lurton in Newton County July 6-23, 1990. Doug James and many observers saw a single bird near Rogers present August 4 to September 5, 1990. Taos Jones obtained video footage of a bird at the Joan and Floyd Bodkin place at Gentry in Benton County August 21-22, 2000 (Joyce Shedell and others also saw it). There is an interesting description of how Doug James was able to clarify the identification of a bird photographed by Bill Brazelton at Fort Smith in 1984 (James and Neal 1986: 216).

#### **Ruby-throated Hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 8 \* (see below) to October 25+.

Few hummers arrive before mid-April and most have departed by mid-September. A few individuals linger later in fall. Dr. Marguerite Baumgartner of near Jay, Oklahoma (in the Ozarks approximately 15 miles west of Maysville, Arkansas) started banding them in 1977. She found that males arrive ahead of females. Young birds recently out of the nest begin coming to feeders by around mid-July. Most southward migration occurs between late August and early September (personal communication, 1987; Baumgartner 1980).

Jewel-weed (*Impatiens capensis*) grows in profusion along the Frisco Spring run at Lake Atalanta in Rogers. It may be an important plant to these migrating birds. Mike Mlodinow and I saw high numbers (25+) of hummingbirds visiting these flowers during their peak blooming August 30, 2003. Though many flowers were still blooming, hummingbird numbers had fallen to approximately 10 by September 14; none were seen on September 28.

A leucistic hummingbird, probably of this species, was photographed during visits to a feeder at Winslow in summer 2007. (\*Arrivals in late March were reported for extreme nWAR on the hummingbirds.net website <<http://www.hummingbirds.net/map.html>>, but despite efforts, I was not able to verify the source of these reports.)

#### **Rufous Hummingbird, *Selasphorus rufus***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter resident; DATES: August 26 to April 4.

There were at least 13 records 1987-2006; 3 of these observations involved *Selasphorus* species that could not be identified. Most observations are clustered from September to mid-December.

An adult female Rufous trapped and banded at Fayetteville by Max and Helen Parker was first seen October 2, 2004, and departed April 8, 2005. An adult male first seen on October 25, 1998, remained during a long, mild fall, then died on December 23 during the year’s first hard freeze (temperature in teens). “Rufie” visited a feeder at the home of Bob and Sara Caulk on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville from about November 8 to December 9, 2005, and only disappeared after overnight temperatures went to 8 degrees F.

Of approximately 11 records identified to species, 3 were adult females, 2 adult males, 1 immature female, and 5 immature males. Doug James trapped two (an adult female and an immature female) in Fayetteville on October 20, 1996. Feathers were measured, and samples sent to the collection maintained by William Baltosser UA-Little Rock.

### **Order Coraciiformes** **kingfishers**

#### **Belted Kingfisher, *Ceryle alcyon***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed all year.

Kingfishers are common along larger streams, lakes, and we usually find them around the hatchery ponds at Centerton. Nesting burrows have been observed on several occasions in high cut banks above or near the Buffalo and Illinois Rivers. Amy Edie and I found young being fed in a nest in a high cut bank along the Buffalo River in Newton County on June 27, 2006.

During winter kingfishers are widespread as long as open water feeding habitat remains unfrozen. They are found in good numbers on an annual basis in the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count circle. Numbers reported are often 10 or more with several counts of 20 or more.

## Order *Piciformes* woodpeckers

### **Lewis's Woodpecker, *Melanerpes lewis***

One record. A single bird was observed repeatedly at Evangeline Foldvary's residence on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville June 30 to July 3, 1967. Dean Crooks collected one in Adair County, Oklahoma, 20 miles from the Arkansas line, on April 3, 1943 (Baerg 1951).

### **Red-headed Woodpecker, *Melanerpes erythrocephalus***

STATUS: uncommon resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Red-headed Woodpecker habitat includes mature trees, predominantly oak, and barkless mature tree snags, in open forest or forest edge (Smith and others 2000). Historically, I assume that red-heads were likely found in the prairie region of the western Arkansas Ozarks in oak barrens (as described by Miller 1972: 23-26) maintained in an open condition by fire. I make this assumption because this appears to be the case in the current time--where such relict barrens remain in western Arkansas.

This Ozark habitat has an analogue in the Ouachita National Forest of Scott County. There, during the period 1990-2008, I found red-heads during the breeding season in stands of mature trees maintained in an open condition by fire and managed for endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Such habitat contains a heavy stocking of both shortleaf pine and mixed hardwood species, and numerous large-diameter mature tree snags. The stands are open and snags (large dead trees) are common.

Information gathered from throughout the broad range in North America indicates a pattern of marked population fluctuations (Smith et al. 2000). Numbers of wintering red-heads (dependent upon acorns as a winter food resource) are positively related to hard mast production in the Ozarks, but this relationship doesn't hold for Blue Jays, that also store acorns and also use a variety of other winter food sources (Smith 1986, Smith and Scarlett 1987). In past decades, acorn crop fluctuation probably explained why red-heads tended to be common in some winters and rare in others. For example, from 1963-1974 annual Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count totals were: 26, 16, 32, 1, 3, 4, 13, 46, 33, 1, and 17. These numbers contrast with CBC totals from the last decade, 1989-2000: 0, 3, 2, 4, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, and 0. A sharp decline on the Fayetteville CBC, starting with the 1987 count, is apparent.

Declines on the Fayetteville CBC are likely a result of local habitat loss related to human population growth within the count circle beginning in the mid-1980s. While some trees are retained due to ordinances, mature trees snags are still routinely removed. Oak barrens dating to the pioneer period have been cleared or greatly reduced in a corridor along US 71 B from Fayetteville north to Bentonville, and extending as much as 15 to 20 miles to the east and west of this corridor (personal observation; Neal 2000). The integrity of quality habitat for red-heads is therefore severely compromised.

Red-heads may still be found with regularity where habitat remains in good quantity. They have been found regularly on the Crooked Creek CBC, with a peak of 13 in 2003. I saw at least 6 in 4 locations scattered in oak barrens around Maysville on January 6, 2007. I found at least 10 in the oak rich forests in the Dawn Hill area of Siloam Springs on January 26, 2007.

### **Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Melanerpes carolinus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Red-bellies are counted on all Breeding Bird Surveys in nwAR, but highest numbers have been found over the years on the Compton survey in Newton County. There, the mean was 6.2 (n=34, range 1-12). It has been found in high numbers on every Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count since the early 1960s, with totals ranging in the 20s-50s. The Fayetteville CBC mean was 33.8 (n=39, range 6-59). They are regular visitors at bird feeders. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

### **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 30 to April 13+.

Sapsuckers are found here in all kinds of mature forested habitat, including urban woodlots. I see their neat, telltale lines of wells in a variety of tree species. Trees with freshly worked sap wells provide evidence that sapsuckers are in the neighborhood. I went in the field with Steve Shrunck, who is researching a woodpecker guide, on December 10, 2005, in the upper Buffalo area of Newton County. He was especially interested in sapsuckers and used recorded playback of their calls to elicit responses. We had at least 10 birds for the day. Sapsuckers are found annually on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, usually in low numbers (but see below). The mean was 6.7 (n=39, range 1-15 for data to 2000). Some recent CBC totals have been much higher than in the past: 23 were counted on the CBC in 2003, 29 in 2004, and 27 in 2005. They are also found in good numbers on the Crooked Creek CBC in Boone County.

On March 3, 2007, I collected digital images of a sapsucker working small trees near the University campus in Fayetteville. Certain plumage characteristics suggested this bird might be a Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*), a species otherwise unreported in Arkansas. The images, however, were not conclusive. The bird was a variation of our yellow-bellied, or perhaps a hybrid, since there is some overlap in their breeding ranges (Walters et al. 2002).

### **Downy Woodpecker, *Picoides pubescens***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Downies are common in all kinds of woodlands, including small woodlots in town and they venture out of the woods into open areas with small trees, fenceposts, etc. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County, the mean was 4.8 (n=39, range 0-20). Downies are always observed in good numbers on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. The mean was 43.6 (n=39,

range 6-95). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest indicated a stable population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**Hairy Woodpecker, *Picoides villosus***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Hairy Woodpeckers are at least fairly common in extensive forests or larger woodlots with mature trees, including some with large dead limbs. Their habitat preferences are similar to those of Pileated Woodpeckers. Like pileateds, hairys require mature trees, including "overmature" trees that are beginning to die. Hairy Woodpeckers are observed in towns as well as in forests, but nowhere are they numerous. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey, the mean was 0.6 (n=39, range 0-4). There have been a few Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts with tallies of as many as 14-16, though the usual number is lower: the mean was 7.9 (n=39, range 0-17). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed a declining population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**[Red-cockaded Woodpecker, *Picoides borealis*]**

STATUS: Extirpated from the Ozarks.

Just as geologists infer past events from present evidence, I infer that this Federally-listed Endangered Species was long ago present in the western Arkansas Ozarks. This inference is based upon their known habitat requirements (open stands of mature pines) and the evidence that such habitat existed here in the past. Howell (1911) reported it as late as 1890 from the few remaining virgin shortleaf pine stands in Van Buren and Cleburne counties in the Ozarks. Here as elsewhere, loss of this bird was the result of land management decisions including at least the following: (1) rapid cutting of the native, mature shortleaf pine forests; (2) failure to regenerate them to pine after virgin stands were cut; (3) widespread suppression of wildfire, which allowed pine stands to be replaced by hardwoods.

Hikers on many trails in the Ozark National Forest (e.g., White Rock to Shores Lake), Hobbes State Park-Conservation Area on Beaver Lake (e.g., Van Winkle Hollow and Pigeon Roost Trail) and elsewhere pass by isolated mature shortleaf pines without realizing that these are relics of a lost ecosystem and habitat of a bird threatened with extinction. In the 1870s, huge pine timbers used to frame Old Main on the UA-Fayetteville campus (and other big structures in late 19<sup>th</sup> century northwestern Arkansas) were cut by loggers from the Van Winkle Mill in the War Eagle-Beaver Lake area of Benton County (Rothrock 1973). "The first sawmills of commercial importance were...around the War Eagle settlements, due to the large quantity and fine quality of pine. An early writer said the supply of pine was 'inexhaustible'" (Funk 1959: 14). Big mills were active all over northwest Arkansas, e.g., Carroll County (Johnson 1979) and Cleburn County (Thomas 1980, Harral 1980). A huge pine log shown being hauled from Cleburn County (Thomas 1980:81) may not have been all that unusual. The heavy support pine timbers in UA-Fayetteville's Old Main came from trees whose age, diameter, and other

characteristics were compatible with trees required by RCWs.

Guyette and others (2007) explored decline of the shortleaf pine ecosystem in the Ozarks. Also, see other relevant papers in Kabrick et al. (2007). The importance of healthy, well-managed stands of shortleaf pine for wildlife, including birds, is well documented (e.g., Masters 2007, Eddleman et al. 2007).

Modern birders of nwAR must travel 110 miles south, into the native shortleaf pine forests of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma, where the Ouachita NF has undertaken an ambitious effort to restore over 200,000 acres of pine-grassland habitat, plus other native plants and animals, including RCWs (Neal and Montague 1991, Hedrick et al. 2007).

**Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Flickers can be observed here all year. They are among the most beautiful and dramatic of our native birds: brown back with black bars, spotted belly, brilliant yellow underwing, red on the head, and easily seen as they forage, unwoodpecker-like, on the ground, seeking ants, a favorite food. Their numbers vary dramatically during the year. Overall, the fewest are present during the nesting season of spring and summer. This situation changes in fall, with big influxes of migrants evident especially during September and early October. They make spectacular overhead migrations around the same time as we see migrating Blue Jays and monarch butterflies. For example, more than 20 flickers passed over Chesney Prairie Natural Area (in 1 & 2s) on October 3, 2004.

Our yellow-shafted form is a fairly common summer resident in mature open forest. This includes urban areas with extensive stands of mature and "overmature" trees and snags. They nest in mature tree cavities. At my home in Fayetteville, they drum loudly on the metal heater vent on my roof, sending a clear territorial signal through the neighborhood, and filling my house with the rhythms. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County, the mean was 1.1 (n=39, range 0-8).

Flickers are more common around nwAR in winter. The mean for the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count was 42.4 (n=39, range 5-95). They regularly foraged like meadowlarks and robins in extensively open habitats. I saw them regularly on a burned area of approximately 30 acres at Chesney Prairie during winter 2005-2006 and again in 2008-2009.

The red-shafted form nesting in western North America has been seen here a few times in winter.

**Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus***

STATUS: Fairly common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Pileated Woodpeckers are fairly common residents in extensive mature forests, including those in lightly developed parts of towns. The ecological needs of this species and that of Hairy Woodpecker seem nearly identical.



Over the years I have found active Pileated Woodpecker nests, usually at mid-May. These nests have been in large diameter dead trees (snags), especially dead pines. As the young grow, they begin to poke their heads out and are highly vocal in urging the adults to stay busy in their care. Pileateds are highly vocal during the time of the Breeding Bird Survey and are numerous on the four surveys that are most forested. On the Ozark National Forest BBS in Johnson County, the mean was 13.8 (n=9, range 6-32). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF showed a stable population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Pileateds are always found on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, and typically in numbers slightly higher than those of Hairys (this may have something to do with the impressive carrying ability of pileated calls). The mean at Fayetteville was 10.1 (n=39, range 1-30).

### **Order *Passeriformes* perching birds**

#### **Olive-sided Flycatcher, *Contopus cooperi***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; DATES: April 29 to June 7 and August 7 to September 29.

Olive-sided Flycatchers are never common here, but we do find them regularly during migration. We see them perched on the upper limbs of dead trees in forest openings or in forest edge habitat. Most reports involve single birds, occasionally as many as 2 or 3. We also occasionally hear their “quick! three beers” songs.

#### **Eastern Wood-Pewee, *Contopus virens***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 18 to October 17.

It’s time to plant tomatoes about when the pewees arrive here. The warm fronts safe for tomatoes encourage insect blooms required by this small flycatcher. I offer this advice in contrast to planting by average dates of last frosts. Pewees know better!

Pewees are most often found in forests and woodlots where there are open, park-like stands of mature trees. “It nests commonly along the wooded hillsides and is one of the most characteristic birds of the region” (Black 1935). The mean on the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County was 10.1 (n=34, range 2-18). Since pewees prefer open forests, it is little surprise that they exhibit only minor responses to forest management (Figure 1). Smith and others (2004: Table 1 and 2) shared this conclusion: pewees were about equally common in relatively undisturbed upland hardwood forest and in forests disturbed by various harvest practices. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed a stable or slightly increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007). The fall migration is mostly over by mid-September with scattered observations into October.

Please consider the Eastern Wood-Pewee tomato planting date guide for your next garden!

#### **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, *Empidonax flaviventris***

STATUS: Rare spring and very rare fall transient; DATES: May 9 to June 3 and three recent fall records, August 24-25 and 31.

Yellow-bellied Flycatchers are always observed in low numbers (based upon several dozen observations since the early 1980s). Most observations have occurred from mid to late May. Smith (1915) stated that he found it regularly at Winslow one year from May 16 to May 22 and September 1-23. Black (1935) stated he found it on May 15 and October 23 only. Baerg (1951) published a May 29 report at Rogers. Mike Mlodinow has carefully studied these birds and has observed them most springs since 1986.

#### **Acadian Flycatcher, *Empidonax virescens***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 27 to September 22.

Acadian Flycatchers are found where there are mature trees and extensive forest: shady stream bottomlands as well as moist, upland forested ravines. As in the case of other forest birds requiring extensive blocks of suitable habitat, Acadians are typically scarce in migration away from such places.

Smith (1977) considered them an “obligatory moist forest species.” On the Boston Mountain Breeding Bird Survey in Franklin County, the mean was 3.4 (n=8, range 0-6). Forest management studies show that Acadians are most numerous in mature forests and those with moderate cutting, but decline as more of the canopy is removed (Thompson et al. 1995). Smith and others (2004: Table 1 and 2) found Acadians one of the more common species in relatively undisturbed upland mesic hardwood forest and much less common in forests disturbed by various harvest practices. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

#### **Alder Flycatcher, *Empidonax alnorum***

STATUS: Uncommon but regular (at times, locally common) transient in spring; many fewer records for fall; DATES: May 4 to June 6 and August 5-September 8.

We find transient Alder Flycatchers every year during migration, especially during spring, with a peak from mid-May into the first week of June. The swampy bottomland forest with willows, maples, and other small trees along the north edge of Lake Fayetteville has been a consistently reliable place to find them, and here they are common at times. For example, there were at least 5-6 in a small area either calling or singing May 29, 2009. This isn’t the only place to find them. Over the years we have observations at the former Lake Frances near Siloam Springs, Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove, the University farm in Fayetteville, Lake Atalanta, and other frequently visited spots. Becoming familiar with songs and call notes is an important aid in separating them from other *Empidonax* flycatchers in the same habitat.

Mike Mlodinow’s studies of this bird include numerous fall records, including 4 birds on September 8, 2001. I have also found them at Chesney Prairie Natural Area

near Siloam Springs, including 2 on May 2, 2006, and 1-2 birds August 8-12, 2008.

**Willow Flycatcher, *Empidonax traillii***

STATUS: Uncommon transient, local summer resident; DATES: May 10 to August 2; fall status unclear.

Willow Flycatchers are migrants across a wide range of open country habitats in nwAR, but they are now present in summer exclusively or at least predictably only on Baker Prairie Natural Area at Harrison. There were at least 6 singing birds on Baker Prairie on June 16, 2001, and nesting was confirmed (Holimon and James 2003). Bill Holimon noted 3 territories in 2003 and observed a nest with four eggs on July 10. We found at least three territories with singing birds on June 13, 2009. A nest found by Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger that day did not have eggs, but had 3 flycatcher and 1 copwbird egg June 19. We also noted 6-7 singing Bell's Vireos in the same area.

Willow Flycatchers once nested in prairie ravine thickets in Benton County in Rogers, according to Dean Crooks, who reported nine nests in a half-mile area (Baerg 1951). This habitat was subsequently developed and the breeding population lost. Beginning at least in the mid-1980s, Willow Flycatchers were present in small numbers during the summer (and nesting confirmed) in former lowland prairie grassland dotted with clumps of trees area adjacent Lake Bentonville in Benton County (Mlodinow 1993). Bell's Vireos were present in the same habitat. A few birds were found there annually through 2003, after which habitat disappeared with drainage and subsequent development of housing and businesses.

I found at least two birds singing in wet thickets of Boxley millpond in Newton County on June 8, 2000, but I couldn't find them there on June 11, so these must have been transients. Willow Flycatchers have been found in migration and early summer in a wet prairie thicket at Fayetteville (Wilson Springs, just east of Dean Solomon Road). This former prairie lowland along Clabber Creek also hosted a summer population of Bell's Vireo.

Birds were found in Missouri adjacent nwAR during the course of the Missouri Breeding Bird Atlas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 169).

How long do they remain in nwAR? Identification becomes more of a challenge once *Empidonaxes* stop signing or calling. For Arkansas as a whole, the latest "for sure" fall Willow Flycatcher date occurs around mid-September (James and Neal 1986). Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs has suitable habitat for Willow Flycatchers, both for nesting and migration. We have found them there in migration. In fall of 2008, I found an *Empidonax* of the "Traill's" type on several occasions August 29-September 15. Calls, habitat, field marks, and behavior made me lean toward Willow. In northeastern Oklahoma, Willow Flycatchers have been reported as late as September 16 (OK Bird Records Committee 2004: 24).

**Least Flycatcher, *Empidonax minimus***

STATUS: Common to fairly common transient, with more records in spring than fall; DATES: April 21 to May 30 and July 21-October 10.

Least Flycatchers are common transients, especially in spring. They migrate through a wide variety of habitats, including urban areas. I see and hear them annually in both spring and fall in my yard in the middle of busy Fayetteville. They can be quite common during the spring peaks: Rob Doster counted 23 at Lake Fayetteville on May 11, 2002, and 15 in the same area on May 10, 2003. Fall records are based upon presence of a conspicuous, complete eye ring and "whit" calls, and relatively short beaks.

***Empidonax* species**

Many flycatchers of this genus are difficult to identify as to species unless their full vocalization is heard. Often these vocalizations are not heard. The general shape of migration through nwAR for this genus occupies the period from late April-early May to early June in spring. The fall migration stretches from the second half of July through September with stragglers into October. There is also a recent record of a silent bird found as late as October 27.

If you take into account that two members of this genus, Willow Flycatcher and Acadian Flycatcher, both nest in nwAR, birders have *Empidonaxes* to alternately dazzle and vex with regularity for the five months from May through September.

**Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; uncommon in winter; DATES: Observed in all seasons.

One of the welcome signs of oncoming spring in the Arkansas Ozarks is the frequently repeated "phoebe-phoebe-phoebe" calls, given by birds as they perch in trees or on rock ledges, easily heard above the roar of rain-swollen streams. The influx is evident at the same time early daffodils bloom in my yard and when I head out to open fields for woodcock dances and the choruses of spring peepers. At least four pairs of phoebes were on territories at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County by March 20, 2009.

Phoebes are common primarily from the first periods of warm weather in late winter and early spring until fall when heavy frosts greatly reduce insect populations. During summer phoebes nest under bridges, rock ledges, and around farms and even neighborhoods in towns, constructing nests under the protective roofs of sheds or porches in quiet shady yards. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County, the mean number of phoebes was 3.7 (n=34, range 0-12).

Most of our phoebes occur between early March and around mid-October. Scattered single birds are always a surprise at mid-winter, but there are now many such records. Northwestern Arkansas is immediately north of the typical wintering region for this flycatcher. Phoebes are heavily dependent upon insects, but will also consume some fruit (Weeks 1994). Single phoebes were reported on 7 of 39 recent Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts. Results from the Buffalo National River (west) CBC showed phoebes present in

about half the years there, with a peak of 6. This was exceeded on the 2004 Fayetteville CBC, where the total was a surprising 7. Phoebes have been found each year on the Crooked Creek CBC, with a peak of 4.

**Say's Phoebe, *Sayornis saya***

Two records. Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman found this bird at the Centerton state fish hatchery on October 18, 1997. A single bird was identified at Fayetteville's Paul R. Noland wastewater treatment plant on February 25, 2006, during a field trip by Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society. It remained in the area until at least March 2.

**Vermilion Flycatcher, *Pyrocephalus rubinus***

One record. Ragan Sutterfield found this bird in Washington County on June 13, 1995.

**Great Crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus crinitus***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 16 to October 10.

This large flycatcher is heard or observed in mature or fairly mature forests, either along the edges or in openings within the forest. The older trees in such forests develop the type of cavities Great Cresteds require for nests. They are common in urban areas with intact mature forest, like that on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in northern Newton County, the mean number was 3.4 (n=34, range 0-7). Forest management studies showed modest responses to logging of varying intensities (Thompson et al. 1995). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed a declining population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

It is found regularly until late summer, and infrequently thereafter. It attracts attention to itself by distinctive calls, but after summer these calls aren't often heard.

**Western Kingbird, *Tyrannus verticalis***

STATUS: Rare spring transient; DATES: May 3 to June 7 and July 15 to September 5.

Western Kingbirds nest regularly and in fair numbers immediately to the south, in the Arkansas River Valley at Fort Smith (Bill Beall and Sandy Berger, personal communication). These nest sites mainly involve the structures associated with electrical substations. Bill and Toka Beall checked such habitats in Washington County in June 2007, but didn't find Western Kingbirds. Oklahoma atlases had few records for the Ozarks and did not confirm nesting (Reinking 2004: 247). The June record for nWAR seems to have involved a late transient, since the bird was found only this one time in a location that was visited daily.

**Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 3 to October 5.

Kingbirds are lords of the open country with scattered mature trees. Large flocks pass through during

spring and fall. A flock of 50 at Durham in Washington County on May 11, 1985, remained in the area for several days, apparently attracted by an emergence of the 13-year periodical cicada (*Magicicada* species). Highest numbers during the nesting season are in open country of former prairies that retain grasslands, such as the Avoca BBS in Benton County. The mean number of kingbirds there was 12.1 (n=32, range 4-23).

Flocks numbering in the hundreds of birds have been seen going to roost in willow trees on the edge of Lake Sequoyah during August and early September. The presence of kingbird roosts in this location seems to be related to emergences of mayflies (*Ephemera* species) fuel for the southward migration. Overall, few remain after late August or early September, and later birds typically are singles. Migrating flocks of 5, 15, etc were passing over Lake Fayetteville on August 25, 2007. The bird seen September 29, 1984, was foraging with a flock of 30 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, who typically perform the southward migration later than kingbirds. The bird seen October 5, 2008, was also associated with Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus forficatus***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: March 28 to November 20.

Scissor-tails are common in open farmlands, large open fields, airports, edges of towns--where there are scattered tall trees, power poles, or other structures which provide suitable perches and nest sites. The mean was 6.1 (n=32, range 0-14) on the Avoca Breeding Bird Survey in Benton County. Most birds migrate south by late August and early September, but a fair number remain later, with scattered individuals into November. More than 100 were perched on fences and wires at northwest Arkansas regional airport in Benton County on August 25, 2007. This number had fallen to 30 by September 1.

**Loggerhead Shrike, *Lanius ludovicianus***

STATUS: Greatly reduced in areas with extensive habitat change; still fairly common in expansive grasslands; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Shrikes are birds of the open country, essentially former prairie grasslands. While they exhibit rangewide decline, they remain fairly common in former Tallgrass Prairie habitat that retains extensive areas of undeveloped or only lightly developed (e.g., grazing) grassland. They are present throughout the year in these areas. For example, I find them on almost every trip to Chesney Prairie Natural Area and its environs.

Shrikes have largely disappeared from much of Washington County and in eastern Benton County because of population growth and development of former grassland habitat. That is, we have lost shrikes in intensively developed parts of the former Osage Prairie – West Fork north toward Fayetteville, Springdale, Lowell, Bentonville, Centerton, etc.

In past years, shrikes were observed in low numbers on both of the Avoca (Benton County) and Compton (Newton County) Breeding Bird Survey routes. Avoca had the

best open country habitat prior to the extensive urbanization of the past two decades. On this BBS, they were recorded annually from 1969 to 1984—typically 2-3 birds (range 1-6). Since 1985, they have been found only 3 years, with none since 1990. The Avoca BBS begins in the eastern sections of the former Osage Prairie north of Rogers and heads south across numerous other former prairies with local names (e.g., Lynch's Prairie at Springdale), all now urbanized. The Compton BBS includes a relatively smaller amount of suitable shrike habitat; here birds were found in half the years between 1967 and 1989 (total of 16 birds in 10 years), but none since 1990.

This distressing pattern of decline is also visible in winter data drawn from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. They were once common winter birds with a mean of 12.2 (n=39, range 0-36). From the late 1960s to mid-1980s, there were 10 years when Fayetteville CBC totals exceeded 20 birds, but few since. Some of this is predictable: shrikes are birds of native grasslands and unimproved pastures.

On the other hand, lightly developed areas still have shrikes. We still find them at Woolsey Wet Prairie on the west side of Fayetteville, where once extensive prairies remain at least as remnants. The 10 birds that Mike Mlodinow and I saw in the Maysville area, December 25, 2006, constituted a good winter day for us in terms of shrikes.

During the nesting season it builds its bulky nests in thorny shrubs, small thorny trees and fencerows in open country. Here the birds continue to nest and are regularly observed in winter. My recent observations (since 2002) indicate nesting activity from March 26 (nest just finished) to family groups with young out of the nest by May 25 and adults still closely attending fledglings on July 16. On May 30, 2004, Irene Camargo and I found three family groups. One of these was on the former Norwood Prairie west of Wedington (3 birds together), and two were on the road into Chesney Prairie Natural Area (6 and 5 birds together), part of the former Lindsley Prairie at Siloam Springs.

Shrike declines are rangewide. "Role of contaminants in decline of this species remains unclear because concentrations required to reduce populations are unknown; species' decline, however, coincides with introduction and increased use of organochlorines in 1940s-1970s" (Yosef 1996:19).

#### **Northern Shrike, *Lanius excubitor***

One record. Mike Mlodinow and I saw a single bird in the brownish juvenile plumage in the Wet Prairie area north of Maysville, in Benton County, on December 25, 2007. Mike, Dennis Braddy, and Jacque Brown returned and refound the bird on December 30. Brown obtained a diagnostic photograph. This is the only record for Arkansas. Despite subsequent searches in the area, there were no further observations.

#### **White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus***

STATUS: common summer resident; DATES: March 17 to mid-October+.

White-eyed Vireos are widespread, both as migrants and summer residents. They are essentially birds of moist thickets at the forest edge, including yards in towns during migration. Judith Griffith found a singing bird at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on March 17, 2008. This was several days earlier than previous records for northwestern Arkansas. Typical spring arrivals are noted from around mid-April and thereafter.

White-eyed Vireos are reported on all Breeding Bird Surveys in nwAR, with highest means on the Compton route in Newton County: 7.6 (n=34, range 0-16) and lowest in the open country of the Avoca route. They benefit from extensive forest cutting that creates suitable openings (Thompson et al. 1995). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

They remain numerous during the warm, summer-lingering days of September, but decline steadily thereafter with occasional stragglers into late November. Jack and Pam Stewart were surprised by one at Erbie in Newton County November 25, 2008. They are very rare after the end of November, but Mike Mlodinow found one December 19, 1991, at Lake Fayetteville.

#### **Bell's Vireo, *Vireo bellii***

STATUS: Uncommon migrant and now very uncommon local summer resident; DATES: April 8 to September 18.

Bell's Vireo is essentially a species of former, primarily lowland prairie grasslands where it occurs in dense shrubby vegetation and fencerows, often in wet habitats. Don't look for it in vast barbed wire-enclosed pastures of fescue grasses, cows, and poultry houses, but rather in old field-grassland-thicket habitats. In nwAR it has become increasingly uncommon and highly localized summer resident in open country with large patches of thickets, shrubs, and small trees, often in riparian habitat (pond, stream, spring, etc.). Often there are noticeable earthen mounds (prairie mounds) and relict clumps of native vegetation denoting locations of prairies that existed prior to settlement.

Bell's nests at Baker Prairie Natural Area in Harrison where Bill Holimon found a nest with 3 large nestlings (and no cowbirds) on July 10, 2002, and a nest with 4 vireo eggs (and no cowbird eggs) on July 3, 2003. During a field trip there on June 13, 2009, we found 6-7 territories and two nests with clutches of eggs (including one nest with a cowbird egg). Restoration of prairie habitat in the Siloam Springs area (Chesney Prairie Natural Area and the nearby, privately-owned Stump Prairie) includes moist thickets of rough-leaved dogwood, buttonbush, and cordgrass. In summer 2008, Joe Woolbright and I found at least 6 singing birds in this area. This situation could further improve as restoration of prairie habitat advances. We still find a few scattered birds in the Maysville area.

In the 1980s, we found Bell's Vireo in several locations around Fayetteville and at several places in Benton County, including wet thicket lowlands adjoining Lake Bentonville, at the Centerton hatchery, and elsewhere. Bell's habitat has disappeared at both Lake Bentonville and

Centerton. In 2009, as Fayetteville's human population approached 70,000, its Bell's Vireo population could still be found within the city limits only on a former lowland prairie in the Clabber Creek watershed. Now most of this area is under development.

Frances James (1971, Fig. 7) described breeding habitat that was very open and in ecological succession about midway between shrubs and small trees; roughly speaking, somewhere between Prairie Warblers and Brown Thrashers. On the Breeding Bird Survey, it has been found only on Avoca in Benton County. During the first years along the route, 1967-1976, numbers ranged from 3-9, dropping to 0-2 by the mid-1980s, and thereafter frequently 0. This is primarily a result of urbanization and consequent loss of open grassland habitat along this BBS (see Loggerhead Shrike discussion, above). Bell's has also declined throughout much of its range (Brown 1993).

Bell's Vireo was found in scattered locations of northeastern Oklahoma during that state's atlas project (Reinking 2004: 257) and in southern Missouri (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 245)

#### **Yellow-throated Vireo, *Vireo flavifrons***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident in extensive blocks of mature forest; DATES: March 25 to October 11.

Yellow-throated Vireos are inhabitants of mature forests, like those of the Buffalo National River, Ozark National Forest, and Devil's Den State Park where they nest in campgrounds along Lee Creek. It is also present in smaller blocks of mature forest like those on Mt Sequoia in Fayetteville, Lake Atalanta in Rogers, and elsewhere.

It has been reported on each of the five Breeding Bird Surveys, though rarely on the open country of the Avoca route, and most frequently on the Compton and Ozark NF routes. The mean on the Compton route was 1.2 (n=34, range 0-4). Studies of Neotropical migratory birds in Ozark hardwoods show that Yellow-throated Vireos are most abundant in mature forests with either no disturbance or only modest disturbances such as single-tree selection harvests; they decline with increasing disturbance levels (Thompson et al. 1995).

#### **Blue-headed Vireo, *Vireo solitarius***

STATUS: Uncommon to fairly common transient; DATES: March 31 to May 31 and September 5 to November 17.

Formerly known as Solitary Vireo, these birds migrate through all kinds of woodlands. We regularly observe them as part of transient warbler and vireo waves passing through western Arkansas. Many vireo species may be singing during such waves. In looking up among the dense leaves of a mature post oak, for example, I seek out a bird that sounds a bit slower and a little sweeter than the typical Red-eyed Vireo. Because of its striking blue head adorned with white spectacles, this bird is always a pleaser, especially during a field trip with birders experiencing the majesty, wonder, and vast complexity of spring bird migration.

While we have seen them unusually as early as the end of March, even the third week in April is a relatively

early arrival period. The typical peaks in spring migration involve late April into late May and for fall, early October into November. In the spring of 2009, I found them at least moderately common during field trips to forested habitat, with 2-3 birds at Lake Fayetteville, Devil's Den State Park, and Ninestone Land Trust (Carroll County) during the first half of May.

Typically, most of our observations involve single birds, but I've counted as many as 3-7 on a good fall peak in the first half of October. There are no records for nWAR after mid-November, though they are sometimes found in southern Arkansas in winter.

#### **Warbling Vireo, *Vireo gilvus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and summer resident at least locally; DATES: April 1 to October 13.

This open country bird is a common transient in all kinds of moist open woodlands, including those of urban areas. It can be surprisingly common as a transient from mid to late April into the second half of May.

Warbling Vireos are uncommon, local summer residents in moist former prairies and similar habitats with a few scattered trees. It doesn't occur in heavily forested areas in summer. Small populations have been reported during the nesting season along the edge of Bob Kidd Lake, Withrow Springs State Park, along the Illinois River, scattered tall trees at Centerton state fish hatchery, Lake Siloam Springs, Lake Bentonville, Clabber Creek bottomlands in Fayetteville, and elsewhere. Warbling Vireos have also been found in low numbers along the Avoca BBS in Benton County.

#### **Philadelphia Vireo, *Vireo philadelphicus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; DATES: April 24 to May 24 and September 4 to October 15+.

Transient Philadelphia Vireos may be observed in nWAR in all types of woodlands, including edges and younger forests. Most of our observations are for spring migration and most just involve a bird or two during a day in the field, but peak numbers are sometimes higher. For example, Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman identified eight at Lake Atalanta during a peak on May 12, 2007. I counted 5-6 during a walk around Lake Fayetteville on May 11, 2007.

The bird at Fayetteville on November 2, 2000, was quite late.

#### **Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 5 to October 13.

Red-eyed Vireos are common in all kinds of forested areas, including those of towns, and abundant summer residents in mature forests (Thompson et al. 1995). Judged by Breeding Bird Survey data, this species with its relatively loud and regular calls is probably our most numerous forest bird, emblematic of our extensive forests.

Highest numbers are attained in forest stands with well-developed midstories of small trees growing under mature canopies, a condition common in mature forests long protected from wildfire. Numbers have likely increased with

regeneration of forests after extensive logging in the early 1900s and in modern times, near total protection from wildfire. As expected, they are found in high numbers along the forested BBS routes, but in very low numbers in the open country route. On the two most heavily forested routes, recent tallies have ranged into the 60s and 70s, with 96 on the Ozark National Forest route in 2001. The steady increase in numbers is evident on the Lurton route in Newton County: mean 40.8 (n=32, range 9-89). Totals in the 20s-30s were typical from the late 1960s to late 1980s, 40s-50s to the mid-1990s, 60s-70s+ thereafter. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF supported this obviously increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

#### **Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata***

STATUS: Common migrant and resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Blue Jays are common in most years. They are always interesting to watch. Birds that nested in my yard in Fayetteville, for example, collected plastic six-pack holders from a garbage bin to provide a base for their nest, which was built on a bicycle hanging upside down in my carport.

Their overhead daytime migrations are fascinating during spring and fall. These are most easily observed in extensively open areas. The spring peak seems to occur during the second half of April. During the fall of 2008, I was in the field frequently at Chesney Prairie and saw relatively high numbers between the last week of September into the second half of October. I counted more than 65 in at least seven flocks on October 5. I was especially impressed by three small flocks I saw on October 22. They were determined to move, even against a south breeze, making short hop flights from tree to tree, steadily working south.

Winter populations sometimes show considerable fluctuation. During Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville, jay numbers varied from 326 (1986) to 8 (1962); the mean was 189.8. Some of this fluctuation is obviously attributable to the number of observers (and therefore effort in terms of party hours) and weather on CBC day. Numbers are also linked to acorns, an important food. Good local acorn production means more jays in winter, and vice versa, though jays also have other food sources in winter, and aren't therefore as tied to acorns as Red-headed Woodpeckers (Smith 1986, Smith and Scarlett 1987). Considering this, one wonders about ultimate effects of the die-off of mature oaks over a vast area as a result of highly elevated red oak borer activity. By late 2001, mature oaks, principally in the red oak group, were affected in over 300,000 acres of northwestern Arkansas (Spencer 2001).

On the Avoca Breeding Bird Survey, the mean number of jays was 16.4 (n=32, range 3-27). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed a stable population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

#### **American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

These crows are common in most if not all habitats. Even in winter, 300-500 American Crows are

typically observed during the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. While the "caw-caw," is recognized by all, they have many other, highly varied vocalizations. One day, if you have time and you are near some crows, stop and give them a listen. They make conversation, and it's not about politics or the stock market. Even over loud traffic, I can hear their strange gargled "bee-yew" calls and other non-"caw-caws" that keep them in touch with one another and keep us wondering what they are talking about.

#### **Fish Crow, *Corvus ossifragus***

STATUS: Common migrant and summer resident, at least locally; DATES: February 24 to November 5.

Though unreported in the western Arkansas Ozarks until the early 1980s, Fish Crows have since become widespread. They are now common in summer along all major streams and reservoirs: Lake Sequoyah, White River, Beaver Lake, Lee Creek, Mulberry River, Buffalo National River, and they also nest in forested urban areas. Spring migration peaks are evident during March: there was a compact flock of 28 at Lake Atalanta on March 23, 2008, and another flock of 80 streaming up the West Fork branch of the White River near Fayetteville on March 27, 2008.

After the breeding season, Fish Crows depart breeding areas and form roosts in areas with food abundance (McGowan 2001). For example, more than 30 were present around a feedlot just south of Chesney Prairie Natural Area August 21, 2005. Both crow species have also maintained late summer roosts at the University farm in Fayetteville. A flock of 25 Fish Crows was at Lake Sequoyah on the relatively late date of September 28, 1989.

#### **Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris***

STATUS: Uncommon local resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Our open country is enriched by the tickling, lilting songs of Horned Larks. They seem the spirit of our former prairies. They sing on the wing from above and from the slightly elevated perch afforded a handy well-dried cow pie. They occupy a vast range across North America where they seem to be holding their own (Beason 1995). Unfortunately, Horned Larks have declined as a breeding bird in nWAR, a direct result of land uses changes, including development of their required habitat: extensively open plowed fields or closely grazed pasture.

They can still be found in modest numbers during the nesting season in our former prairie areas where farming, and especially field crops like beans, is the norm. We observe them with at least fair regularity on the former Beaty Prairie of Maysville in Benton County. For example, I found singing birds in at least three places near Maysville on February 13, 2005, and that was in a high wind, which meant I heard only birds near the road. On July 2, 2005, Mike Mlodinow and I saw flocks consisting of 20 and 6 Horned Larks in recently harvested bean fields near Maysville. This suggests successful local nesting. I also found singing birds in two places on the former Norwood Prairie west of Wedington on the Washington-Benton county lines in 2005 (June 4 and

July 16), and saw a flock of 4 birds overhead in a different part of Norwood on July 24. A male and a female at Hindsville May 31, 2009, suggest they are also nesting in that former prairie habitat.

In winter, flocks are locally common where the vegetation is sparse. Especially large flocks can be seen during severe cold when the ground is covered with snow. It's impressive to see these flocks flying characteristically low over the fields, blending well to the point of disappearing among the colors of soil and harvested crops. On January 17, 2003, I estimated at least 250 on plowed fields adjacent the Siloam Springs Airport. There were at least 100 in the Maysville area in a heavily grazed pasture January 1, 2003, and an estimated 300 or more on February 8.

The mean on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count was 32.6 (n=39, range 0-110). It was not found on 6 of 39 recent CBCs. The increasing pace of development and population growth in the metroplex between Fayetteville and Bentonville—with much of this development consuming what was once extensively open farmland-- can be expected to further reduce suitable lark habitat within the Fayetteville CBC circle, not to mention total loss of former breeding habitat.

Horned Larks in a Missouri study were common only on very short grasslands, usually heavily grazed pastures (Skinner and others 1984). Horned Larks were sparsely distributed in Missouri atlas blocks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 183) as well as in those in northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004: 283). We may be richer in a financial sense as we trade our former prairie lands for roads, homes, and commerce, but loss of the spirited songs of Horned Larks is an unfortunate aspect of the exchange.

#### **Purple Martin, *Progne subis***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: February 26 to September 19.

Purple Martins are birds of the open country, including open areas in towns. "Scouts" may show up during a warm spell toward the end of our Ozark winter, typically sometime between late February and mid-March. Martins are prized wherever found, especially by many folks who otherwise have only a modest interest in wild birds. Possession of a martin colony is a bragging point; the lack of birds by those who have put up houses is a cause for disappointment.

Martins can be especially abundant where they gather into large roosts after the nesting season. Here are a few examples. "Thousands" of martins maintained a fall roost in the Larue area of Beaver Lake in late July 1987. There were 133 at Lake Elmdale on August 6, 1989. The 700 perched on utility wires at the state fish hatchery in Centerton on August 17, 2003, declined to 15 by August 30, and none were seen on September 6. In August 2005 an estimated 30,000 roosted in sweetgum trees near the Arkansas River in Fort Smith. There's no way to say if this huge roost included birds from western Arkansas to the north, but it seems likely: birds in such roosts elsewhere have

come a distance of 80 km from their natal site (Brown 1997:6).

#### **Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor***

STATUS: Common transient, uncommon summer resident; DATES: February 25 to November 14.

Tree Swallows are observed either in small flocks or mixed among other swallow species. Early warm-ups in late winter can produce a few birds and large flocks soon follow. There were at least 75 at Lake Fayetteville on March 13, 2005, and 320 birds at the same place on March 28, 2008. Approximately 1000 swallows were seen at Table Rock Lake on April 3, 1987; among them were Tree, Northern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows, plus Purple Martins.

Adults and a nest with eggs were observed in a snag at Bob Kidd Lake near Prairie Grove on May 25, 1984. There have also been nesting season reports at Lake Siloam Springs, Beaver Lake, Table Rock, Hobbs Estate (Shaddox Hollow), SWEPCO Lake at Gentry, Lake Leatherwood, Lake Elmdale, several places in and around Fayetteville, and doubtless elsewhere. It seems likely our small nesting population is attracted to the numerous and relatively safe (from terrestrial predators) natural and woodpecker-excavated cavities in snags where mature trees have been killed due to the creation of impoundments that were once forests. They will take advantage of available nest boxes placed in an attractive location. Leif Anderson saw Tree Swallows using a bluebird box at Wedington on May 26, 2002. I saw a male and female using a Purple Martin box adjacent a large pond at Fayetteville Country Club on May 25, 2005.

#### **Northern Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx serripennis***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 5 to October 25.

The Buffalo River in early spring can be exciting. In March I'll be looking for the first Louisiana Waterthrushes, listening for the first Black-and-white Warblers, and watching the river intently for rough-winged swallows. I'm out for birder's spring tonic of cheery "git-git" calls as they fly close to the water. That said, I may also hear them overhead, even in my Fayetteville neighborhood, as the first transients arrive in the Ozarks and explore the area.

In nWAR these cavity nesters have utilized tunnels in hard dirt banks as well as natural cavities in rock bluffs, both above streams. Other cavities will do as well. They have also successfully reared young in square holes in the concrete supports under highway bridges.

#### **Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; DATES: March 31 to June 6 and July 13 to September 28.

Bank Swallows can be looked for in the mixed species flocks that forage over open bodies of water during migration. At Centerton, for example, they fly low over ponds and perch conveniently (for observers) on wires, just like a Roger Tory Peterson painting. Small, "pure" flocks of 20 or so birds have been observed on several occasions during May as

they flew over the open ponds at Centerton. An estimated 80 were there on May 14, 2004. There is no evidence they nest in nwAR (the frequently reported nesting “bank swallow” is our Northern Rough-winged Swallow). Early June observations in Benton and Washington counties raise some interesting possibilities. Nesting was confirmed in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, adjacent Benton County, during the course of the Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas project (Reinking 2004: 291) and in McDonald County, Missouri, also adjacent Benton County (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:191).

**Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 18 to October 6.

Cliff Swallows can be seen widely in our area during migration, often mixed with other swallow species. During summer they frequently nest under large bridges. More traditional situations, like bluffs above the White River (Beaver Lake and elsewhere), are also still used. They have nested in the cliffs above War Eagle Creek north of Huntsville. There is a huge colony under the twin bridges on Highway 45 east of Fayetteville spanning the West Fork of the White River and Richland Creek. They also nest under the bridge over Prairie Creek at Lake Atalanta where you can comfortably stand or sit on the bridge and watch the birds flying below. Six birds observed by Andrew Scaboo and Brandon Schmidt under the bridge at Lake Sequoyah on March 30, 2009, were already investigating nest sites.

In May 1999, work on replacement of the Highway 412 bridge east of Sonora (spanning the White River near the Blue Springs area of Beaver Lake) was halted for several months by Arkansas Department of Highways and Transportation in order to accommodate nesting Cliff Swallows. This temporary inconvenience was a laudable example of environmental ethics. My interpretation is that there is more to the necessary world than just our important human concerns. These concerns are best met when we accommodate the needs of creatures with which we share the planet.

**Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 2 to November 16+.

Barn Swallows are common in open field habitat throughout northwestern Arkansas. This is the swallow species most often seen sweeping low and gracefully over open fields – but other species do this as well. They sometimes arrive surprisingly early, often before real spring and full development of flying insect populations upon which swallows depend. Overall, however, Barn Swallows don't become common until the end of March or the first part of April, when warming trends are clearly underway and flying insects become plentiful. After this they seem like they are just about everywhere.

They nest under bridges, in large highway culverts, in open barns, and under porches of houses in lightly developed areas of towns. On the Avoca Breeding Bird Survey, the mean was 38.5 (n=32, range 9-61). After the

breeding season, Barn Swallows gather in premigratory flocks, like the 125 birds I saw together at Centerton on August 10, 2008. The estimated 25 Barn Swallows that flew over Chesney Prairie NA on September 15, 2007, was a relatively high number so late in the season.

**Carolina Chickadee, *Poecile carolinensis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Carolina Chickadees are among our most common yard and feeder birds. They don't migrate, so they remain numerous here throughout the year and we observe them in a broad range of habitats, from forests to brushy edges of fields. On the Ozark NF Breeding Bird Survey, the mean number of chickadees was 13.7 (n=9, range 2-22). Totals in the range of 150-200 birds are typical for Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts: the mean was 162.9 (n=39, range 23-354). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

In Missouri, both Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees were found in southern counties during the course of their atlas project, but these records are highly unusual, since Black-capped Chickadees became frequent only in central Missouri and further north (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:203). There is no record for Black-capped Chickadee in northeastern Oklahoma (Wood and Schnell 1984: 196) and no valid record for Arkansas.

**Tufted Titmouse, *Baeolophus bicolor***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

During spring, when small understory trees like serviceberry and redbuds are blooming, “peter-peter” calls of the Tufted Titmouse ring through still leafless forests, proclaiming energy and promise in a new season. They are common in older woodlands, including those of towns. Like chickadees, titmice don't migrate so they are present here in all seasons. Smith (1977) found that Tufted Titmouse seemed to be able to use both dry and moist forest equally.

On the Ozark National Forest Breeding Bird Survey, the mean number of titmice found was 10.2 (n=9, range 5-16). On the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, the mean was 85.0 (n=39, range 0-187). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**Red-breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta canadensis***

STATUS: Irruptive transient and winter resident in invasion years; DATES: September 7 to May 10.

This typical nuthatch of northern boreal forests and the Rocky Mountain west undergoes periodic irruptive migrations, apparently driven by food shortages (Ghalambor and Martin 1999). They show up in nwAR during these irruptions, joining our resident White-breasted Nuthatches. Irruption years are obvious on Christmas Bird Counts. They have been found on about half of Fayetteville CBCs since 1961. The 38 birds tallied on the 1993 CBC doubled any previous count—a big irruption year. Numbers present vary considerably from irruption year to year, with



very few or none seen some years. Ten were observed in pines at Fayetteville Country Club on November 7, 2004, during an "invasion" year.

**White-breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta carolinensis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

White-breasted Nuthatches are common in mature forests, including woodlots with mature trees in towns. Mature trees develop the natural cavities nuthatches require for nesting. Other types of cavities will also do: I photographed nuthatches feeding young in a bluebird box at the state fish hatchery in Centerton.

Patterson (2007) looked at the foraging behaviors of Ozark forest birds potentially impacted by widespread mature trees deaths caused by red oak borers and other insects (Spencer 2001, Spetich 2004; also, see Smith et al. 2004). She found that White-breasted Nuthatches might eventually suffer negative impacts because of strong reliance on white oaks.

On the Ozark National Forest Breeding Bird Survey, the mean was 4.1 (n=9, range 1-10). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF showed an increasing population trend (La Sorte et al. 2007). They are found yearly on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: mean number was 21.3 (n=39, range 2-64).

**Brown-headed Nuthatch, *Sitta pusilla***

STATUS: Rare and local in the western Ozarks; DATES: observed in all seasons in a few locales.

Over the years, Bill Beall of Fort Smith has observed Brown-headed Nuthatches in a stand of pines south of Fern in Franklin County. His sightings in 1986 and 1987 were 1.5 miles southeast of Fern in a logged area. A nesting cavity was being excavated there March 7- April 4, 1987. Other records in the Ozarks include: several observations at Fairfield Bay in Van Buren County, at Rosetta in Johnson County, and one mile north of Pelsor in Newton County.

These birds seem likely in the past to have been resident in big pine stands including those in Madison, Carroll, and Newton counties. An obligate permanent pine forest resident, they have been almost wholly extirpated from the Ozarks for the same reason that Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were lost: failure to regenerate and restore once extensive stands of shortleaf pine after logging in the 1800s (see comments in the Red-cockaded Woodpecker account). This failure, coupled with long-term fire suppression, has resulted in many native pine stands being replaced by hardwoods that won't support Brown-headed Nuthatches or many other species of plants and animals that require pine forest habitat. Populations are still robust to the south, in the Ouachita National Forest, where logging in pine timber includes silvicultural practices that regenerate pine stands.

**Brown Creeper, *Certhia americana***

STATUS: Common transient and fairly common winter resident; DATES: October 2 to April 21.

Creepers are often observed in mixed-species flocks that include Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, chickadees, titmice, and other small birds. Numbers present in winter vary considerably, probably related to the severity of weather at mid-winter. They are found on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts, with the mean number being 5.7 (n=39, range 0-24).

**Rock Wren, *Salpinctes obsoletus***

Three records. This western species was first reported in the Arkansas Ozarks on January 1, 1986, when Bob Sanger saw a single bird at a limestone quarry in Johnson, Washington County. It was observed on several occasions thereafter during the first half of January. There were also two records in 1989: one seen by Frank and Joanna Reuter at Beaver dam in Carroll County on January 21 and one during the Arkansas Audubon Society meeting at Lake Ft. Smith State Park on October 28.

**Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Carolina Wrens are common in urban areas as well as generally in the forest, especially where there is much woody material on the forest floor: logging slash, brush piles, and other kinds of woody cover. However, our population has fluctuated considerably. Since these predominantly insectivorous birds don't migrate, their decimation during severe, prolonged cold is inevitable. Alternately, the population expands following mild winters.

These trends are reflected in results from the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count as well as on the Compton (Newton County-headwaters area of Buffalo National River) BBS. Data from the Fayetteville CBC since the early 1960s shows population lows during four periods: 1961-1963, 1971-1975, 1977-1981, 1984-1985, and a rather sharp dip in 2000 as compared to 1999. Measured by the number of wrens seen per 10 party hours on the CBC, the lowest count occurred in 1978 with only 0.1 (this equals 1 bird). This contrasts with relatively high counts by the 1990s. In 1993, observers found Carolina Wrens at the rate of 19.2 birds per 10 party hours (actually 107 birds); 112 were reported for the 2006 CBC. Breeding Bird Survey data show roughly similar patterns.

Lowest totals from the Buffalo headwaters region also occurred in the decade of the 1970s, with the only zeros (no birds found) on the Compton BBS during 1976-1978. Finally, even after decimations, these birds recover. In mid-February of 2002, they were busy constructing a nest atop a light fixture in my Fayetteville carport, early preparation for the potentially long nesting season ahead. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a strong increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii***

STATUS: Rare (see below); DATES: observed in all seasons.

Bewick's Wren occurs primarily as a somewhat rare transient, a rare summer and even rarer winter resident.

Both the eastern (red) and the western (brown) forms have been found here. It favors open habitats and brushy edge. Many observations have involved former Tallgrass Prairie areas that are more open than habitats in our Forest Region. The widespread suppression of fire has allowed forests to creep into former prairie areas, disfavoring Bewick's Wren.

Spring migrants are noted primarily in March (but notice below that some birds start nesting in March), fall migrants from mid-September through October. In his time, Black (1935) considered it an irregular summer resident at Winslow. A half century ago, Baerg (1951) considered it "locally common" in summer at Fayetteville, which was then much more open and less forested. It was reported in low numbers (usually 1-2) on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count up to 1973, but was unreported on the count again until 1991 (1 bird) and not thereafter.

Since the mid-1980s there have been almost annual reports between mid-March and July that involved nesting or possible nesting. The observations involve Washington, Benton, Madison, Carroll, and Boone counties. Young fledged from a nest in a gourd between Springdale and Rogers on June 19, 1988. There have been records of singing birds and nesting in Newton County at Steele Creek campground (1992 and 1993); at a nest box on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville on April 27, 1994; near Rhea in Washington County where the birds were nest building in a mailbox on July 15, 1996.

JoAnne Rife, Sally Jo Gibson and others in Boone County have provided a number of recent nest records. Adults with 3 fledglings were reported on a developed portion of Baker Prairie (near the Natural Area) in Harrison on July 3, 1998. Also at Harrison, Gibson first saw birds on March 15, 2000; they were incubating in a birdhouse on April 4 and three young fledged by May 4.

Mike Mlodinow found an adult at the University farm (a very open area and former prairie) in Fayetteville on March 9, 2000, and later saw three fledglings together on May 29. I found 2 birds together on Floyd Moore Road on the former Round Prairie near Cherokee City in Benton County on June 18, 2005, and what appeared to be a family group in the same area August 31, 2008. In 2008 and 2009 there were sightings of birds at Lake Fayetteville and near Pea Ridge NMP (also former prairie), which could involve nesting.

I joined with Sarah Thompson, a graduate student from Arkansas State University-Jonesboro, for a few days of Bewick's Wren surveys in 2009. On May 21, 2009, we found 4-5 birds on what appeared to be three territories east of Maysville on the former Beaty Prairie. In each case, we found them in open areas that included homes and open fields associated with oak barrens (open stands of mature trees associated with former prairies). On a return trip with Doug James and Elizabeth Adam (June 7, 2009), we noted that at least some of these were brown plumaged birds of the western subspecies.

There have been recent observations of migrating birds at Chesney Prairie Natural Area in Benton County: September 19, 2004 and April 2, 2005. I found a bird

in Fayetteville farm implement junkyard on December 18, 2002, and one in the same area February 17, 2003-- apparently an overwintering individual.

In Missouri, Bewick's was found in many atlas blocks bordering northwest Arkansas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:215). They were also observed in northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004:319). Historically, nwAR combined elements of both eastern forests and open grasslands of the Tallgrass Prairie. Growing human populations, expanding urbanization and near total suppression of fire favors dense forest and less grassland.

#### **House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon***

STATUS: Common transient and locally common summer resident; rare in winter; DATES: primarily April 3 to December 12+.

House Wrens nested at Winslow in the 1930s (Black 1935). Callahan (1953) listed it as an uncommon summer resident at Lake Wedington. It was nesting at Fayetteville by the 1970s and is now common in summer at Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, Siloam Springs, and by at least 2000, at Harrison (personal communication, Sally Jo Gibson and Alan Gregory), Green Forest (Frank Reuter), and doubtless elsewhere. During the nesting season, House Wrens are at least locally common in urban yards, but during migration they are common in shrubby open fields and fencerows.

Fall migration is notable during late September and early October. I found a minimum of 15 in the fields at Chesney Prairie Natural Area on October 7, 2008. Single birds have been several years on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. There are additional winter observations. Mike Mlodinow found them on 4 occasions in the Fayetteville area during winter 2008-2009.

In Missouri, House Wrens were found in many atlas blocks bordering northwest Arkansas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:217). They were also observed in northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004:321).

#### **Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and uncommon but regular winter resident; DATES: October 2 to April 26.

We find Winter Wrens every year, but always in low numbers. I have heard them singing in my yard in the middle of Fayetteville during migration, but more often they call attention to themselves with a distinctive kip-kip alarm note. Wintering birds usually must be looked for in forest habitat, typically in hillside drainages or stream bottoms with large rocks, ledges, and down woody material. They may be more common during mild winters than during those with prolonged periods of severe cold. It has not always been found on the Christmas Bird Count at Fayetteville (0 recorded in 8 years), with peaks of 8 and 9 (1983, 1992). Mike Mlodinow's (2000:11) analysis of CBC data indicated a significant increase for the period of 1992-1998 as compared to 1985-1991, a suggestion that climate warming may account for changing their winter range.

**Sedge Wren, *Cistothorus platensis***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; uncommon and local as a probable breeder; uncommon to rare in winter; DATES: observed in all seasons.

We find Sedge Wrens in open, low-lying, wet grassy fields, often at the edge of a pond, lake, or small stream. They seem essentially birds of former prairie seasonal lowlands. Fall peaks are apparent in several observations: 12 birds in the low-lying grassy fields at Lake Bentonville on October 3, 1998, and 8 at Chesney Prairie NA on October 8, 2004, and at least that many in the same place October 6, 2007. Many spring records involve the period from late April to mid-May. At least 4 were in the grassy fields of Wilson Springs along Clabber Creek at Fayetteville on May 1, 2003.

Sedge Wrens have been found in Benton and Washington counties during the period when it has been known to breed elsewhere in Arkansas (James and Neal 1986). It's well known for breeding outside its "usual range" and at different times of the breeding season (Herkert 2001). Baerg (1951) published the reports of Dean Crooks who in 1947 found it in Benton County during May, July, and August. Could 5 birds singing vigorously at Lake Elmdale August 21-September 4, 1988, have been nesting there? A singing bird was observed at Lake Bentonville on August 24, 2000, and at Wilson Springs in Fayetteville on August 15, 2002. Joe Woolbright and I saw 4 at Chesney Prairie NA on August 14, 2004. In August 2005, three singing birds occupied the low wet fields of Wooley Wet Prairie, wetlands mitigation site adjacent Fayetteville's west side wastewater treatment facility, and 6-7 at Chesney Prairie on August 20. On August 13, 2005, there were a total of 5 in two areas along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville. There are additional records for this period in recent years from other areas in nwAR, including 2008, when I found 3 singers at Chesney (August 8), 1 at Maysville (August 17) and 10 at Pea Ridge NMP (August 24).

In his studies in Arkansas rice fields, Meanley (1952) found the migration peak occurred from mid-July to mid-August, with nests from mid-August to mid-September, and no singing after mid-September. He noted movement of birds into nesting habitat coincided with development of the rice to a suitable height for nest placement. While no nests have been found in nwAR, Meanley's observations about the timing of migration and presence of singing in nesting habitat are consistent with our field data. Following this line of thinking, vegetation development in our seasonal wetlands may be similar to that in rice fields.

Very little data is available from breeding atlas projects in adjoining states, possibly because of this wren's "late" nesting habitat (Jacobs and Wilson 1997; Reinking 2004). In Missouri, they were observed in tall dense vegetation, a result of light grazing or leaving pastures idle; they occupied spring burned prairie by mid-July (Skinner and others 1984:22). This habitat was almost identical to that chosen by Henslow's Sparrow.

There have been a number of observations at mid-winter dating back into the 1980s. Many involve single birds. We have found them for several recent Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville, at least in part because we are now

steadily birding these dense low grasslands. Five were found in grassy fields along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville on December 10, 2000; none could be found after a snowstorm three days later. On December 28, 2002, I counted 7 birds, including 5 together apparently going to roost in the same field near Clabber Creek. Mike Mlodinow had a similar series of observations (3-6) birds in this same area between December 12, 2002, and February 12, 2003.

NOTE: Between 2000 and 2005, we were focused on the Clabber Creek fields because they were such excellent places to find specific birds hard-to-find elsewhere (e.g., Sedge Wren and Henslow's Sparrow) and also because it became clear that former lowland prairies in the Arkansas Ozarks were an increasingly rare habitat. It would be desirable for conservation agencies or other public entities to acquire such habitat when available, and to manage it as native grassland. While the focus for preservation has properly been on preservation of remnant high-quality natural habitats (i.e., habitats retaining a high percentage of original botanical composition), many species can also benefit from non-native grasslands. Efforts to acquire and protect non-native grasslands could complement acquisition and restoration of native Tallgrass Prairie.

**Marsh Wren, *Cistothorus palustris***

STATUS: fairly common fall transient, uncommon spring transient; DATES: April 15+ to May 12 and September 13 to December 15+.

We observe Marsh Wrens in all kinds of wetlands, especially perennially wet, marsh-like habitat with cattails and other tall, dense vegetation. The big peak of southward-moving transients involves early to mid-October. I saw 5 in dense vegetation along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville on October 2, 2002. In Benton County on October 3, 1998, Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman hit a migration jackpot: they observed 13 at Lake Bentonville and another 8 at the Centerton hatchery. This is similar to my experience at Chesney Prairie NA near Siloam Springs where I found 10 on October 8, 2004, and at least 12 on October 6, 2007, all in tall, dense native grasses, like big bluestem, in a marshy section of Chesney Prairie. After October there is a big decline in numbers as most birds continue moving south. It seems Marsh Wrens largely bypass nwAR during the northward migration in spring. Our observations during spring only involve scattered birds.

Since the 1980s, there have been as many as 8 observations for December-February, most involving single birds. Their midwinter distribution is primarily to the south and west. This causes me to think that our winter season records probably involve transients that linger here as long as the weather remains mild.

**Golden-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus satrapa***

STATUS: Common transient and common to uncommon winter resident; DATES: October 2 to April 15.

The high-pitched see-see calls of Golden-crowned Kinglets are heard in our woodlands and urban yards by mid-October. They form flocks with other newly

arrived winter residents like Brown Creepers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, plus residents like Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice. These mixed flocks sweep through our woodlots and forests, dominating them as deciduous trees lose their leaves and winter is announced by the first frosts. The 37 Golden-crowned Kinglets at Fayetteville on November 2, 2000, indicated a big fall migration peak.

During winter we look for them where there is good cover, especially where there are clumps of eastern red cedars and pines. Some winters we see a great many of them, in others, none. For the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, the count mean was 18.3 for 39 recent years. The highest count total was 65 on January 4, 1986; this was doubled during the extraordinary count on December 18, 2005. In some years, however, they are hard or impossible to find here in winter. This is indicated by the fact that 0 to 3 were found during 7 of 39 CBCs at Fayetteville.

#### **Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus calendula***

STATUS: Common transient and apparently an increasing common winter resident; DATES: September 12+ to May 26.

Ruby-crowned Kinglets are quite common during migration in both fall and spring in all types of woodlands and fields with taller saplings. For example, I found 10 within a small area on Cave Mountain in Newton County on October 16, 2008. Most of them depart for the south by the time of hard winter cold, with many fewer observations from December through February. A migration peak is obvious during April, with only scattered birds remaining past early May.

Northwestern Arkansas is on the northern edge of its typical range in winter, based upon the Christmas Bird Count data available in the historical section of National Audubon's CBC web pages. CBC data at Fayetteville indicates Ruby-crowned Kinglets are now more numerous in winter than in previous years:

1961-1970 -- the high count was 6 (1969); we had 0-1 on 5 counts. In 1971-1980 -- the high count was 11(1980); we had 0-1 on 7 counts. In 1981-1990 -- the high count was 10(1982); we had 0-1 on 3 counts. In 1991-2000 -- the high count was 21(1999); we had 0-1 on 1 count 2001-2008 -- the high count was 34(2008); we had 0-1 on 0 counts.

Mlodinow (2000) analyzed Arkansas CBC data (including Fayetteville's) and reported a trend toward higher numbers in the state at this time of year.

David Chapman found a single bird at Lake Fayetteville on the very early date of August 29, 2007.

#### **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, *Poliptila caerulea***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 10 to October 7+.

These tiny forest birds are among the first of the summer residents to arrive in nwAR. At times their calls fill the stream bottom and hillside forests where they nest. They seem to thrive in moist forests along streams as well as relatively dry cedar and hillside hardwood forests. Nesting begins early, commonly by mid-April. Nests are constructed in

both cedars and deciduous trees. On the Lurton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County, the mean was 7.7 (n=32, range 0-21).

While some species of birds are in decline, our gnatcatchers seem to be holding their own. They seem resilient to disturbances, responding positively to a variety of forestry practices (Thompson et al. 1995). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a strong increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

There are also occasional reports of single birds lingering in December. One was found on the Crooked Creek valley CBC in 2002, and two on the Fayetteville CBC of December 14, 2003.

#### **Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Bluebirds are common in open country, including open farmlands and grassy openings of a few acres in urban areas (e.g., Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville). They disappear as forests or home development replaces grassy openings. The following data is from nesting boxes in the White River valley near Durham in Washington County: a clutch with five eggs as early as March 26, and at least 17 nests under construction or completed by the same date (C. Hensley, personal communication). On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County, the mean was 10.1 (n=34, range 0-26).

Bluebirds are present all winter and have been found in relatively high numbers. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 96.3 (n=39, range 8-255). More than 100 have been found on half the counts since 1961, with over 200 in 1991 and 1998. Bluebirds were also numerous on the Buffalo National River (west) CBC, with a peak of 393 (1982) and on the Crooked Creek valley CBC in Boone County, with a range of 135-258 on four recent counts.

#### **Townsend's Solitaire, *Myadestes townsendi***

Two records. Doug James and others observed a single bird in a stand of cedars above the White River south of Sonora, Washington County, between December 8, 1963, and January 4, 1964. Another bird was seen by Jack and Pam Stewart and others during a field trip along Hideout Hollow Trail near Erbie in Newton County on October 21-28, 1995.

#### **Veery, *Catharus fuscescens***

STATUS: Rare spring transient; DATES: April 12 to June 6

This eastern thrush rarely strays as far west as northwestern Arkansas, but we have occasional observations, often associated with birds singing on their northward migration. Almost all are single birds. Sightings are clustered between the last days of April and mid-May. David Lyons found one in Newton County on the very late dates of June 5-6, 1995. This was likely a straggling transient. Swainson's Thrushes, for example, are sometimes still migrating through western Arkansas in early June.

#### **Gray-cheeked Thrush, *Catharus minimus***

STATUS: Uncommon spring transient, very rare fall transient;  
DATES: April 23 to May 24.

We find Gray-cheeked Thrushes in the same forested habitats frequented by much more common migrating Swainson's Thrushes, but most observations of Gray-cheeked Thrushes involve single birds only. Three were seen together in Walker Cemetery at Fayetteville on May 8, 1981. One sang in my yard at Fayetteville on a daily basis the same year, May 9-20.

The only fall report involved a bird studied closely by David Chapman on October 18, 2008, at Lake Fayetteville. He had a good comparison study of a nearby Hermit Thrush.

#### **Swainson's Thrush, *Catharus ustulatus***

STATUS: Common spring transient, rare fall transient; DATES: April 12 to June 4 and September 3 to October 27.

Swainson's Thrush sometimes seems everywhere in spring, from wooded yards in town to the open forests of the Buffalo National River. There are regular accounts of high numbers late April to mid-May. Here are 2 examples: a conservatively estimated 30-40 on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville on April 28, 2003, and 75+ in the Pelsor area on the Newton/Pope county lines on May 10, 1994. During spring migration this thrush is conspicuous in wooded yards, parks, and forests, calling attention to its presence with its song. Numbers drop significantly in the second half of May, with only a few scattered observations thereafter.

The migration route for fall is more easterly than the broad migration front characterizing spring (Mack and Yong 2000). Therefore, compared to the northward spring migration, our mere handful of fall observations reflect the fact that relatively few birds pass through the western Ozarks in that season.

#### **Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 5 to May 4.

Apparently shy and retiring by nature, Hermit Thrushes nevertheless are of regular occurrence here in forested habitat with patches of regenerating former farmland including eastern red cedars, often in the same places frequented by flocks of robins. Here there is good cover from harsh winter weather, plus cedar berries and other winter food. I saw nine birds, including one group of five, in a hillside forest on Cave Mountain in Newton County October 16, 2008. Jack Stewart counted 12 in an area of about one acre at Erbie in Newton County November 10, 2008. On December 10, 2005, I spent a day with Steve Shunk in the upper Buffalo River area of Newton County. We counted 10-15 Hermits during the day with the aid of recorded playback.

On the Buffalo River (west) Christmas Bird Count, Hermit Thrushes were recorded most years and frequently in numbers higher than those at Fayetteville, with peaks of 46 (1978) and 28 (1982). The peak was 9 on the Crooked Creek valley CBC in 2002. Numbers found on the Fayetteville CBC since 1961 include 0-1 on 23 counts and 5 or

more on 8 counts. The peaks include 12 (2004) and 13 (2005). The higher recent Fayetteville CBC counts could be a result of several factors. If I can find one bird in a thicket of cedars and other early successional habitat, I tend to keep looking and often find several in the same area. Hermit Thrushes are also responsive to playback of their calls and the calls of Eastern Screech-Owls.

#### **Wood Thrush, *Hylocichla mustelina***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident; DATES: April 14 to October 15+.

Wood Thrushes are found in migration and summer in open mature forest with an understory of small trees and shrubs. In the Winslow area many years ago, it was "very common...especially so in the deep ravines...It is not uncommon to see and hear as high as 100 singing males in a single afternoon around the first of May when the spring migration is at its height" (Black 1935).

Wood Thrushes are recorded on all Breeding Bird Survey routes in nWAR with the highest numbers on the Ozark NF route in Johnson County. The mean there was 10.5 (n=9, range 7-15). The birds are also found regularly on other BBS routes: Lurton (mean 7.3), Compton (mean 6.6), Boston Mountains (mean 5.7). Based upon data from 1966-2000, Wood Thrushes have declined along the Lurton BBS, but no such decline is yet detected on Compton. However, the regional decline is a statistically significant annual loss of -0.7 (Sauer et al. 2001).

Wood Thrushes here are on the extreme western margin of their summer range. Range wide losses have been attributed to many factors including destruction and fragmentation of forest habitats in both the breeding range and wintering range in the Tropics (Roth et al. 1996:2). Forest management studies showed Wood Thrush numbers highest in undisturbed forests, declining with increasing levels of timber harvest (Thompson et al. 1995). Smith and others (2004: Table 1 and 2) showed similar results. Wood Thrushes were more common in relatively undisturbed upland hardwood forest as compared to sites disturbed by various forest practices. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest also support these conclusions: they showed a declining trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Wood Thrushes can still be heard in suitable habitat, including lightly developed sections of towns. In Fayetteville we still find them in summer in the mature forests on Mt Sequoyah though increasing subdivision development will predictably continue to reduce suitable habitat. Wood Thrushes sing in the forests all around the Newton County seat at Jasper—one of the special delights of visiting the Buffalo National River area. There is also a highly unusual, but well-supported, observation for February 5, 1998.

#### **American Robin, *Turdus migratorius***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Robins are present throughout the year in nWAR. They are common nesting birds in yards and are even more common (and sometimes abundant) most winters.

The dawn chorus singing of robins dominates our Urban Region on warming temperatures of late winter. Their energetic courtships and foraging add life to urban areas, connecting us to a world typically wider than that otherwise encompassed by our busy lives. Breeding Bird Survey data illustrates how adapted robins are to towns and farmlands. They have steadily increased over the years on the highly urbanized Avoca BBS. With more than 100 counted some years, robins are among the top five birds in terms of numbers on this route; the mean number was 75.3 (n=32, range 10-151). By contrast, they are almost never found on two of the most heavily forested and least urbanized BBS routes, Ozark National Forest and Boston Mountain.

When she was in elementary school, my daughter Ariel did a science project that involved discovering what robins collected while building a nest in our yard in Fayetteville. She found that it contained at least 11 different kinds of materials, most of which could have been collected within 30 feet of the nest.

During fall and winter robins may be quite widespread in towns and forests since they form large roosts involving many thousands of birds when the crops of wild berries (cedar, hackberry, blackgum, poison ivy, Amur honeysuckle, etc.) are available in abundance (James and Neal 1986). From 1961-2006, data from the the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count showed more than 1000 robins found in 7 count years, and more than 100 during half of the counts. However, robins are scarce in winter some years: 25 or fewer were found 9 times during this time period. The Fayetteville CBC mean was 478.0 (n=39, range 4-8000).

#### **Gray Catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident; DATES: April 11 to October 22+.

Loud mewing calls and vigorous singing from conspicuous branches marks the spring arrival of catbirds in my yard in Fayetteville, typically around mid-April. They occur in towns, farmyards, and edge habitats, but are absent from extensive grasslands and forests. My unkempt Fayetteville yard and woodlot is overgrown with dense thickets of non-native shrubs, including bush or Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) and common or European privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*). This is a common situation throughout the Fayetteville area, where these plants form a dense shrubby layer that shades out the native species. Fruits from both species seem to be used by many birds.

"In the region of Fayetteville, catbirds begin to sing about April 23 and may be heard until near the end of July" (Baerg 1951). In the Winslow area, Black (1935) considered it "perhaps the most common summer bird..." They occur in modest numbers on Avoca, Compton, and Lurton Breeding Bird Surveys but are absent from the heavily forested Boston Mountain and Ozark NF BBS routes.

Black noted that "in dry summers they retire to the larger streams about the middle of July, in company

with other birds that ordinarily remain more evenly distributed." I have found catbirds at Chesney Prairie Natural Area, where they do not nest, as migrants, primarily during September and early October; my data from Clabber Creek bottomlands at Fayetteville is similar.

A few catbirds linger past mid-October, leading to occasional records for December, January, and February. A catbird in my Fayetteville yard on December 29, 2008, called from dense patches of privet, still covered with leaves and loaded with berries.

#### **Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Mockingbirds are common permanent residents of open country thickets and are well adapted to all but the most heavily developed urban environments. In towns their frequent and highly varied singing is a good counter to traffic, leaf blowers, and other modern audio horrors. They are often associated with fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, especially multiflora rose and other thickets.

Mockingbirds occur annually, usually in high numbers, on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: mean 73.1 (n=39, range 11-157).

#### **Brown Thrasher, *Toxostoma rufum***

STATUS: Common resident except during midwinter, when relatively few are found; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Like towhees, these thicket dwellers are not much in evidence unless they are calling or singing. While hard to find in winter, they are much in evidence by mid-March as they sing from treetops. Two birds were already building a nest in my yard in Fayetteville on March 19, 2008. Thrashers are similar to mockingbirds in their avoidance of extensive forests and preference for shrubby thickets in generally open country. This is also reflected on Breeding Bird Surveys where thrashers are counted in relatively high numbers on the Avoca route (mean 6.3, n=32, range 1-11), followed by lower counts on Compton and Lurton, and virtually none on the two most heavily forested routes.

Birders consider thrashers a "good bird" in winter because they are usually hard to find at that season. The number of thrashers reported on the Christmas Bird Count at Fayetteville (1961-2001) varied from 0-10, with 0-1 recorded 14 years.

#### **European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris***

STATUS: Abundant resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

In their dark starry plumage of fall, starlings are handsome birds with a big repertoire of vocalizations. Nevertheless, they are not counted among the beloved, to say the least. While there is nothing inherently wrong with them, as an introduced non-native species, they tend to smother the competition for cavity nest sites, whether that competition be Purple Martins, Red-headed Woodpeckers, flickers, or other obligate cavity nesters. In this respect, they are much like non-native invasive plants capable of out-competing and sometimes eliminating natives. That is, starling flocks may smother habitats much like kudzu vines.

Huge flocks numbering hundreds and thousands of birds wheel through the fall and winter skies, a dazzle of symmetry and order, and a good target for foraging Cooper's Hawks. During winter they congregate into enormous night roosts that often number in the hundreds of thousands of individuals.

**American Pipit, *Anthus rubescens***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 25 to May 8.

American Pipits frequent extensively open country, including plowed fields, closely grazed pastures, and mudflats associated with ponds and lakes. Once you learn the high-pitched "pipit pipit" call, it is fairly easy to spot the bird and follow it as it settles back down on the pond flat. Flocks seem to float along until they settle into a field, where they blend and disappear.

We find single birds up to larger flocks regularly during migration and winter. In the 1980s, when Lake Sequoyah was drawn down exposing big mudflats, we had several late October counts of more than 60. There were an estimated 120 in a closely grazed pasture near Cherokee City in Benton County on April 11, 2009. This was an excellent count so late in spring.

While pipits are readily found in migration, they are somewhat less numerous during winter. However, we usually find a few at the state fish hatchery at Centerton and during long days in the field at Maysville even in the coldest weather. Pipits were often missed on the Fayetteville CBC in past years. With extensive coverage of the University farm, we have missed them only a few times in the last decade. Since 2002, we have tallied 50+ on 5 counts, including a peak of 114 (2007).

**Sprague's Pipit, *Anthus spragueii***

Douglas James saw 1-5 birds in an open field near Farmington in Washington County between December 15, 1956, and April 17, 1957. Otherwise, this species has not been found here. James' winter 1956-1957 sightings involved an open pasture with very sparse vegetation somewhat typical of the old prairie areas of western Washington and Benton counties.

**Bohemian Waxwing, *Bombycilla garrulus***

One record published by Baerg (1931) is vague: 12 to 15 birds at Fayetteville in "April or May" of 1921. The second record involved a single bird associating with Cedar Waxwings at Winslow on May 12, 1931 (Black 1935).

**Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum***

STATUS: Common transient, irregular during winter; rare or very uncommon summer resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Cedar Waxwings have often been seen in fall, winter, and spring, but their appearances are somewhat unpredictable even in these seasons. They are somewhat rare in summer, but nesting is confirmed. Flocks estimated to

number more than 500 individuals have been observed over the years during March, consuming ripening berries.

Cedar Waxwings remain in the Arkansas Ozarks during late spring and early summer in order to take advantage of ripening fruits, but some of these are nesting. The 10 birds at Jasper in Newton County on August 17, 1985, included birds in juvenile plumage. During the 1990s there were at least 10 reports of nests or fledglings. Kim Smith found a nest in a pine at Paradise Valley Country Club in Fayetteville on June 2, 1996; young fledged by June 30. James Tucker, Mia Ravels, and others found 4 young in a nest in a sycamore tree at Cass in Franklin County on June 19, 1993. In Boone County, Harold and Mary Jo Loch observed a nest that was built in a pine in the first week of August 1997; young fledged about September 1. Mike Mlodinow and Betty Coody observed a bird with pine needles in its beak at Lake Bella Vista in Benton County on July 9, 1999. In addition, they have been found during the nesting season at lakes Elmdale, Atalanta, Wedington, Sequoyah, as well as at Fayetteville, in Newton and Carroll counties, and elsewhere. I have seen juveniles on several occasions during late summer at Lake Fayetteville including young being fed out of the nest (August 11, 2008) and a flock of 9 birds, 8 of which were juveniles (September 10, 2008). Breeding season records are consistent with known breeding cycle elsewhere, including the habit of late season nesting (Witmer et al. 1997). They have also nested in the Missouri Ozarks adjacent northwest Arkansas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:237).

Cedar Waxwings have been found on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts: 100 or more were counted 14 years, but on 7 others there were none or only a single bird on count day. The mean was 121.5 (n=39, range 0-828). Data from the Buffalo National River (west) CBC is similar, with a peak of 879 in 1982.

After a huge ice storm in late January 2009, Cedar Waxwings in my Fayetteville neighborhood conspicuously consumed persimmons from limbs broken by the storm. They reminded me of Audubon's painting of Carolina Parakeets – perching upside down, sideways, and at all angles, in lusty pursuit of ripe fruit.

**Bachman's Warbler, *Vermivora bachmanii***

A specimen of this extremely rare, and possibly extinct, species was collected in Washington County on May 5, 1914 (James and Neal 1986). The location of this specimen was unknown in 1986. However, during a visit to the Denver Museum of Natural History, Charles Mills found and verified the specimen (personal communication, January 17, 2006).

**Blue-winged Warbler, *Vermivora pinus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and summer resident; DATES: April 10 to October 22.

I'm carried back to some of the history of northwestern Arkansas when I find Blue-winged Warblers. These are essentially birds of small clearings once associated with Native American crop fields, clearings by pioneers from the 1820s forward, and more recently, early succession

habitat created or maintained by wild fires and prescribed burning (as on public parks and forests)

We typically find them in larger, very open fields that have grown-up in saplings, including eastern red cedars. The habitat was characterized as an open landscape in the “early tree stage” at Pea Ridge National Military Park in Benton County (Shugart and James 1973). The size of these “early tree stage” fields makes a difference: Hunter et al. (2001: Table 3) found them associated with “larger patches (e.g., greater than 5 ha) with shrub-scrub, early succession and forest edge conditions generally more than 3 years after disturbance.” Callahan (1953) listed it as a “common summer resident” at Lake Wedington—when that area included much abandoned and regenerating farmland; most of this has now regenerated to forest, which is unsuitable. Summer localities include fields at Pea Ridge National Military Park, Lake Wedington (dam area plus other places still in early succession), overgrown fields at Devil’s Den State Park, Redding area in the Ozark National Forest in the Mulberry River valley, old farmlands adjacent the Buffalo National River (Erbie, Cave Mountain, etc.), traditional fields at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County, and elsewhere. Low numbers of Blue-wingeds have been reported on 4 of 5 Breeding Bird Surveys in nwAR. It has been found with most consistency on the Compton BBS route in northern Newton County with weedy fields of former prairies north of Ponca.

Blue-winged Warblers can be looked for in recently logged oak-hickory forest habitat with extensive disturbance (Thompson et al. 1995). This suggests that this species may have been more common and widespread here in the wake of past logging booms (late 1800s-early 1900s) and after the Great Depression (late 1920s-early 1940s) when many farms were abandoned with consequent initiation of young tree forests.

Habitat preferences of Blue-winged Warblers (and other ecologically related birds) confound the notion that all oak-hickory forest landscapes should be managed for mature trees.

The hybrid form “Brewster’s Warbler” has been observed on a handful of occasions.

#### **Golden-winged Warbler, *Vermivora chrysoptera***

STATUS: Uncommon spring transient; rare fall transient; DATES: April 25 to May 17 and August 29-September 28.

Most observations involve single birds, primarily between the last week in April into the second week of May. This is the period when Neotropical migratory songbirds make their concentrated push northward and hence when we are most likely to find the more unusual species, like Golden-winged Warblers. Paul Rodewald and Rob Dobbs counted 3 on May 4, 1994, during a long day that included birding at Lake Atlanta (1) and the Ozark NF (2). Mike Mlodinow saw 2 (a male and female) at Gregory Park in Fayetteville on May 11, 1990, and I saw 2 on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville on May 15, 2004; these were part of a huge wave of migrants.

Fall records are concentrated in mid to late September. Almost all of the fall sightings were made by or

included Mike Mlodinow. He told me in 2007 that 4 records he had in fall 2006 compared to a total of 5 he had in the previous 20 years! His habit of birding regularly includes sharp focus on what Roger Tory Peterson termed “confusing fall warblers.”

#### **Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina***

STATUS: Common transient in spring; uncommon in fall; DATES: April 3 to May 27+ and August 27 to October 29+.

Tennessee Warblers call attention to themselves by loud and persistent singing during migration. Invariably, they choose mature trees (such as post oaks) in open, park-like settings. “Of all the warblers migrating through the Fayetteville area, this one is easily dominant with its song” (Baerg 1951). This situation is unchanged with the passage of over a half-century. Paul Rodewald provided what he termed a very conservative count of 100+ during a long day in the Pelsor area and Jasper in Pope and Newton counties during a spring peak, May 10, 1994.

I saw and heard one in my yard at Fayetteville on the very late date of June 13, 1986. Mike Mlodinow found a single bird at the UA farm in Fayetteville on the unusual dates of December 17, 2003, and January 3, 2004.

#### **Orange-crowned Warbler, *Vermivora celata***

STATUS: Uncommon spring transient; fairly common fall transient; very uncommon to somewhat rare winter resident; DATES: April 12+ to May 18 and September 4 to November 27+.

Observations for orange-crowneds are concentrated primarily between mid-April and mid-May and in fall from October to about mid-November. I saw four at Chesney Prairie NA on October 15, 2005, and 3 at Lake Fayetteville, May 9, 2008 – both pretty good days for me in terms of these transients. Occasional lingering and overwintering birds complicate early spring arrival and late fall departure patterns (especially during recent winters; see below).

Orange-crowneds have been found on a number of occasions outside the usual migration period including scattered records, often of single birds, on the Fayetteville CBC (or during the count week). Orange-crowneds were widespread in the Fayetteville area (and at least Bob Kidd Lake) during the winter of 2004-2005. Mike Mlodinow had 19 observations during December, January, and February, making this the biggest winter on record. Historical CBC data from National Audubon shows that the typical mid-winter distribution lies well south of Arkansas, with only highly scattered records as far north as nwAR. Milder winters may account for what appears to be a trend for more individuals remaining here, especially since there were numerous sightings in winter 2008-2009. I had one briefly at my yard feeder on January 30, 2009, right after a huge ice storm.

#### **Nashville Warbler, *Vermivora ruficapilla***

STATUS: Common transient in spring and fall; DATES: March 28 to May 16+ and August 29 to November 4+.



As is the case with Tennessee Warblers, Nashville Warbler songs seem to fill the air during peak periods of spring migration, mid-April to mid-May. Nine were counted in 20 acres of deciduous forest in Madison County on May 2, 1986—a conservative and not unusual spring peak count. My impression is that these birds are so common that most of us just stop counting.

Nashvilles are also common during much of October and they also show up outside the expected migration periods. Mike Mlodinow found a bird that apparently spent much of winter 2001-2002 on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville. There is also a June report from Newton County.

#### **Northern Parula, *Parula americana***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident in all kinds of mature forests; DATES: March 19 to October 16+.

Parulas are observed in a variety of habitats during migration, but in summer occur mainly in moist forests, especially those in stream bottomlands and in upland ravines. They have been found on each of the Breeding Bird Survey routes, with highest numbers on Compton in northern Newton County. The mean was 5.3 (n=34, range 0-11). A long section of this BBS lies in the Buffalo National River bottomlands, plus moist forested ravines north of Ponca and on Cave Mountain. In the latter places, parulas can be heard singing in the same places as Cerulean Warblers, making possible direct comparisons of their somewhat similar songs. Shugart and James (1973) showed parulas in mature mesic forest (Table 1) and James (1971) characterized their habitat choice as falling between that of Wood Thrush and White-breasted Nuthatch (Fig. 8). Forest management studies (Thompson et al. 1995) showed parulas most numerous in mature forests and remaining numerous with single tree and group selection cutting, but declined as more of the canopy was removed. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows an increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). There are several observations as late as the first half of November.

#### **Yellow Warbler, *Dendroica petechia***

STATUS: Common transient; rare and local summer resident; DATES: April 15 to September 28+.

Yellow Warblers are widespread in migration and can be seen in numerous open forest and edge habitats, including urban woodlots. Migration peaks occur in the first half of May and during August. The 8 birds I saw during International Migratory Bird Day, May 14, 2005, were mostly in the scattered trees in the Clabber Creek bottomlands at Fayetteville. Mike Mlodinow observed 11 at the University farm on August 22, 2005. Early June records may include late northward migrants. Fall migrants may be seen by late July. I saw a brilliant male at the University farm on the very late date of November 4, 2006.

During the nesting season they must be sought in a more restricted habitat, characterized by Frances James (1974) as the willows and cottonwoods “fringing open water of gravel bars along rivers, or in the scattered trees and

shrubs of small towns.” They have been found on the Avoca, Lurton, and Compton BBS, but since the early 1980s, only on the Compton route. These reports, involving 1-2 birds, have come from a fringe of tall trees at Boxley millpond in the valley of the Buffalo River. There are also summer records from the bordering Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997:257) and northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004: 351). Northern Arkansas is on the southern extreme of this bird’s vast nesting range (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

#### **Chestnut-sided Warbler, *Dendroica pensylvanica***

STATUS: Fairly common spring transient, uncommon fall transient, rare and local summer resident; DATES: primarily April 21 to mid-May+ and August 28 to October 7.

In Audubon’s time, Chestnut-sided Warblers were unusual, especially compared to today. This is because, as Richardson and Brauning (1995) note, it is a bird of “scrubby second-growth areas and forest edges,” such as regenerating clearcuts and abandoned farmland. This habitat became common as the human population expanded across North America, including western Arkansas.

Spring migrants are fairly common in both urban and wooded areas. They are still found in places where they don’t nest around mid-May, but also at this time some have settled into what we now recognize as breeding habitat. Jacques Brown, David Oakley, and I found a bird singing in just such an opening in northern Franklin County at Fly Gap along the Highway 23 pig trail on May 22, 2009. This constantly singing bird could have been a transient, or perhaps it was trying to attract a mate.

In 1993, then UA-Fayetteville graduate student Paul Rodewald found four male Chestnut-sided Warblers in Pope and Johnson counties in clearcuts where he also found Black-throated Green Warblers (Rodewald 1993). In June and July 1994, he and Amanda Dumin observed 10 males and 2 females within a 3-mile radius of Pelsor on the Pope/Newton county line. More recently, Mike Mlodinow has found them in summer in a group selection cut near the junction of highways 21 and 16 in southwestern Newton County. There were four singing males at two locations in Newton County in June 2001. David Rupe, Jason Garrett, and Heath Martin found 9 birds in hardwood regeneration cuts in the Sassafras Knob area of Newton County on May 29, 2002. A nest there on June 20 held three nestlings.

#### **Magnolia Warbler, *Dendroica magnolia***

STATUS: Fairly common spring transient, very uncommon fall transient; DATES: April 29 to June 4+ and August 28-October 6.

Magnolias can be found in a variety of habitats as they migrate through nwAR. I find them annually in my yard right in the middle of Fayetteville. I observed a singing male on the very late spring migration date of June 15, 2007. Rob Doster counted 12 at Lake Fayetteville on May 12, 2003.

#### **Cape May Warbler, *Dendroica tigrina***

STATUS: Rare transient, plus a few winter observations; DATES: April 30 - May 22+.

Karen McGee saw two Cape Mays at Devil's Den on May 9, 1992, and Mike Mlodinow found a male and a female at Lake Fayetteville on May 19, 2009. There are three fall observations. Doug James and others saw one at Lake Sequoyah on September 23, 2000.

Wayne Easley and Jim Wampler observed a single bird at Gentry November 28-December 2, 1981. Perhaps most amazing, Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman found one for the Fayetteville CBC, December 12, 1999.

**Black-throated Blue Warbler, *Dendroica caerulescens***

Two records. One was identified at Fayetteville on October 4, 1986. A single male was found as early as December 9, 1999, at a feeder in Fayetteville. It was located for the CBC on December 19 (documentation provided) and last observed December 20.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler, *Dendroica coronata***

STATUS: Common transient that is at times the most common warbler observed; resident most winters; DATES: September 10 to May 23.

The fall influx of Yellow-rumped (myrtle) Warblers into western Arkansas is most apparent during October and early November. For example, I saw 23 in one flock at Lake Sequoyah on October 10, 2007.

In winter they seem more concentrated in forests where there are cedars and other wild fruits (poison ivy, wild grapes). Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since 1961 show them present most years in mid-December, but in 9 years the totals range only from 0-3. The overall CBC mean was 23.0 (n=39, range 0-109).

The spring migration primarily occupies March and April: more than 50 were counted in a few hours at Lake Fayetteville on March 24, 2002, and 114 on April 8, 2000. However, there were at least 22 still at Lake Fayetteville as late as May 4, 2007. Myrtles commonly sing during later stages of spring migration here and many also acquire their striking nuptial plumage as well, providing us a peek at how they look (and sound) on their northern breeding grounds.

Almost all of our yellow-rumps are the eastern "myrtle warbler" with a white throat (Dunn and Garrett 1997), but Mike Mlodinow has made two observations of "Audubon's Warbler," the form with a yellow throat that winters in the far western U.S.

**Black-throated Green Warbler, *Dendroica virens***

STATUS: Fairly common transient; local summer resident; DATES: March 28 to May 29 and August 13 to November 15; plus nesting season records in June and July.

UA-Fayetteville graduate student Paul Rodewald found 14 singing males and fledglings on the Ozark National Forest in Pope and Johnson counties in 1993 (Rodewald 1993). This was the first evidence of nesting in Arkansas. Most of its range lies well to the east and north of Arkansas and birds in summer in Arkansas appear to be largely disconnected from the main breeding season populations (Morse and Poole 2005). Summer records from the Ozarks are mainly from national forest lands with

extensive mature tree stands. Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger observed a nest in the Boxley valley in Newton County in 2008 in the upper Buffalo River area (personal comm.).

Rodewald reported that the Black-throated Green sites were "rather rich in tree species diversity." This habitat typically involves mature tree stands on north and east-facing slopes. Subsequent to Rodewald's discovery, USDA Forest Service personnel have found these birds in more areas of the national forest. Leif Anderson and others found them in summer in the Ozark National Forest (Richard Creek area of Newton Co., Cherry Bend in northern Franklin Co., Pilot Knob in Johnson Co., etc.) No birds were found on the Ozark NF BBS route in Johnson County in its first year (1991), but Steve Osburne and John Andre have counted 1-3 annually in subsequent years.

**Blackburnian Warbler, *Dendroica fusca***

STATUS: Uncommon spring and rare fall transient; DATES: April 26 to June 4; 3-4 fall records.

Most observations have involved single birds. We observed at least 8 on a field trip during a spring peak, May 15, 2004, on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville. There are also observations of single birds for September 2-October 1.

**Yellow-throated Warbler, *Dendroica dominica***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident; DATES: March 20+ to October 9.

Summer hikes to the famous Hawksbill Crag in the Upper Buffalo Wilderness of Newton County are much enlivened by Yellow-throated Warblers. They sing conspicuously from the pines and cedars right along the big bluffline facing Whittaker Creek. They were numerous along the Buffalo River in big trees on a float trip with my daughter Ariel from Pruitt to Hasty on June 17, 2001. This fits the pattern of this bird's former name, Sycamore Warbler, since sycamores are common along the river. We also observe them in larger stream bottomlands with mature riparian forest and in mature pine stands.

They have been tallied on the Compton, Lurton, and Boston Mountain Breeding Bird Surveys, with highest numbers on the Compton route: mean 1.3 (n=34, range 0-6). The Buffalo River and its tributaries influence approximately 10 miles of this route. Forest management studies showed little response by this species to a variety of cutting techniques (Thompson et al. 1995). Written documentation was provided for a single bird at Hickory Creek Park on Beaver Lake in Benton County on February 1, 1987.

**Pine Warbler, *Dendroica pinus***

STATUS: Common summer resident, uncommon winter resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Northwestern Arkansas borders the extreme north and west of the year around Pine Warbler range (Rodewald et al. 1999). They are common here in summer in pine and mixed pine-hardwood stands. Salveter et al. (1996) found that Pine Warblers were the commonest avian species in her pine forest study area and increased in numbers with

the increasing age of the stands. They are found in high numbers on the Ozark National Forest Breeding Bird Survey route where the mean was 35.2 (n=9, range 21-50). Pine Warblers are also numerous on the Boston Mountain BBS, with lower numbers elsewhere. Pine Warblers respond well to most timber management activities, but decline with extensive canopy removal (Thompson et al. 1995). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows a stable population trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). The 5 birds Doug James found singing in a patch of pines at Eureka Springs on February 28, 1993, no doubt marked the breeding season onset.

In winter they are generally uncommon, often hard to find, and appear to be absent from parts of their nWAR summer range. Planted pines within the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count circle have matured, resulting in some habitat for wintering Pine Warblers. This accounts for Fayetteville CBC records of 1-3 birds on about one-half of the counts held since 1985 (with no prior CBC records). There is very limited winter data from the relatively extensive stands of pines in the Beaver Lake area.

My experience with Pine Warblers immediately to the south, in the Ouachita NF, is that they are harder to detect up in the canopy during the cold weather when they are much less vocal. More mid-winter study within existing pine forests will expand our knowledge of this bird's seasonal fluctuations and clear up questions about mid-winter distribution.

Pine Warblers in nWAR are representatives of a once more robust and widespread pine ecosystem that included Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and other plants and animals within the range of native Ozark shortleaf pine (see Dale 1986 for map and discussion; and Sargent 1884). For example, in 1880 Professor F.L. Harvey of Arkansas Industrial University (now UA-Fayetteville) estimated that Newton County held 767 million board feet of shortleaf pine and neighboring Polk County, 2,592 million (Sargent 1884: 544). Much of this habitat has disappeared and been replaced by hardwoods, with loss of habitat for pine specialists.

#### **Prairie Warbler, *Dendroica discolor***

STATUS: Locally common summer resident; otherwise, uncommon transient; DATES: April 5 to September 13.

Prairie Warblers show up during migration in open habitats where they don't nest. We have found them on several occasions in the big former prairie grassland thickets at Lake Fayetteville (and in other thickety fields in the Fayetteville area). Mike Mlodinow and I counted 2 birds at Chesney Prairie NA on August 21, 2005, and I saw 2 there on September 9, 2007.

Nesting Prairie Warblers in northwestern Arkansas occur primarily in extensive overgrown fields with small trees and shrubs like eastern red cedar. They are present regularly, for example, in the old fields at Erbie where personnel from the Buffalo National River maintain openings with prescribed fire.

James' (1971) study of habitat ordination showed Prairie Warblers on the extreme end of birds that require open habitat—that is, it had to be very open. In their study at Pea Ridge National Military Park, Shugart and James (1973) found Prairie Warblers in a variety of open fields including those with broomsedge, early tree stage, and forest edge. They have been found on all Breeding Bird Surveys, but disappear with loss of open field habitat. They are present in relatively high numbers on the Ozark National Forest BBS route: the mean was 6.0 (n=9, range 2-26). Prairie Warblers are absent from heavily forested areas in the Ozarks, but they can quickly take advantage of forests harvested with shelterwoods and especially clearcuts (Thompson et al. 1995). Immediately to the south, in the Ouachita NF, where shortleaf pine is dominant, I found Prairie Warblers very common in mature, open, park-like pine forest maintained in an open condition with prescribed burning.

#### **Palm Warbler, *Dendroica palmarum***

STATUS: Very uncommon transient with more records in spring than in fall; very rare in winter; DATES: April 14 to May 12+ and September 25 to October 29+.

Palm Warblers have been found with fair regularity in all kinds of extensive brushy fields, open grasslands, and crop fields like those at the University farm in Fayetteville. Here are some peak observations: 6 at Lake Fayetteville on April 27, 1995; 4 at Centerton on May 8, 1984; 4 at the University farm on September 29, 1999. JoAnne Rife and Martha Milburn found 2 at Harrison on May 9, 1988. In submitting her record Rife wrote, "Is this warbler being overlooked because we usually look for warblers in wooded locations?" I have found 1-2 birds on three occasions in the fall at Chesney Prairie NA: September 26, 2005, September 30, 2007, and October 13, 2003.

There are five records scattered between December 1 and March 21 showing that Palm Warblers occasionally overwinter. Martha Milburn and many others saw a single bird at Harrison Lake in Boone County on February 4, 1995. Mike Mlodinow found a Palm Warbler at Lake Sequoyah in Fayetteville on March 21, 1986, and thought it could be the bird recorded three months earlier on the 1985 Fayetteville CBC. The most recent record involved a bird found on the 2008 Fayetteville CBC and subsequently observed by others at least into early January 2009.

Palm Warblers are never common in Arkansas during winter. Maps available from the National Audubon Society based upon CBCs show that their principal winter range is well southeast of Arkansas. That said, a warming climate will likely foster winter range expansion.

#### **Bay-breasted Warbler, *Dendroica castanea***

STATUS: Somewhat rare spring transient, rare fall transient; DATES: April 28 to June 2 and September 24 to October 12.

Northwestern Arkansas is on the extreme western edge of the bird's typical Arkansas migration route. Compared to the northward spring passage, the fall migration route is more heavily concentrated along the Atlantic coast (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Almost all observations involve

single birds. JoAnne Rife and others saw 2 in Boone County on April 28, 1996. David Chapman found single birds at Lake Fayetteville during spring 2008 on May 2 and May 11.

**Blackpoll Warbler, *Dendroica striata***

STATUS: Fairly common spring transient; DATES: April 20 to May 26.

Blackpolls are found only during spring migration, but during this time we hear their highly distinctive high-pitched vocalizations in all types of forested habitat including mature and mid-succession woodlands, both in urban and non-urban areas. Most observations involve 1-2 birds. The 11 blackpolls at Lake Fayetteville on May 4, 1984, reflected a peak in spring migration. I found at least 6 there on May 11, 2009, including males and females, and the actual number seemed higher. The number was much higher, because Mike Mlodinow counted 23 there May 19, 2009!

The fall migration occurs well to the east of Arkansas, accounting for the lack of fall Blackpoll Warblers sightings for northwestern Arkansas.

**Cerulean Warbler, *Dendroica cerulea***

STATUS: Locally common summer resident in moist, mature, extensive forest with a rich understory; rare as transient away from nesting areas; DATES: April 14 to September 6.

In summer we seek ceruleans on the steep east and northeastern-facing slopes that are primarily included within the Ozark National Forest. At Winslow, Smith (1915) found that ceruleans arrived “by April 16, and before the trees were fully leafed out, it was readily detected as it moved about in the tops of the highest trees on heavily forested slopes and in ravines. Later as the foliage developed it was less apt to be observed...”

A recent survey (James et al. 2001) turned up many cerulean sites in the western Ozarks, including Devil’s Den State Park, Wedington Unit of the Ozark National Forest, and elsewhere. I have observed them over the past decade in various places in heavily forested Newton County, and especially on Cave Mountain near Boxley, where they inhabit heavily forested benches in an area with umbrella magnolia, pawpaws, and cucumber magnolias—“rich woods,” to use a common term.

It has been found on both Breeding Bird Surveys in Newton County and on the Boston Mountain route (once, 2 birds in 1994). On the Lurton route, ceruleans have been reported in 12 of 32 counts since the 1960s (range 1-4 birds). The situation is similar on the Compton route, where birds have been reported on 12 of 34 counts (range 1-4). They were certainly present in some years they didn’t make the Compton survey; I returned later and found birds I didn’t see or hear during the three-minute stop.

Ceruleans have long been known from the former Cherry Bend campground in the Ozark NF of northern Franklin County. Here the Ozark Highlands Trail crosses highway 23 along a bench far above a forested stream bottom. In past years it has been possible to watch ceruleans nearly at eye level as they foraged in canopies of mature trees growing in the stream bottom below. At current

epidemic levels, red oak borers have killed mature trees over huge areas (Spencer 2001), including trees at Cherry Bend. However, ceruleans remain in the immediate area and I estimated there were at least 12 singing birds there during a hike on May 6, 2009. Therefore, while it’s unclear what impacts these mature tree deaths will have on ceruleans, it’s reasonable to think it may add to existing problems. Ceruleans have been declining throughout their range (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

We don’t often find Cerulean Warblers away from known breeding areas; therefore their late summer-early fall status is poorly known. Birds have been found between the last week of July and early September in non-nesting habitat, indicating they were transients. We were pleased to find two at Lake Atalanta in Rogers on August 19, 2006.

**Black-and-white Warbler, *Mniotilta varia***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: March 17 to October 15.

In nWAR it has become a ritual among birders to “hit the woods” at mid-March in places like Devil’s Den State Park in search of that first “squeaky wheel”—song of the Black-and-white Warbler, fresh in the Ozarks from winter in the tropics. Even if the birds haven’t yet arrived, there’s the possibility for a Louisiana Waterthrush or perhaps a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher—all early birds in the local migration calendar. Black-and-white Warblers inhabit all types of forests, including those in urban areas in migration, but during the breeding season they mainly inhabit extensive mature forest.

They are found on all Breeding Bird Surveys. They were never common on the lightly forested Avoca route, but are numerous on the four routes with extensive forests. On the Boston Mountain BBS, the mean was 8.9 (n=8, range 3-19) and on the Lurton BBS, 5.3 (n=32, range 0-13). Forest management studies (Thompson et al. 1995) showed that when compared to untreated mature forest, these birds appear to benefit from various levels of disturbance. Smith and others (2004: Table 1 and 2) found only marginal differences when relatively undisturbed upland hardwood forest was compared to sites disturbed by various forestry practices. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a stable or slightly increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 17 to October 18.

Redstarts occur widely in all kinds of forested habitat during their migration, including urban woodlots. I see them during both spring and fall in my yard in the middle of Fayetteville. Rob Doster counted 22 migrants at Lake Fayetteville on May 11, 2002. I observed at least 11 singing birds along Richland Creek near the Richland Creek campground in Searcy County during a camping trip on May 19, 1984.

During summer they are common in extensive moist forests, including riparian forest and moist hillside forests. At Devil's Den State Park, the birds are "common particularly in the lower streamside trees" along Lee Creek (Tulsa Audubon Society 1973). Black (1935) found it "common in the larger ravines on the slope" at Winslow during summer. I have found them in many places along the upper Buffalo River— moist mature upland forest of Cave Mountain, Ponca, lowwater bridge, Boxley, Steele Creek area, etc. They were very common in the riparian forest along the Buffalo River between Maumee and Rush during a float trip June 26-29, 2006. They have been found most years on the Compton Breeding Bird Survey typically in the segments near the Buffalo River. The mean on the Compton BBS was 2.3 (n=34, range 0-8).

**Prothonotary Warbler, *Protonotaria citrea***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident in the larger forested stream bottomlands and forested lakes; DATES: April 5 to September 19.

Prothonotaries occur in nWAR in the swampy overflow areas of rivers (for example, White River) and along forested, swampy backwater impoundment margins (for example, Lake Fayetteville). JoAnne and Earl Rife found 10+ in Boone County on April 23, 25, and May 1, 1997, on Long Creek Arm of Table Rock Lake, in Blair Creek and Long Creek. According to Rife, these birds were primarily singing at or near nest holes, but one was "apparently defending turf in one of the large boat docks at Cricket Creek." I found at least 6 along a few miles during a float on the West Fork of the White River near Fayetteville June 8, 2007.

**Worm-eating Warbler, *Helmitheros vermivorus***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident in mature forests, especially moist, rocky, upland ravines or rocky slopes; rare as a transient away from such habitat; DATES: April 11 to September 17.

The Worm-eating Warbler in my yard in Fayetteville on April 16, 2004, was a rare bird indeed, for we infrequently observe them far from rich, extensive woods with a tangle of wild grapevines, low shrubs, small trees, etc. Examples include slopes below White Rock Mountain and Cherry Bend (both in the Ozark National Forest), Cave Mountain and Lost Valley in the Buffalo National River area, and Devil's Den State Park. We found a singing bird perched on a flowering pawpaw tree on Cartwright Mountain near Artist's Point April 26, 2008, during a field trip associated with the spring Arkansas Audubon Society meeting. They are recorded on each forested Breeding Bird Survey route, with highest numbers in the Ozark National Forest. On the Ozark NF route in northern Johnson and Pope counties, the mean was 4.7 (n=9, range 2-9). Abundances are similar on the Boston Mountain route in northern Franklin County: mean 4.5 (n=8, range 0-10).

In Benton County, James and Shugart (1973: 65) found them in their mesic wood plot with sparse understory and an extensive canopy. Smith (1977) also noted extensive canopy. In their study plots in southern Newton

County and northern Pope County, Rodewald and Smith (1998) compared mature, untreated plots with plots where the understory (or midstory) had been thinned to encourage oak regeneration. They found fewer Worm-eating Warblers in the treated plots, perhaps because the warblers make extensive use of smaller understory trees for foraging. Forest management studies (Thompson et al. 1995) also showed them most numerous in the least disturbed forests. In the Missouri Ozarks, Annand and Thompson (1997: 168) noted that it (and others) "usually associated with mature forests, were abundant in group and single-tree selection treatments. A key feature...appears to be the interspersion of small canopy openings containing dense patches of shrubs and tree reproduction...Bird species usually associated with mature forest, however, were likely abundant in the selection treatments due to the presence of intermediate-and large-diameter trees." Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows a stable or slightly increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

**Swainson's Warbler, *Limnothlypis swainsonii***

STATUS: Rare transient and local summer resident; DATES: April 22 to July 29+ (spring arrival and fall departure dates poorly known).

We have relatively little data about Swainson's Warbler, either during migration or in summer. In spring 1985 single singing birds were found in dense bottomland forest along the White River in Washington and Madison counties in the first two weeks of May, but not thereafter. A migrant was present on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville May 10-22, 2000. The presence of adults still feeding young on July 29, 1983, at Redding (more below) indicates that the birds remain in nWAR well after this date.

The birds have been found during summer in a few extensive canebrakes like the one at Buffalo Point on the Buffalo National River and during the 1980s in the dense, shady floodplain forest at the Ozark National Forest's Redding campground along the Mulberry River near Cass in Franklin County. It has also been found in summer in the stands of cane or thickets of maple trees in moist, upland slopes (Wheeler 1924, James 1974) and in cane below the Beaver Lake dam site. Cannon et al. (2000) searched for Swainson's on the Buffalo National River, finding birds at four locations: Erbie, just upriver from Ozark (two locations), and Hasty; high water interfered with the surveys and probably caused birds to be missed. While they found Swainson's in two canebrakes, they characterized habitat as "deciduous habitats with dense shrub development in moist, but not inundated bottomland hardwood forest" and dense "swampy tangles, thickets and areas with shade and dense understory..."

**Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapilla***

STATUS: Common summer resident in extensive mature forest; uncommon transient in smaller forest blocks; DATES: April 7 to October 8.

During migration Ovenbirds are relatively widespread, utilizing smaller, forested habitats including

urban woodlots, but nesting birds are found only in the most extensive, mature, undisturbed forests. Smith (1977) considered it an “obligatory moist forest species.” A common theme in Ovenbird research is their need for large continuous mature forest habitat in the breeding season (Van Horn and Donovan 1994). Under such conditions, Ovenbirds are among the most numerous of our breeding Neotropical migrant warblers. On the Ozark National Forest Breeding Bird Survey route, the mean was 27.3 (n=9, range 9-44); on the Boston Mountain route, 18.3 (n=8, range 9-28); on the Lurton BBS in southern Newton County, 25.4 (n=32, range 0-51).

In their study in Benton County, Shugart and James (1973) found Ovenbirds only in mature forest plots. Amy Salveter (1994) and Salveter et al. (1996) showed that Ovenbirds declined in pine study plots on the Ozark National Forest after prescribed burning. In their Missouri Ozarks study, Annand and Thompson (1997) found that Ovenbirds were most abundant in undisturbed mature forests and declined with increasing intensity of treatments. Rodewald and Smith (1998) found that Ovenbirds declined on their study plots in the Ozark NF after treatments that included understory thinning and canopy reduction. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows a fairly stable trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). Joe Woolbright and I were very surprised to find a transient Ovenbird at Chesney Prairie Natural Area (with very little forest cover) on October 3, 2005.

#### **Northern Waterthrush, *Seiurus noveboracensis***

STATUS: Fairly common spring and less common fall transient; DATES: April 4 to May 26 and August 16 to October 15.

In their annual migrations through the western Ozarks, Northern Waterthrushes are observed in forested habitat at the edges of reservoirs, along sluggish streams and other pond-like, still water situations including those in urban areas. The swampy fringe of willow trees along Lake Fayetteville has been productive. Peak counts in the spring have involved 3-5 in early May and as many as three in late August. It has been surprising to me to find Northern Waterthrushes with fair regularity at Chesney Prairie Natural Area. In this grass-dominated area, they utilize a small drainage with modest forest and shrub cover.

Mike Mlodinow and I were birding on the Frisco Trail at Lake Atalanta in Rogers on August 19, 2006, when we found a waterthrush, or actually, waterthrushes. We couldn't agree on the species involved. Separately, we both felt pretty sure about our tentative identifications. Things cleared up when we finally realized we were each looking at different birds that were very close together—one Louisiana and one Northern.

#### **Louisiana Waterthrush, *Seiurus motacilla***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and summer resident along streams and in adjacent floodplain forests; DATES: March 8 to September 11+.

Louisiana Waterthrushes are common residents along our fast flowing headwaters streams. They

show up in these areas early in spring, often by the second half of March. They are conspicuous by their songs through the summer, but are hard to find later with only scattered sightings into the first half of September. There is also an older record for October 4 (Baerg 1951). Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger's research (more below) showed the birds arrived in the upper Buffalo area between March 11 and March 24. She typically found the first nests of the season around mid-April.

Breeding Bird Survey routes don't sample long stretches of streams. The birds are readily apparent while hiking, swimming, and floating. My daughter Ariel and I floated the Buffalo River between Pruitt and Hasty on June 17, 2001, and saw and heard them all along. They were common between Maumee and Rush during another float trip June 26-29, 2006. Over the years I have seen a few of their nests, which are constructed on the ground, well-concealed, and above the typical spring flood stage.

Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger, a UA-Fayetteville PhD candidate, is researching Louisiana Waterthrushes (Marshall-Rosenberger in progress). She is interested in seeing how these birds could indicate environmental quality in a river like the Buffalo. During 2004-2008, she banded 227 waterthrushes, tracked the return rates of banded birds, followed nest success, and collected breeding biology data. I found it fascinating to read that her birds often returned year after year to the same territories, but there appeared to be differences based upon the quality of the stream involved—highest quality stream had highest returns. Part of her study includes waterthrush bioacoustics. This study will help determine if territorial males discriminate between songs of neighbors and strangers and if they are capable of recognizing individual neighbors. Her research demonstrates how protecting stream quality logically protects waterthrushes and other native species.

#### **Kentucky Warbler, *Oporornis formosus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient away from nesting habitat; common summer resident; DATES: April 15 to September 30.

We often find Kentucky Warblers in thickets or similarly dense understory vegetation within mature forests or in forest edge. James (1971) demonstrated that Kentucky Warbler habitat choices lay between Gray Catbird and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Kentucky Warblers are often associated with habitat disturbance within forests (Hunter et al. 2001: Table 5). Research in Missouri and other Central Hardwood states showed that Kentuckies responded positively to forest management, including single-tree and group selection (Thompson et al. 1995).

Kentuckies are widespread in summer and have been reported on all Breeding Bird Surveys in the western Ozarks. Numbers are low on the heavily urbanized Avoca route, but are relatively high on the routes that sample forests or the forest-farmland interface. Data from the Compton BBS in northern Newton County is typical: mean 6.6 (n=32, range 0-12). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows an increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Fall migrants show up in areas where they don't nest at least by early August. For example, I was surprised to see one at Chesney Prairie Natural Area on August 3, 2008.

**Mourning Warbler, *Oporornis philadelphia***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; DATES: April 30 to June 6 and August 17 to October 3.

Mourning Warblers are highly sought after by observers all over Arkansas. In part this is because in a relative sense, they seem rare, though I typically find them at least several times during migration IF I listen carefully for songs and inspect all kinds of low dense shrubbery and other low, shady cover.

In his writing about this warbler in the *Birds of North America* series, Pitocchelli (1993) states this species is "a common breeder in cleared but regenerating areas of North America's boreal forest, winters in Central and South America, where it also prefers disturbed areas with thick undergrowth. In favoring such clearings caused by logging or forest fires, this warbler may be one of North America's few Neotropical migrants that has benefited from human settlement." This statement certainly fits occurrences during migration through western Arkansas. They utilize all types of semi-open areas with a dense brushy cover of shrubs, bushes, etc. at forest edge or in our former prairie areas.

Our observations of Mourning Warblers involve low numbers, often 1-2. Singing birds may call attention to themselves in spring; otherwise, they're difficult to "pish" out of the bushes for clear views. We have found them in the dense edges along the Frisco Spring trail at Lake Atalanta—waist high vegetation, including flowers, shrubs, and grasses easily viewed from the trail. It is possible to walk carefully along this trail (or the mowed edge) and hear even the quiet singing that characterizes their spring passage. A male and female remained in my yard in Fayetteville May 20-22, 2002, using the bushes and other low vegetation growing in a 15 foot-wide unmowed strip left just for such purposes. There is a modest peak in numbers during May. In spring 2008, I found them on 5 occasions, May 9-18. I was surprised to find them twice at Chesney Prairie Natural Area, August 29 and 31, 2008 (different birds). Jacque Brown and David Oakley obtained fine images of a singing male in the brushy edge at Chesney May 25, 2009.

**Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 4 to November 11+.

Spring migrants are typically found after mid-April. They often remain a few days in dense flowerbeds in my yard in Fayetteville, an announcement that migration is underway. In the Clabber Creek bottomlands in Fayetteville, my earliest observations were in the third week of April, with peaks of 10 birds by mid-May.

Yellowthroats nest in the moist thickets of extensively open areas, including regenerating clearcuts in forested habitat. James (1971: Fig. 8) located yellowthroat habitat between that chosen by Brown Thrashers and Field

Sparrows. Yellowthroats are reported on all Breeding Bird Surveys. On the Avoca BBS in Benton County, the mean was 3.7 (n=32, range 0-12); on the Compton BBS in northern Newton County, 3.5 (n=34, range 0-9). Just to the south, in the Ouachita NF, I frequently found yellowthroats in summer in grassy open pine stands where Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were nesting—essentially forest open enough with enough sunlight to support vegetative cover required by yellowthroats.

Yellowthroats are numerous during fall migration in extensively open grasslands like Chesney Prairie Natural Area. There were at least 15 there during a fall peak October 3, 2005, and 10, in a variety of plumages, October 6, 2007. There is a sharp decline by mid-October, with stragglers thereafter. The only record past the typical fall migration involves a single bird found by Mike Mlodinow in the Clabber Creek bottomlands at Fayetteville January 7, 2009.

**Hooded Warbler, *Wilsonia citrina***

STATUS: Common summer resident in extensive mature forest; rare transient away from such habitat; DATES: April 12 to October 4.

Hooded Warblers are birds of extensive, moist (Smith 1977) mature forests, in both upland and bottomland situations. During migration they are found in places where the forest is less extensive (e.g. Lake Fayetteville, Lake Atalanta). I found at least 15 birds on September 17-18, 2008, in the upper Buffalo River area, but could find only 1 on October 2.

Hoodeds are common on the forested slopes below White Rock Mountain, Cherry Bend, and other places in the Ozark National Forest, on Cave Mountain above the Buffalo River, etc. They are found on each of the four forested Breeding Bird Surveys. Data from the Ozark NF route includes a peak of 26 in 2001. The mean on the Lurton survey was 4.7 (n=32, range 0-15). James (1971: Fig. 7) depicted nwAR breeding habitat as highly diverse in tree species, high percentage of canopy cover, relatively tall trees, with numerous small trees in the midstory, and gaps in this canopy (Fig. 2). In another study, hoodeds appeared to respond negatively in the short-term to understory removal and partial reduction in the canopy (Rodewald and Smith 1998). In their study in Missouri Ozarks hardwoods, Annand and Thompson (1997: Fig. 2, Table 2) found that Hoodeds responded positively to both single-tree and group selection harvests (also see Thompson et al. 1995). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows a stable trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Leesia Marshall-Rosenberger (2005) studied behavior and chip note vocalizations of female Hoodeds in the Mark Twain NF (Missouri Ozarks). She found that behaviors and vocalizations of first nesting season females changed in subsequent years. They differentiated between predators (gray squirrels and black rat snakes) and events with experience.

**Wilson's Warbler, *Wilsonia pusilla***

STATUS: Common transient; DATES: April 29 to June 3 and August 17 to October 22+.

Wilson's Warbler passes through western Arkansas in May during the northward migration, and then during September to early October, heading south. They are pleasingly numerous during peaks. Rob Doster counted 15 on May 11, 2002, at Lake Fayetteville, an excellent place to find them. Mike Mlodinow and I found 10 at Lake Atalanta on September 11, 2005, and Mike counted 16 at Lake Fayetteville on September 12, 2006. During its passage, Wilson's can be found just about anywhere with fairly open edge habitats including urban woodlots, fields with medium sized trees, forest edge, and overgrown fencerows. I always see them in my yard right in the middle of Fayetteville.

Of his unusual June 3, 2004, record Mike Mlodinow noted, "This could have been a member of the western race as the song was atypical, rising at the end in a way reminiscent of the song of Blackburnian Warbler." There is also a very late observation dated November 12.

#### **Canada Warbler, *Wilsonia canadensis***

STATUS: Very uncommon transient; DATES: May 1-June 6 and August 23-September 22+.

The file of records maintained by Arkansas Audubon Society indicates that Canada Warblers are never common anywhere in Arkansas, including northeastern Arkansas, where daily tallies of many other Neotropical migratory warblers tend to be higher than those in nwAR. Our records have mainly involved single birds, but Mike Mlodinow counted three on Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville August 30, 2005. Mike also holds the late day record – a single bird on Markham Hill in Fayetteville on October 6, 2007.

#### **Yellow-breasted Chat, *Icteria virens***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 16-October 13 (few reports after late August).

Chats are kings of dense thickets in extensive, overgrown fields. They rule the dense tangle of forest regeneration following logging and similar disturbances. Their growls and whistles are distinctive and entertaining, but woe to the curious person who wades out for a closer look: briars of all kinds, chiggers, ticks and brush piles will be your dubious reward.

Chats are on the extreme edge of birds using extensive open habitats, sharing this trait with species like Prairie Warbler, Bell's Vireo, and Brown Thrasher (James 1971: Fig. 7). At Pea Ridge, Shugart and James (1973: Table 1) found chats in a variety of early successional habitats, with peak numbers in their woody field plot—a late development within the general framework of "early tree stage." Chats benefit from a variety of forestry practices that open the canopy. In the Missouri Ozarks, Annand and Thompson (1997: Fig. 2) found chats in low numbers in group selection cuttings, increasing strongly through shelterwoods and clearcuts. Chats show up on most Breeding Bird Surveys. On the Ozark National Forest BBS, the mean was 14.9 (n=9, range 10-29); on the Lurton BBS, 9.6 (n=32, range 2-17). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF show a stable or

increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). Prior to human settlement, chats must have found suitable habitat in parts of the prairies that didn't burn thoroughly. Also, it seems likely that periodical destructive windstorms and forest fires must have provided suitable habitat patches.

#### **Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 11 to October 30+; very rare in winter.

Our "summer redbird," as the old timers knew it, is a familiar warm season resident of mature forests, including those in modestly developed urban areas where a high percentage of the mature forest canopy has been retained (for example, mature post oaks). It is also common in all of the large forested areas of the western Ozarks. The key appears to be large, older mature trees. Summer Tanagers are recorded in good numbers on each forested Breeding Bird Survey route (but have disappeared from Avoca probably due to its heavy urbanization). Mean number of Summer Tanagers on the Compton BBS was 5.8 (n=34, range 1-14). In Central Hardwood forests, Summer Tanagers didn't exhibit appreciable change across a broad range of forestry practices (Thompson et al. 1995). However, breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a declining trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). The same authors noted that "Forest management activities such as prescribed burning and thinning benefit this species."

Summer Tanagers remain here until around mid-September, but thereafter migrants are evident in places where no tanagers nest. Such is the case at Chesney Prairie Natural Area, where I saw two on September 19, 2008, and one on September 30, 2007. There are scattered observations of birds lingering through the leaf-fall month of October.

Summer Tanagers typically winter much further south, to central Mexico and southward (Robinson 1996). However, winter season records are scattered across North America, including a fair number in Arkansas (James and Neal 1986). One bird with a deformed bill was observed at Gentry November 28- December 18, 1981. On Mt Sequoyah in Fayetteville, there have been records of 1-2 wintering Summer Tanagers in female or immature male plumage and one in adult male plumage since 2002. In each case, investigation showed that these birds were visiting suet feeders. A male Summer Tanager was photographed for the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count at the home of Bob and Sara Caulk in 2004-2006 (and into 2007) where it made regular visits to a suet feeder. Steve Erwin reported a bird in yellowish plumage visiting his suet feeder in Fayetteville on February 9, 2009, during the course of the Great Backyard Bird Count. The bird had been present since at least January. I obtained images of this bird on March 4, 2009. It was molting into a male summer redbird by early April.

#### **Scarlet Tanager, *Piranga olivacea***



STATUS: Common summer resident in extensive mature forest; rare as a transient away from such habitat; DATES: April 4 to October 3.

Scarlet Tanagers occur in extensive mature deciduous forests and are often more common than Summer Tanagers at higher elevations. They avoid urban areas, seemingly even in migration. Scarlet Tanagers are recorded in good numbers on each of the forested Breeding Bird Survey routes. On the Lurton route the mean was 9.8 (n=32, range 0-20) and on the Compton route 4.0 (n=34, range 0-13). As compared to Summer Tanagers, Scarlet Tanagers are more associated with undisturbed mature forests. When compared to untreated mature control stands, Scarlets increased in single-tree selection cuts but declined with increasing levels of forest removal (Thompson et al. 1995). Smith and others (2004: Table 1 and 2) showed that Scarlets were a fairly common species in relatively undisturbed upland hardwood forest and sites variously disturbed by management practices. The exception involved clearcutting; in these sites Scarlet Tanagers were rare. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a stable trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). I found 12 in the upper Buffalo River area of Newton County on September 17-18, but none on my next trip on October 2.

#### **Western Tanager, *Piranga ludoviciana***

One record. The Arkansas Bird Records Committee accepted documentation for a Western Tanager observed by Lavaughn Graham on May 14, 1980, near War Eagle Recreation Area in Washington County.

#### **Spotted Towhee, *Pipilo maculatus***

STATUS: Somewhat rare winter resident; DATES: October 12 to March 4+.

Spotted Towhees nest well to the west of Arkansas, but in winter a few birds migrate east, with their typical winter range barely reaching western Arkansas (Greenlaw 1996). Like our more familiar Eastern Towhee, Spotted Towhees are birds of thickets and other dense cover. Also like Eastern Towhees, we find Spotted Towhees only in low numbers during winter and unless we are very lucky, only after careful inspection of dense cover in areas that generally otherwise lack trees. There are more than a dozen sightings on file; single birds have been reported on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count in 1991, 1993, 2000, and 2007. Most of our sightings involve single birds, but Doug James and others found two males and one female in dense thickets of regenerating field habitat at Lake Fayetteville on November 11, 2000. David Chapman found a very late one at Lake Fayetteville on April 17, 2008.

#### **Eastern Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident, uncommon winter resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

During migration towhees make brief stops in all kinds of thickets, including those in urban areas. They show up at mid-March in my yard in Fayetteville. Towhees

were already singing on at least 4 territories at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on March 20, 2009.

The single towhees seen during two years at Chesney Prairie Natural Area in mid-October were certainly transients. During such times, they remain a day or two at most. The 8 birds counted by Jack and Pam Stewart at Erbie in Newton County on November 25, 2008, was a high number so late in the season.

During summer towhees are typically found in fairly open habitats with shrubs and medium-sized trees, including regenerating field habitat—old farmland provides good habitat. In the Shugart and James study at Pea Ridge (1973:65), towhees occurred in a range of early succession habitats, with highest numbers in woody fields and especially forest edge (Table 1). This latter plot was characterized as “the junction of a post oak forest and a broom sedge field. The junction included a dense understory of winged sumac and blackberry.” Logging operations also can foster suitable nesting habitat. In the Missouri Ozarks, towhees were common in regenerating clearcuts and present in lower numbers in stands with shelterwood and group selection cutting (Annand and Thompson 1997: Fig. 2). Towhees are recorded on all Breeding Bird Survey routes. On the Lurton survey in Newton County, the mean was 8.6 (n=32, range 2-16). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a declining trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Towhees have been found most years on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: the mean was 6.9 (n=39, range 0-24). A peak of 12 was recorded on the Crooked Creek Valley CBC in 2002. During winter 2001-2002, there were at least 3 birds in a brushy field with scattered trees midst a lightly developed residential neighborhood on a south-facing slope of Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville.

#### **Bachman's Sparrow, *Aimophila aestivalis***

The only recent record for the old “pine woods sparrow” involves one bird found by Bill Shepherd in Franklin County on April 30, 1992. The habitat was a recent clearcut on the Ozark National Forest. Bachman's occurs during summer immediately south of nwAR on the extensively open and frequently burned former prairie grasslands and shrublands of Fort Chaffee at Fort Smith. Over the years I have found them regularly on the Ouachita NF in western Arkansas, also maintained in an open condition with fire. The open park-like mature pine habitat in the Ouachitas includes a dense understory of native grasses and forbs that provide hiding places for their nests. As in the case of Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch, Bachman's must have been more widespread historically. It is strongly associated with the early regeneration of forests (both pine and hardwood) and open, mature pine-dominated forest (James and Neal 1986). Unlike Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman's is migratory. This suggests that our native pine forests in the Beaver Lake, Eureka Springs, and the Ozark NF area can be attractive IF required ecological requirements are met. The IF includes restoration activities (thinning hardwood midstories and prescribed burning) that would mimic the

ecological conditions that existed prior to widespread fire exclusion in areas that once were heavily dominated by shortleaf pines, with only codominant hardwood species. These restored landscapes would be attractive to Bachman's Sparrows, as well as many other plant and animal species excluded by current forest management practices.

**American Tree Sparrow, *Spizella arborea***

STATUS: Uncommon winter resident; DATES: October 18 to April 3.

Tree sparrows are not found in nwAR every winter, but in those years when they are here, they seem associated with blasts of snow and severe cold that drive them south from their typical winter range to our north. We tramp the big, open fields with brush, weeds, and other cover in hopes of seeing them. This is habitat similar to that chosen by the much more common White-crowned Sparrows. During a trip into the former Lindsley Prairie area of Siloam Springs, January 1, 1984, I found tree sparrows literally everywhere: flying across the road, along fencerows, in brushy fields. I had counts of 2, 5, 12, 25, 5, 3, 15, then found a flock that might have numbered as high as 75, but I couldn't rule out the fact that other sparrow species were part of that flock.

Low numbers are often reported on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. On 44 CBCs through 2005, they were found on 32 counts (plus 1 count week record). However, numbers observed were either 0 or 1 bird on 17 of the 44 counts. Peak CBC counts were 25 (1974) and 44 (2000). On the Siloam Springs CBC, peaks included 48 in 1983 and 55 in 1976. Flocks of 40 or more have been found on several occasions in brushy-weedy fields like those at the University farm north of the Fayetteville campus, in the area around the state fish hatchery at Centerton, and elsewhere. Mike Mlodinow counted 65 at the University farm on January 31, 2001. Joe Woolbright and I enjoyed sighting 23 at Chesney Prairie NA on January 26, 2006.

**Chipping Sparrow, *Spizella passerina***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; somewhat rare in winter; DATES: primarily March-October, but observed in all seasons.

At mid-March, when the days of winter begin to lift toward spring, I have enjoyed listening for Chipping Sparrows while walking across the broad lawn in front of Old Main on the University campus in Fayetteville. They are frequent especially where there are well-spaced, mature trees and the ground is open and grassy: parks, campgrounds, golf courses, open pasture where trees have been left, and mature open pine woods. Flocks are still present here into the second half of April, indicating spring migration is still underway at this time.

Chipping Sparrows nest widely in western Arkansas. They are reported on all Breeding Bird Surveys. The mean was 12.4 (n=34, range 3-26) on the Compton BBS in northern Newton County. Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest shows a strong increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Chipping Sparrows have apparently become more common in winter in recent years: they have been found on about half of the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since the early 1990s. Peaks include 8 in 1998 and 15 in 2001. I found at least 9, and suspected more, on the former Norwood Prairie west of Fayetteville on January 3, 2008.

**Clay-colored Sparrow, *Spizella pallida***

STATUS: Uncommon to very uncommon transient; DATES: April 10+ to May 14 and September 8 to October 31+.

This western counterpart of our more familiar Chipping Sparrow migrates mainly through the Great Plains to our west, but observations are scattered east all the way to the Mississippi Valley (Knapton 1994). In nwAR, Clay-colored Sparrows are observed regularly in open areas including brushy fields and open park-like forest, including those in urban areas.

We see a spring migration peak between the last days of April until about mid-May. Many sightings have involved 1 or 2 birds, but a flock of 12 was found at Fayetteville on April 28, 1968. At least three were in a brushy field at Lake Fayetteville on May 2, 1986, and for several days thereafter. Mike Mlodinow and others saw 25 at the Centerton hatchery on April 26, 1996. During the 2006 International Migratory Bird Day, May 14, 2006, my party found a total of 9 during the day, and with a little effort, could probably have found many more: they seemed "everywhere."

We typically see fall transients from the second week of September through the third week in October, with a few scattered records thereafter. Joe Woolbright, Shane Woolbright, and I saw 3-5 at Chesney Prairie NA on October 6, 2007, a good number for fall. A bird I saw near the Siloam Springs airport on November 13, 2008, was late. A bird in Fayetteville on the unusual date of February 12, 2008, was well documented.

**Field Sparrow, *Spizella pusilla***

STATUS: Common to fairly common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

We find these handsome sparrows all year. Migration influxes are apparent during spring and fall. For example, at least 10 Field Sparrows were at Maysville on March 16, 2008; migrants were signing in my yard in Fayetteville during the same time. There were 9 Field Sparrows in the Clabber Creek bottomlands at Fayetteville March 30, 2002. The six birds singing on the former prairie habitat at Lake Fayetteville on April 23, 2009, seemed to be on territories, but some migrants are probably still moving through western Arkansas in late April.

Influxes of migrants are also apparent in the fall, from late September into November. At least 7 were in the Clabber Creek fields on September 26, 2005. My data from Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs show birds present in the fall starting in early October. A flock of 8 Field Sparrows visited my yard in Fayetteville November 6, 2008.

Field Sparrows inhabit larger open fields with brush, small trees, and thickets (but don't look for them in fescue pastures). In their study at Pea Ridge, Shugart and James (1973: Table 1) found Field Sparrows across a range of fields in early succession, with highest numbers in plots characterized by broomsedge, clonal persimmons, and woody fields. The highest numbers were in the clonal persimmon plot, an "early tree stage" with "small trees separated by expanses of broom sedge and other herbaceous species...Overall the canopy was 83 percent open." This species responds positively to forestry practices, including clearcutting (Thompson et al. 1995).

During June, the sweet song of Field Sparrows can be heard in farmlands all along the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in northern Newton County. The mean on the survey was 16.3 (n=34, range 7-34). However, continental BBS data indicates a significant decline (see Hunter et al. 2001: Table 3).

Field sparrows are found annually on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. The mean was 84.2 (n=39, range 4-350). Numbers found on the CBC have fallen since high counts of the early 1960s and 1970s. This is attributable in part to Fayetteville's growth with consequent reductions in a count circle that once had many acres of suitable "young tree stage" fields, now urbanized.

#### **Vesper Sparrow, *Pooecetes gramineus***

STATUS: Uncommon to fairly common migrant and rare winter resident; DATES: October 4 to April 28.

Vesper Sparrows are "fond of grass" as the Latin portion of their name, *gramineus*, suggests. We find them in extensively open areas, including farmland, short grass fields, and roadside thickets. I typically find them in the same areas frequented by Savannah Sparrows. They often arrive in the fall by early to mid-October and we see them through mid to late November. On October 16, 2004, a group of us counted 3 at Chesney Prairie Natural Area, at least 7 in a plowed field nearby, and another single bird at Centerton. Richard Stauffacher and I saw at least 8 on the old Hindsville prairie on October 15, 2005. On November 2, 2008, during a long day's trip through the former prairie region of western Benton County, I tallied about 14 for the day – all birds seen along gravel roads midst broad, open grassy, fields.

Vesper Sparrows were once fairly common here during winter, based upon some of our earlier Christmas Bird Counts. For example, of the few CBCs at Fayetteville in the 1920s, there is the record of 6 in 1925. The birds were found on 10 Fayetteville CBCs 1961-1990, but have not been recorded on the CBC since 1990. Some of this change may be a result of Fayetteville's extensive growth, reducing what was once a fair amount of suitable habitat. However, we have not found them at mid-winter in other parts of nwAR, either. The western Ozarks are on the bird's extreme northern edge of typical winter range. Presence or absence here is probably related to climatic variation and a variety of land use changes that have occurred over time—primarily reforestation of land in the eastern United States that was once much more open as pasture, crop fields, and prairie (Jones and Cornely 2002).

Transients are observed again with the onset of spring weather --from about mid-March and thereafter. I saw nine together near Centerton on March 28, 1990, and 15 at or near Chesney Prairie NA on April 1, 2006. Counts like these mark peaks in the northward migration.

#### **Lark Sparrow, *Chondestes grammacus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and local summer resident; DATES: March 26 to September 12+.

Lark Sparrows are essentially birds of our former prairies and heavily grazed pastures, observed along unpaved roads (where there are a few tall trees) and open overgrazed fields with sparse vegetation. They have certainly become less common in nwAR.

Andrew Scaboo counted 7 Lark sparrows at Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville on April 19, 2009, an indication of the spring influx. I saw a single bird in a small flock of Chipping Sparrows the following day.

Lark Sparrows were recorded on both Breeding Bird Surveys in Newton County in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but not since. The last BBS record for nwAR was one bird on the Avoca route in Benton County in 1993. Lark Sparrows have suffered a significant continental decline (Hunter et al. 2001: Table 2).

In 2005 I visited former prairie areas and subsequently located a Lark Sparrow population in and around the former Norwood Prairie, just west of Wedington on the Washington/Benton county line. On July 24, 2005, I found 13-14 birds in four family groups, all with fledglings. We also have recent summer records of a few birds at Centerton, Hindsville, and the former Beaty Prairie around Maysville.

They nest across the adjacent Missouri border (Jacobs and Wilson 1997: 317) and widely in northeastern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004:407). John Prather observed a bird on November 1, 1998, at University farm in Fayetteville.

#### **Lark Bunting, *Calamospiza melanocorys***

There is one record for this western species. Jody Clark submitted written and photographic documentation to the Arkansas Audubon Society for a Lark Bunting in the Lead Hill area of Boone County for several days around June 4, 2009. The bird was a male in breeding plumage and was viewed and photographed by others in the Disorganized Birders Club at Harrison.

#### **Savannah Sparrow, *Passerculus sandwichensis***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 11 to May 15+.

One of my favorite works of art is "Savannah Sparrows" by Richard Stauffacher of Fayetteville. This hand-colored etching depicts two birds peering from the cover of smartweed stalks, one of many thousands of these aquatic plants at the state fish hatchery in Centerton. It perfectly illustrates where we often find these birds: grassy-weedy fields, croplands with stubble, grassy expanses of airports, and all kinds of "edge" in extensively open country. They flush from grassy fields and perch on barbed wire fences,

allowing easy observation. They are often numerous in open areas that are essentially former prairie habitat, including frequently birded places like the University farm north of the campus in Fayetteville.

They arrive often by the end of September and early October, becoming one of our common winter sparrows. During a drive through the former prairies of western Benton County, November 2, 2008, I easily counted at least 131 along gravel roads surrounded by open fields.

When we are birding in good Savannah habitat with a group, someone is bound to ask about how to quickly identify one. Soon as I mention they are pale and streaky, out pops a dark one. Then I say, look at that crown stripe – but there's one without a stripe. Finally, I say, look for that yellow spot in the supercilium and, oh well, here's one with barely any yellow. This happens because Savannahs exhibit a wide range of plumage characteristics associated with their equally broad geographical nesting range (Rising et al. 2009). Birds in nWAR in winter may, for example, be light birds more typical of the west, dark birds more typical of the east, or something inbetween!

They have been found in most years on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Peaks include 104 in 1993 and 82 in 2005. Since 1961, there have been 8 count years with only 0-2 birds recorded at Fayetteville. The birds may pass unseen as they forage weedy fields, but can be observed in high numbers when forced to roadsides (presumably for waste grain from poultry feed trucks) during periods of severe weather when ice or snow covers open fields.

During spring, Savannah Sparrows remain in nWAR into May. I counted at least 25 in open fields at Fayetteville during a spring migration peak, April 28, 2002. Baerg (1951) reported two observations of nesting birds at Fayetteville, but there have been no such reports since. There is a record from the Missouri Breeding Bird Atlas for for a bordering county (Jacobs and Wilson 1997).

#### **Grasshopper Sparrow, *Ammodramus savannarum***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and local summer resident;  
DATES: April 6 to October 28+.

Grasshopper Sparrows are restricted to our former native grasslands: extensive fields often including many native grasses and forbs, or croplands (especially during migration). They may be surprisingly common, especially during spring migration in appropriate habitat. JoAnne Rife and others found 15-20 on May 1, 1997, in Harrison at Lone Star Dairy and adjoining farms that are part of the original Baker Prairie. My party and I heard and saw at least 20 in the Maysville area (former Beaty Prairie) during International Migratory Bird Day, May 12, 2007. For fall, there is also a very late observation for November 11.

In Missouri, nesting habitat was characterized as grasslands of low to medium height, in pastures heavily to moderately grazed (Skinner and others 1984). We have looked for Grasshopper Sparrows in the nesting season across nWAR and have recent summer records (since 2000) from Hindsville in Madison County (former Hindsville Prairie), the former Beaty Prairie at Maysville, former Round Prairie at

Cherokee City, former Norwood Prairie west of Wedington, on Baker Prairie and environs at Harrison, University farm at Fayetteville, and elsewhere including the Compton Breeding Bird Survey route in Newton County. I saw and heard at least 15 at Hindsville on May 28, 2005.

Grasshopper Sparrows were recorded on bordering Missouri atlas blocks, but were much more common further north (Jacobs and Wilson 1997). They were also found in a few of the adjacent Oklahoma atlas blocks (Reinking 2004). Overall, this species has suffered a significant continental decline (Hunter et al. 2001: Table 2). The cause for part of this is apparent here. Excellent habitat at Hindsville has been impacted by relocation of highway 412, plus subdivision development. Baker Prairie NA and the old, once more extensive former prairie, has been steadily reduced. Population and urban expansion in the once Tallgrass Prairie region between Fayetteville and Bentonville, around Siloam Springs (former Lindsley Prairie) leaves little for Grasshopper Sparrows.

#### **Henslow's Sparrow, *Ammodramus henslowii***

STATUS: Rare transient; local summer resident in former moist prairie or prairie-like open country habitat; DATES: April 1 to October 31.

Mike Mlodinow found a singing Henslow's Sparrow on June 6-26, 2001, in a former seasonal wetland prairie along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville in an area we call Wilson Springs. This is immediately west of I-540 and lies along Dean Solomon Road south of Wedington Road. A collaborative survey effort starting in spring 2002 led to discovery of at least 3 or 4 territories in the Wilson Springs property (Holimon et al. 2004). During International Migratory Bird Day May 10, 2003, I found 3-5 Henslow's in a second Clabber Creek lowland field, just southwest of Razorback Park golf course and therefore about one-fourth mile from the initial Wilson Springs birds. Because of their wet character, the Clabber Creek lowlands have until recent years escaped development and therefore preserved many biological characteristics of the former Tallgrass Prairie landscape. Unfortunately, both of these properties are midst intense housing and commercial projects.

During International Migratory Bird Day May 14, 2005, Mike and David Chapman found a single singing Henslow's in a large grassy field at Pea Ridge National Military Park in Benton County. Mike and I returned to this spot on July 9, 2005, and located 6-7 Henslow's in a field just outside the visitor's center. In the following week, we located at least 3 more birds in the Leetown battlefield area, basically the center point between cannon batteries marking Union and Confederate lines on March 8, 1862. This part of Pea Ridge NMP includes a significant effort to restore native Tallgrass Prairies grasses (big bluestem grass, Indiangrass, cordgrass, etc). Unlike the Clabber Creek grassy lowlands, Pea Ridge is public property and likely to remain grassland. Henslow's were found on several occasions here in 2008.

Henslow's Sparrow has suffered a significant continental decline (Hunter et al. 2001: Table 2). Adjacent the western Arkansas Ozarks is a population on the Tallgrass

Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska, OK (Reinking et al. 2000). A small population is known from preserved prairie in the Arkansas valley to the south (Holimon et al. 2004). Henslow's Sparrow also occurs during summer in the adjacent Missouri Ozarks (Jacobs and Wilson 1997). Missouri habitat was characterized as tall, dense cover in lightly grazed or idle grasslands; spring burned prairie was suitable for Henslow's by mid-July. The birds were common on undisturbed grassland even if it had been disturbed the previous year (Skinner and others 1984). Henslow's habitat is quite similar to that selected by Sedge Wrens here. Indeed, we have found the two together in several locations during recent summers at Wilson Springs (prior to 2006) and Pea Ridge NMP.

**Le Conte's Sparrow, *Ammodramus leconteii***

STATUS: Uncommon to fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 7 to May 11.

We look for Le Conte's Sparrow in tall dense grasses or similar vegetation, usually in low-lying, extensively open fields. The remarkable and attractive buffness of their plumage blends well with fall and winter grasses. With a little effort, we usually can get the bird to perch up for a look. The 7+ Le Conte's at Chesney Prairie NA on October 16, 2004, indicated a fall arrival peak, as did 12-15 in the same place on October 27, 2007. Relatively few are observed between early December and mid-February, but at least 6 were at Lake Bentonville-Bentonville airport on January 17, 1998. In 2005 the City of Fayetteville set aside part of a former prairie seasonal wetland as mitigation associated with the new west side wastewater treatment plant near Farmington. Woolsey Wet Prairie now provides excellent winter habitat for Le Conte's: we counted approximately 8 there on February 4, 2006, and as many as 8-10 on February 10.

This is a sought-after bird on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Le Conte's was found almost annually 1961-1973, including a peak of 7 in 1968, but wasn't found 1974-1984. Since 1985, it has been found in low numbers (1-2) on about half of the counts. Suitable extensive field habitat is fast disappearing under a wave of development within the Fayetteville CBC circle. At present we have initial data from the Woolsey site and it looks promising for grassland birds.

**Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, *Ammodramus nelsoni***

STATUS: Rare transient; DATES: October 2 to 28, and two spring records, May 13 and 20.

We have had only about a dozen Nelson's records in two decades. Most observations involve single birds. There was a single bird at Centerton on October 9, 1983; two were there the following day. The habitat was dense, knee-high vegetation in a drained fishpond and the low-lying overgrown field nearby. A single bird was seen well by my party on International Migratory Bird Day May 13, 2007. It flushed from dense grass in the former prairie grasslands of the Clabber Creek bottomlands, its rich orangish breast and face plumage signaling that we'd found "a good bird." I saw and collected images of one at Woolsey Wet Prairie on October 10-15, 2008. Woolsey includes more than 30 acres, with many wet cells potentially suitable for Nelson's

and other wetland birds. There were many Marsh Wrens in the same area.

**Fox Sparrow, *Passerella iliaca***

STATUS: Fairly common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 10 to April 13+.

These handsome birds are another of the long distance sparrows that are at least fairly common in nWAR during migration and over most winters. They've come a long way to winter here: various Fox Sparrow subspecies nest in the far north and west, including the northern boreal and western montane forests (Weckstein et al. 2002). We find them here in open areas such as woody-brushy fields and thick vegetation grading into forest. For example, dense edge thickets with scattered trees adjacent open fields of Chesney Prairie NA in Benton County provides suitable habitat.

The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 13.2 (n=39, range 0-55), but Fox Sparrows can be scarce in some winters, as illustrated by the fact that in 8 years since 1961, totals for the count ranged between 0 and 2 birds. Fox Sparrows were found with greater frequency and relatively higher numbers on the Buffalo National River (west) CBC in Newton County. Peak numbers there include 33 in 1981 and 46 in 1982. These numbers seem more like Fayetteville's early CBC efforts in the 1920s: with only a few observers in the field, the tally was 50 in 1925! A single bird at Lost Valley near Ponca on April 28, 1987, was "late."

Across their huge breeding range, Fox Sparrows have evolved distinct characteristics leading to numerous subspecies designations. Birds in nWAR are from the red subspecies *iliaca* that breeds across the far north of North America. Zink (1994) proposed four separate species, one of which would be our red Fox Sparrow.

**Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 7 to May 2+.

Song Sparrows are common in all sorts of dense moist vegetation of extensive open fields. For example, I counted more than 15 at Chesney Prairie NA on October 13, 2003, with high numbers of others sparrows, too: a big sparrow day and typical for mid-October. My grassland studies show that southward-moving migrants arrive during the first half of October and become common by mid-to-late month. During spring, the main part of the migration is over by the first half of April, with stragglers thereafter.

Song Sparrows are common at mid-winter, too. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count data up to 2000 showed the mean number of Song Sparrows found was 79.8 (n=39, range 13-176). The total recorded in 2002 was 243. Black (1935) stated that the species nested "rarely" at Winslow. No other nesting records are known here. There are several records of singing birds past the normal spring migration period. Nesting was confirmed for a breeding bird atlas block in bordering McDonald County, Missouri (Jacob and Wilson 1997).

**Lincoln's Sparrow, *Melospiza lincolni***

STATUS: Common transient, somewhat rare winter resident;  
DATES: September 23 to May 26.

Lincoln's Sparrow is a common transient during both the southward and northward migrations. Southward migrating birds are common or at least fairly common in suitable grassland habitat during October. Birds heading north become evident by the second half of March and then can be found in numerous places (including my yard in the middle of Fayetteville) during April into the second half of May. They utilize all types of grassy or brushy edge habitats, including open forest edge, pastures and lawns in town. At Lake Bentonville, the count was 26 on October 15, 2000, marking a fall arrival peak. At least ten were in an open field or a forest edge in Fayetteville on April 28, 1988, and 25+ in open fields along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville on May 2, 2002.

Its secretive habits in winter markedly contrast with those during migration. Lincoln's is readily confused with more numerous Song or Swamp sparrows, since all may occur in the same habitats at that season and exhibit streaking, buffiness, and other plumage characters designed by evolution to make them invisible or at least highly confusing in the grass. The flocks of fall transients have passed through nwAR by winter's onset and nwAR is only marginally within the typical winter range, primarily to the southwest (Ammon 1995). Therefore, genuine winter records are scattered, irregular, and usually involve single birds, including birds at feeders. On Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since 1961, number of Lincoln's found was 0-1 in 29 years. Midwinter peaks on the CBC include 7 (1966) and 6 (1964, 1975). One party on the 2006 Fayetteville CBC reported 9 in the Clabber Creek bottomland fields, which caused quite a spirited and perhaps overly zealous discussion. These were ultimately withdrawn. However, Mike Mlodinow returned to the same area on January 10, 2007, a few weeks after the disputed count, and found 1-2 Lincoln's, along with 86 Song and 21 Swamp Sparrows! During the same time, J. Pat Vlaentik had one visiting his feeder regularly at Eureka Springs.

#### **Swamp Sparrow, *Melospiza georgiana***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 23 to May 12.

As their name implies, Swamp Sparrows are specialists of marshy open habitat with some woody vegetation like buttonbush. We often find them along edges of ponds, reservoirs, swampy creeks and marshy seasonal wetlands in former prairie fields. You may be in a good spot to find these birds if you see cattails and other tall aquatic vegetation. Other than seeing the right vegetative structure, my first clue about finding these handsome birds are distinctive PEET calls they give when disturbed.

Swamp Sparrows can be surprisingly common here by the second week of October during influxes of southward-migrating birds. In spring, most Swamp Sparrows have headed north by mid-April, but we have observations of stragglers into the first half of May. There were 50+ Swamp Sparrows in fields along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville on

October 18, 2002, marking a fall arrival peak. They are also common in the marshy areas at Chesney Prairie Natural Area.

Swamp Sparrows show up regularly on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. The CBC mean was 16.0 (n=39, range 0-64). There were 143 on the 2002 CBC, but only 4 in 2004. I assume that some of this difference involves weather patterns, since prolonged weather that caused marshy habitat to freeze would force birds further south.

#### **White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 26 to May 23+.

When it's time to get the wood pile in shape and check out the furnace, it's also time to start enjoying the winter sojourn of White-throated Sparrows. At first they quietly sneak into nwAR during their fall southward migration, but then become numerous and quite vocal by mid-October and thereafter. Big cold fronts and cold weather by late October turns the migration trickle into a flood. They are firmly established here for the winter by Halloween.

They are strongly associated with dense honeysuckle thickets, hedges, and other heavy cover in our urban environments. Their close association with honeysuckle as cover, roosting habitat, and winter fruit makes me wonder, only half-humorously, what they did before honeysuckle became so well established? I don't know what the status of honeysuckle was within the Fayetteville CBC circle in the 1920s, but here's a hint: the peak number on the 1920s CBC was merely 5 birds, roughly the same as Vesper Sparrow! Of course, it's not just honey suckle. I have found them in high numbers in the Ozark National Forest during fall migration, using as cover all kinds of low native vegetation like grape vines, blackberry, brush piles, etc.

They are one of the very common winter residents in urban areas: the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 151.9 (n=39, range 15-400). Arkansas CBC data indicates a modest downward trend. The statewide trend may reflect modest declines in the bird's breeding range which is primarily in Canada (Falls and Kopachena 1994).

Energetic White-throated Sparrow choruses typical of the spring migration period occur around the time when dogwoods are blooming, especially during the last few weeks of April and early May. After this time most White-throated Sparrows have departed for their northern breeding grounds. There are several summer records, but no indication of nesting.

#### **Harris's Sparrow, *Zonotrichia querula***

STATUS: Uncommon to locally common winter resident; DATES: October 15 to May 13.

Harris's Sparrow nests in the forest-tundra zone of northern Canada, in a landscape mosaic that is very open with scattered trees and shrubs (Norment and Shackleton 2008). Therefore, the best strategy for locating Harris's Sparrow is to head out to dense fencerows in very open and generally undeveloped areas—basically, the same places frequented by the much more numerous White-

crowned Sparrows and especially in those areas with open groves of trees and shrubs somewhat like the forest-tundra zone in Canada. It's likely you will find these open country birds where former prairies have also retained their open, grassland characteristics. Pastures and chicken houses are likely to be in the area.

The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 14.6 (n=39, range 0-8). The peak of 83 occurred in 1966, but 0-1 have been recorded on 6 counts. Harris's numbers on the Siloam Springs CBC include peaks of 14 (1976) and 12 (1979); 13 was a peak on the Crooked Creek valley CBC (2002). The count of 41 birds on the 2006 Fayetteville CBC is the highest here since the 1960s. Harris's is also a regular winter visitor to home bird feeders in rural areas with suitable nearby habitat.

Maysville in extreme western Arkansas is consistently the best place to find them (the bulk of their winter range is west of Arkansas). We expect Harris's Sparrow with the onset of cold weather, especially in early November: we found 5 birds around Maysville on November 9, 2008, and 35 during a long day, including one flock of 25, on January 14, 2006. There were 13 at Chesney Prairie NA on December 21, 2002, and approximately 20 foraging in a burned field adjacent a small woodlot at the same place on January 12, 2003. The single bird in my yard in the middle of Fayetteville on March 17, 2003, was certainly a migrant (as was the Eastern Towhee there on the same day). The 2-3 birds at Chesney Prairie Natural Area on April 19, 2008, were in heavy molt. Most birds have moved north by the end of April.

#### **White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: September 24 to May 19.

White-crowned Sparrows inhabit open woody fields with well-developed hedgerows and other thickets, including blackberries, multiflora rose, etc. They are associated with open field habitat that has developed on our former prairie grasslands. Transients show up for a few days, even in urban areas without suitable habitat. During October I see a bird or two in my yard in the middle of Fayetteville and then again in late April and early May, but they don't remain. My field notes show that the first fall migrants reach the high quality habitats at Chesney Prairie Natural Area in early October, with flocks by mid-month, and the highest numbers overall from December through March. There is a sharp decline in numbers by early April, as most birds depart for the far north. Only stragglers then remain. Doug James noted spring migration at his feeder in Fayetteville from 1996-1998, with small numbers of birds (1-6) between April 27 and May 12.

Birds that reach us in fall have made a long distance migration from breeding areas far to the north and west (Chilton, et al. 1995). A recent study employing radio tracking showed that adults use a learned navigation map covering much of North America, whereas juveniles rely upon an innate program to reach wintering grounds (Thorup et al. 2007). I keep such things in mind during field trips to places like Chesney Prairie where their overwinter habitat

requirements seem well met. The adult sparrows there apparently had this in mind when they took off from northern Canada after the nesting season. The juveniles eventually find the area as well, as long as habitat remains suitable. During the cold months, 100 or more White-crowned Sparrows may be observed at or near Chesney, sometimes in big flocks that include Harris's and Savannah Sparrows. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 71.4 (n=39, range 0-196). The 339 birds on the 2006 Fayetteville CBC was our highest tally ever.

#### **Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis***

STATUS: Common transient and winter resident; DATES: October 9 to April 28+.

Snowbird flocks are common in winter, so common it easy to forget how very diverse they are. A lot of this diversity in plumage and geographic origin is obvious from just casually watching flocks. From November 9, 2002 to February 26, 2003, various birding companions and I made 22 birding trips to a variety of sparrow habitats. Most juncos seen were what we think of as the typical snowbird, but I was able to classify some to described subspecies, some of which we once considered separate junco species: 13 as *cismontanus*, 6 as *oregonus*, and 1 *mearnsi*.

Following the admonitions of Roger Tory Peterson, we call them all juncos, and hundreds are reported annually on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count and more than a thousand in several years. The Fayetteville CBC mean was 552.6 (n=39, range 29-1100). There are several additional records of "Oregon juncos." I saw a male Oregon at my feeder on October 11, 2007, my first junco of the season.

During mid to late March, when the serviceberries illuminate our otherwise wintery forests with their white blooms, most juncos have departed the Ozarks for their northern breeding grounds. Only stragglers remain for the redbuds flowering in April. I saw and photographed a "pink-sided" junco at my feeder in Fayetteville on March 21, 2002 (Neal 2003). Hank and Sheree Rogers saw a junco on the very late date of May 22, 2008, at Harrison.

#### **Lapland Longspur, *Calcarius lapponicus***

STATUS: Uncommon but regular transient and winter resident in former prairie habitat; DATES: November 1 to February 9.

During the cold season, November through early February, we listen keenly in extensively open areas for "rattle and tew" calls of a unique sparrow, the Lapland Longspur. We find Laps in our former prairies that remain open and undeveloped, or developed in a way useful to these birds. Our observations are often single or a few birds, or small flocks, often fewer than 10 birds, in open country with very sparse vegetation, including plowed fields like those at the University farm in Fayetteville. Perhaps this habitat at least somewhat resembles the Arctic tundra of the far north where they nest. Sometimes these longspurs are mixed with flocks of Horned Larks or American Pipits.

There are six records for the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, with a peak of 21 birds in 2000. There

are reports from airports at Fayetteville, Siloam Springs and Rogers, the University farm in Fayetteville, along highways at midwinter when hard freezes or snow forces birds from open fields. We don't find them on every winter field trip, even in the best habitat, but they can sometimes be locally abundant. An estimated 40 were among approximately 200 Horned Larks in a plowed field near the Siloam Springs airport on January 19, 2003. We estimated 170 in a harvested bean field just northeast of Maysville on January 20, 2007.

**Smith's Longspur, *Calcarius pictus***

STATUS: Rare transient and winter visitor; DATES: November 17 to February 28.

There were a few reports in the 1980s of 1-2 birds from Smith Field at Siloam Springs where they were observed in the *Aristida* species grasses near the terminal building. There are two February 28 records: Howell (1911) collected a specimen at Fayetteville and Mike Mlodinow saw 1 at Smith Field on February 28, 1993. Mike also found a bird on December 11, 2004, in a partially harvested soybean field at the University farm in Fayetteville and 4, also in short grass there, on December 2, 2006.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur, *Calcarius ornatus***

One record. A single bird was observed and heard by Tom Haggerty at the University farm in Fayetteville on April 15, 1983. Documentation is on file with the Arkansas Audubon Society.

**Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Cardinals are found all year in shrubby neighborhoods and woody fields, at the forest edge, and even within thickets of extensive forest openings. Their striking appearance and pleasant song adds considerably to the charm of living in the western Ozarks. During summer highest numbers are recorded on the Avoca Breeding Bird Survey route, with a mean of 35.8 (n=32, range 15-66). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF show a strongly increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

Mobley (1994) studied nesting behavior of cardinals in the Fayetteville area. He found that they made on average about 2.5 nesting attempts each year and overall fledged about two young with these attempts. Only about one-third of the pairs he studied managed to produce offspring. He also found that cardinals abandoned nests if a cowbird egg was laid in it before cardinal eggs were laid, which may account for why 19% of the nests he found had been abandoned.

Cardinals are tallied annually in high numbers on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count: the mean number was 254.7 (n=39, range 21-460). While cardinals are common birds at urban feeders, they are also common in the suitable habitat of non-urban areas. During winter I often see as many as a dozen birds, both males and females, at my yard feeder in Fayetteville. I can see as many, and sometimes more, in the dense thickets formed by giant ragweed, poke, blackberries

and small woody plants that develop along roadsides in open farming country. In these situations it is typical to see cardinals in loose flocks with White-crowned Sparrows, Harris's Sparrows, and other species. They are always a delight to see, whether it's the striking plumage of the males or the elegant subtlety of females.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak, *Pheucticus ludovicianus***

STATUS: Common spring and uncommon fall transient; very rare in summer; DATES: April 18 to May 28+ and September 1 to October 18.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are common transients that are easily found if you learn the distinctive "keek" call, which helps a lot in locating them high up amidst the foliage of mature spreading trees. They are much easier to observe when they crowd around feeders! There were at least 10, including males and females, at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on May 17, 2008, a spring peak.

I counted at least 8 on Cave Mountain in Newton County on October 2, 2008, a fall peak. During fall migration they take advantage of nwAR's abundant, widespread crop of giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*), heavy with seed just at the right time. We observed at least 4 grosbeaks harvesting ragweed seeds along Frisco Spring at Lake Atalanta on September 29, 2002. I made similar observations at Chesney Prairie NA on September 30, 2007.

In addition to transients, there are a few summer records. The most recent of these involves a male visiting Sally Jo Gibson's feeder at Harrison in late June 2009, where it was photographed by Gibson. During the course of the Missouri breeding bird atlas project, grosbeaks were found nesting widely in the northern half of Missouri, with summer records highly scattered to the south, including blocks bordering nwAR (Jacobs and Wilson 1997).

**Black-headed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus melanocephalus***

Two records. A single bird was observed at close range from January 23-26, 1979, in Newton County near Boxley. One was observed at Siloam Springs on April 12-20, 1993.

**Blue Grosbeak, *Passerina caerulea***

STATUS: Common summer resident; DATES: April 19 to October 7.

Blue Grosbeaks can be found during summer in our former prairie grasslands, extensive old fields, pastures, and cropland. Habitat-wise, I associate them with Painted Buntings and have often found them in the same places. Out in the open country, I stop and listen. At a great distance, I hear what I think is a grosbeak. Or is it the bunting? Differences in their songs are obvious up close, but not so obvious across a big field. In her study of bird habitat ordinations in Arkansas, James (1971: Figs. 7, 8) characterized Blue Grosbeak habitat as very open, shrubby, with isolated larger trees; Field Sparrow and Eastern Kingbird shared these characteristics. The large, open, and frequently shrubby fields along the Compton Breeding Bird Survey in Newton County



seem about ideal. Mean numbers of grosbeaks along the route was 11.1 (n=34, range 2-39).

**Lazuli Bunting, *Passerina amoena***

There are three records for these western birds. Jennifer Russell observed and photographed one male in Washington County on May 9-15, 1996. In 2006, J. Pat Valentik found one at Lake Leatherwood near Eureka Spring on May 13. Leesia Marsall-Rosenberger and others on a field trip of the Disorganized Birders' Club found one at the Elk Education Center in Ponca, and it was present there May 15-17, 2006. Sally Jo Gibson obtained photographs. There is a big peak in the migration of similar species, like Indigo Buntings, at mid-May. Based upon this, it seems reasonable to conclude that our Lazuli Buntings were slightly off course and arrived here with local nesting birds.

**Indigo Bunting, *Passerina cyanea***

STATUS: Common transient and summer resident; DATES: April 14 to October 25+.

Indigo buntings are one of the most numerous of the migrant species nesting here. They are common along the edge of the forest adjoining open farmland and in dense fencerows with tall trees in open country. There were at least 16 buntings visiting feeding stations at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County on May 17, 2008, indicating a spring peak.

They are common in a variety of habitats as nesting birds. In extensively forested habitats, numbers of these buntings increase with increasing levels of forest removal (Thompson et al. 1995; also Rodewald and Smith 1998: Table 1; and Annand and Thompson 1997: Fig. 2). Indigos also nest in the forest interior where there are openings of sufficient size. On the Boston Mountain Breeding Bird Survey, the mean was 70.5 (n=8, range 50-83). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark National Forest show an increasing trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007). In 1986, at least five birds returned to the same 40-acre research plot near Durham in Washington County where they had been banded in 1985 (personal communication, Jane Fitzgerald).

Indigo flocks of a dozen or more birds are especially notable during September and the first half of October, declining thereafter. These flocks are busy harvesting the seed bounty in fields and along the forest edge. Most are in the predominant brown plumages, though here and there we see a bird with some hints of fine indigo. Jack Stewart observed approximately 30 birds feeding on seed of Indiangrass and big bluestem in Newton County on September 10, 2004. It's a good count that is fairly typical of the fall migration peak.

Even though migration is clearly underway, some relatively late nesting also occurs. At Chesney Prairie NA, I saw a young bird, just out of the nest, accompanied by both adults, on September 19, 2008. There are also three records past typical fall migration, including one observed in Fayetteville by Jennifer Russell and others from December 24, 1996 to February 11, 1997.

**Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris***

STATUS: Fairly common locally as a summer resident; DATES: April 16 to September 11+.

Painted Buntings are typically seen in nwAR by the end of April or the beginning of May, sometimes at feeders or in mixed flocks with Indigo Buntings. For example, there was a brilliant male Painted associated with a flock of Indigo Buntings at Devil's Den State Park on May 3, 2008—a good find for “Birder's Weekend.” Fall migration seems to be heavy during August. I saw at least 7 green plumaged Painteds in 3 spots in the Cherokee City area on August 31, 2008. However there is nesting activity in August as well (below), and this pushes the migration into at least the first half of September.

Painted Buntings are fairly common locally as summer residents, at least in those areas that were formerly prairies and remain open with only a modest level of development. If you want to find them, recognizing the song is critical, because neither the brightly colored males nor the greenish females are often seen. Typically, males become visible only as they sing from the tops of trees in fencerows. Many of these former prairies are now pastures. It is not unusual to find remnants of prairie mounds in such places. Over the years I have found Painteds regularly in open country broken by dense thickets or extensive fencerows with some tall trees, often overgrown fields with cedars, neglected railroad right-of-ways, and edges of towns where shrubby-thickety conditions prevail. During summer of 2005 I birded regularly on former prairies at Norwood (just west of Wedington on the Washington-Benton County lines), Cherokee City (former Round Prairie), and Maysville (former Beaty Prairie). At Maysville they occur in the mature tree belts along the gravel roads surrounded by huge open fields. Painted Buntings were common in all of these areas (typically, at least 4-5 per day without specific effort to find them). I also found them on the former Hindsville Prairie in Madison County, Chesney Prairie NA at Siloam Springs (former Lindsley Prairie), and in remaining habitat patches in the Fayetteville area (former prairie habitats at Lake Fayetteville, in south Fayetteville along Willoughby Road, in the Fayetteville Industrial Park, University farm, Clabber Creek bottomlands). JoAnne Rife has documented a population in Boone County in the Lead Hill-Sugar Loaf-Diamond City Recreation Area on Bull Shoals (Rife 1990). She observed them in the residential area near Sugar Loaf dock, but stated that another way to find them was to go by boat and watch “not-so-steep bluff areas either up in West Sugar Loaf Arm, Deer Cove, or Shoal Creek.” Painted Buntings were reported in good numbers in past years on the Avoca BBS in Benton County (up to 5-6 in late 1960s-early 1970s), but disappeared almost entirely from that survey as the route was swallowed up by urban development that has virtually eliminated the obligate habitat of big open field and dense hedgerow.

Mike Mlodinow has found both adults and fledglings at the University farm in Fayetteville during mid-August several years. I observed 2 birds in what I assume was a juvenile plumage on August 30, 1987, in south Fayetteville

near Drake Field. In two different years I have observed fledglings and adults together at Chesney Prairie NA during the first half of August.

A bird in green plumage regularly visited a feeder at Paige and Mary Bess Mulhollan's home in Fayetteville November 17- 27, 2007 (and was photographed there by Mary Bess). This bird disappeared, but within the month, Doug James and Elizabeth Adam, also in Fayetteville, repeatedly observed a bird in a similar plumage at their feeder January 19-23, 2008. Birds sometimes winter even further north (Lowther et al. 1999).

Continent-wide Breeding Bird Survey data shows a significant decline (see Hunter et al. 2001: Table 3). I attended a meeting of the international group Partners-in-flight at McAllen, Texas, in 2005. Some of the presentations there were about this decline. Sadly, part of the problem involves birds captured during winter for the caged bird trade. Captured birds bring as little as 25 to 50 cents each. Many die in the process. Stopping the trade in wild birds by providing alternatives ways to make a living is part of the solution. Even if they evade capture in winter, they face significant reductions in suitable nesting habitat. Extensive old field habitat is lost when the former prairie lands are converted for other uses. Thousands of acres of such habitat have been lost here, directly impacting Painted Buntings. It's not as obvious a detriment as trapping, but it's just as deadly.

#### **Dickcissel, *Spiza americana***

STATUS: Common migrant and summer resident; DATES: April 24 to October 31+.

Dickcissels are the familiar scions of our former prairie grasslands. They habitually sing from open perches on fences and utility lines. They prefer fields with tall grasses and tangles of vegetation like blackberries, persimmon sprouts, etc. Joanne and Earl Rife noted a big spring migration peak with 50-75 in Boone County west of Harrison on April 28, 1996. We estimated about 100 at the University farm in Fayetteville during a peak, May 6, 2006.

In their study at Pea Ridge, Shugart and James (1973) found Dickcissels in a field with broomsedge grasses and sassafras saplings that had burned the winter before their study. Dickcissels frequently attempt to nest in hayfields, but because of mowing, successful nests are likely only along the fencerows or in abandoned fields. It has been found on the three Breeding Bird Survey routes (Avoca, Lurton, and Compton) that include farmland, but as expected, not on the two more heavily forested routes (Ozark National Forest, Boston Mountain). The Avoca BBS mean was 10.9 (n=32, range 0-29). Numbers found on the Avoca BBS have declined considerably since the late 1980s, which is consistent with increasing urbanization.

Dickcissel migration is underway by late August and early September. The 25 birds at the University farm on September 9, 2001, was a high count so late in the season. There are scattered records of 1-2 birds after the end of September and into early December. Some of these stragglers are birds derived from late nests. We have found

adults feeding fledglings on several occasions in early September.

Dickcissels remain fairly common birds in our former prairie region. But as is the case with many grassland species, continent-wide BBS data shows a significant decline (see Hunter et al. 2001: Table 2).

#### **Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus***

STATUS: Uncommon to locally common spring transient; somewhat rare fall transient; DATES: April 28 to May 28 and August 12 to September 15.

JoAnne Rife and other Boone County birders have tracked Bobolink spring migration since at least the late 1960s. They have found them consistently in alfalfa fields in the Crooked Creek valley, 4 miles west of Harrison, especially in fields at Lone Star Dairy along Highway 206. Their records show relatively high numbers from April 25 to May 20, and peaks often in the first two weeks of May: for example, an estimated 100 on May 10, 2001, and May 20, 1997. There were "100s" on May 7, 1996, as reported by Rife and Martha Milburn. The estimated 50 Bobolinks observed 2-3 miles southeast of Harrison on May 10, 1997, suggested there were additional fields in the area being used by migrants. Big fields at Pea Ridge National Military Park in Benton County are also used in spring migration. I observed a late spring male at Hindsville in Madison County on May 28, 2005.

Fall counts are much lower. Migration peaks are reflected in counts of 18 at Centerton on September 10, 1989, and 12 at University farm in Fayetteville August 12, 2001. The late fall date involved two birds at Chesney Prairie NA seen during a field trip September 15, 2007.

No Bobolinks were reported in Missouri Breeding Bird Atlas blocks bordering Arkansas (Jacobs and Wilson 1997).

#### **Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus***

STATUS: Common resident that is locally abundant in winter; DATES: observed in all seasons.

There is nothing quite like hearing male red-wings proclaim OH KEE LAH from a stand of cat tails around a big marshy pond during spring and early summer. Their red epaulets flash in the effort to defend territories around the pond. On the Avoca Breeding Bird Survey in Benton County, the mean number of Red-winged Blackbirds was 72.0 (n=32, range 16-132).

After the nesting season they gather into big flocks that are notable in prime feeding areas, especially big cow pastures. Huge night roosts form in winter. Over the years, Doug James and his students have counted winter roosts in connection with the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count. Some of the peak numbers include 450,000 (1972) and 182,083 (1981).

#### **Eastern Meadowlark, *Sturnella magna***

STATUS: Common resident of extensive grasslands; DATES: observed in all seasons.

With the onset of spring at mid-March, meadowlark singing seems to dominate the landscape on all

but cold, windy days. They are common in the western Ozarks in all kinds of extensive grasslands and croplands, wherever these occur. High numbers have been recorded on the Avoca BBS. The mean was 113.5 birds (n=32, range 19-198). However, numbers of meadowlarks recorded on this route have been dropping as urbanization increases and suitable open field grassland is lost. Habitat loss is the source of this bird's declining numbers in other parts of its vast range in eastern North America.

After the nesting season, when I am out birding on a cool, blue sky fall day, I am pleasantly surprised by the chorus of Eastern Meadowlark songs. At first I don't see any of them, but they are out there in the far pastures. Their songs fill the entire landscape of the former prairie. They seem to sing in praise of sunrise, or perhaps in memory of the long summer days of their nesting season.

The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 293.7 (n=39, range 55-660), but this is undergoing change, too, as suitable habitat is increasingly reduced within the count circle. My section of the Fayetteville CBC includes the University farm. Over the years there I have consistently found winter meadowlark flocks of several dozen individual birds or more in harvested crop fields.

#### **Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta***

STATUS: Uncommon winter resident; DATES: October 10 to April 7.

Outward differences between Eastern and Western Meadowlarks are modest; most birds found in the western Ozarks are Easterns. However, on occasion a meadowlark can be heard and seen that is singing the Western song or giving the "chup" call note. We have obtained many such records in the fields and feedlots of our former prairies. We find them at the University farm in Fayetteville, in the environs of Chesney Prairie NA, at Maysville in Benton County, with additional records scattered elsewhere. A fall influx was indicated during a long day in the Maysville area, November 11, 2005: I heard westerns singing or calling nearly every time I stopped to check on a soaring hawk. At one spot there was a minimum of 6 westerns, some singing a scratchy song that reminded me of juvenile White-crowned Sparrows.

Western Meadowlarks have been found on roughly half of the Christmas Bird Counts at Fayetteville since 1961. Numbers have always been low. While meadowlarks of one species or the other are common during mid-winter, actually identifying them without hearing songs or calls requires close and careful observation, which isn't easy in cold winds or when birds are far away. We've had good luck at the University farm. A sunny late winter day February 24, 2002, encouraged singing by meadowlarks at the farm. I heard songs and calls from a small Western Meadowlark flock of at least 5 birds. Other meadowlarks in the area gave typical Eastern calls or songs. We counted at least 7 on January 14, 2006, at Maysville. Some birds were identified when they responded to playback of their songs and calls. There are few Westerns here after mid-March.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird, *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus***  
STATUS: somewhat rare transient, occasional winter visitor;  
DATES: July 18 to October 5+ and April 9 to May 12.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds nest primarily west and north of Arkansas and so their migratory path just barely includes nwAR. Nevertheless, a few turn up most years during migration. They are rare enough that it is always a treat to find them. Most observations involve just a few birds. Observations for the southward fall migration are clustered primarily between the second half of September and the second half of October. Sightings for spring occur primarily from mid-April into the second week of May.

Amy Edie and I saw three males at Centerton on October 14, 2006; Mike Mlodinow and I went back the following day and saw the three males, plus one female. I collected some images of birds perched atop a small bulldozer, painted black and yellow, like the birds. This immediately set off a humorous discussion of mimicry, though I doubt the dozer needed protection. There were 41 Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Centerton on April 15, 1984, and the flock remained there for more than a week. There were 10 at Centerton on May 3, 1997, and 5 at the Lead Hill area of Bull Shoals Lake in Boone County on May 8, 1999.

Besides the above sightings involving migration, there are a few scattered sightings during winter, when they are occasionally seen in mixed species blackbird flocks (November-March). Dean Crooks reported a "nesting pair" in Benton County on May 3, 1947 (Baerg 1951), but no further information is available. No confirmed or suspected nests turned up during breeding bird atlas projects in adjoining states (Jacobs and Wilson 1997, Reinking 2004).

#### **Rusty Blackbird, *Euphagus carolinus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient and winter resident; DATES: October 18 to May 1.

Rusties nest in wet Boreal forests well north of other blackbirds (Avery 1995). Jason Luscier, a UA-Fayetteville PhD candidate, is studying habitat use by rusties in their winter range (Luscier in progress). Relatively little is known about them in either their summer or winter ranges; there is concern about the causes of downward population trends.

Rusties are observed in all kinds of wet ground situations like ditches, swampy forest edge, pond flats in northwestern Arkansas. We also see them in feed lots and as part of mixed-species blackbird flocks. In the fall, they arrive fairly late, infrequently before mid-November. The were 50 along the edge of a fish pond at Centerton on November 25, 2006, indicating a fall peak. They are found on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts (but 0 in eight years since 1961). Peak CBC numbers include 3029 (1976), 1000 (1980), 700 (1999); these high numbers all involved informed estimations and counts of big mixed-species blackbird roosts within the Fayetteville CBC circle. Scott Michaud and I counted 67 on muddy flats along Clabber Creek in Fayetteville on January 4, 2009. Most rusties have departed by the first half of April.

**Brewer's Blackbird, *Euphagus cyanocephalus***

STATUS: Somewhat rare transient and winter resident;  
DATES: October 18 to March 18.

Brewer's Blackbird is infrequently reported in nWAR. It seems likely this western blackbird is often overlooked in the enormous mixed-species blackbird flocks that settle onto pastures during winter. At a distance and especially without use of a spotting scope, I have confused male Brewer's for Common Grackles. Another potential source of confusion is that some Brewer's exhibit an aspect of typical Rusty Blackbird plumage. A group of us birding at Centerton on November 10, 2007, had excellent views through spotting scopes of a small blackbird flock on recently plowed ground. We counted 17 Brewer's, including males and females (with their dark eyes). I had a similar observation on November 20, 2008, with a flock including males and females foraging in an open field adjacent a dairy farm northeast of Maysville. It looked like there were maybe a 100 birds. I was just up to a count of 16 when the birds were flushed by the low pass of a helicopter.

Brewer's has been found on one-third of Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since 1961. The 213 birds in 1981 was a high number. They are unusual enough that records are sometimes questioned. I found at least 2 birds in plowed fields at the University farm on the 2003 Fayetteville CBC (December 14, 2003). I say "at least" because there were others, but I focused on two in order to collect some evidence. As is his long-standing habitat, Doug James, then the CBC compiler, raised questions as we all gathered to tally up the day. Fortunately for my party and me, I had "digiscoped" (collected a digital image through my spotting scope) male and female Brewer's perched on a wire. I showed Doug the unmistakable image on my digital camera.

#### **Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula***

STATUS: Common resident; abundant near roosts in winter;  
DATES: observed in all seasons.

Common Grackles are present in nWAR throughout the year. They are most conspicuous in winter, when they form huge roosts. Over the years, Doug James and his students have counted blackbird roosts in the Fayetteville area. Peak grackle totals on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count (based primarily upon James' roost counts): 201,763 (1972), 150,822 (1972), 60,000 (1983), 44,000 (1999). These high counts contrast with winters when grackles are scarce: over the same period, there have been 8 count years when 25 or fewer Common Grackles could be found within the Fayetteville CBC circle, or were seen only during the count week.

During the nesting season, these grackles nest widely in all kinds of open country including urban areas. Of course, they are rarely reported on Breeding Bird Survey routes that are heavily forested (Boston Mountain, Ozark National Forest), but show up in fairly high numbers on routes with open farmland and forest (such as both Lurton and Compton in Newton County), and are abundant in the most urbanized route, Avoca in Benton County. The mean there was 91.0 grackles (n=32, range 17-165).

#### **Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus***

STATUS: Locally common in a few places in Benton County, but otherwise very uncommon to somewhat rare; DATES: observed in all seasons.

Great-tailed Grackles are fairly recent arrivals to northwestern Arkansas. The first definite records were obtained at the state fish hatchery in Centerton on April 28, 1984: a pair built a nest and laid three eggs by June 3. This nest was abandoned, apparently after nearby vegetation was cut. Nesting was observed in the cattails of a farm pond south of Maysville on April 16, 1986. Doug James found them roosting with other blackbirds, starlings, and herons in a peach orchard near Farmington in Washington County on August 19, 1990. On May 26, 1991, James observed approximately 50 nesting in the same orchard with Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons. At least 125 birds were at the U of A farm in Fayetteville on October 3, 1987, and a flock of at least 30 remained for the winter 1987-1988. They have been reported on most Fayetteville Christmas Bird Counts since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Peak counts are 128 (1999) and 120 (1992). Doug James estimated 400 in a mixed species blackbird roost at Fayetteville January 18, 1997.

Many of our records of relatively high numbers have come from the open country (former prairie grasslands) of Benton County where feedlots are common. Kenny and LaDonna Nichols saw approximately 500 at the Bentonville Airport on February 5, 2000. Mike Mlodinow and David Chapman estimated 400-500 at the U of A farm on March 5, 1995. I counted approximately 300 in small flocks as they flew over the Centerton hatchery, apparently headed to roost, on March 10, 2007. There were approximately 60, including males and females, just south of the Centerton hatchery on March 16, 2002.

Since fall 2007, we have often seen Great-tailed Grackles just north of Vaughn (immediately south of the Centerton hatchery). They are associated with the cattle, dairy, and poultry farming operations. I have also seen hundreds of them on the grounds of the Wild Wilderness Drive-Through Safari in Benton County, another feedlot situation (2008-2009). Doug James and his U of A-Fayetteville mammology classes have seen them regularly at this location over the years. Sarah Thompson and I saw females carrying nesting materials into Bradford pear trees at Safari on April 11, 2009. On May 24, 2009, I saw 15-20 adults at Lowell in Benton County. These birds were attending nests in three blue spruce trees in front of the JB Hunt offices. The females were carrying gobs of worms to nestlings. I eventually saw a fledgling with downy feathers on its head.

#### **Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus ater***

STATUS: Common resident that is abundant in winter flocks;  
DATES: observed in all seasons.

Cowbirds are common in numerous habitats during the nesting season and in winter they form huge night roosts with other blackbirds and starlings. Folks who enjoy birds in their yards are always disappointed when their favored cardinals produce broods of cowbirds. I have seen tiny Blue-gray Gnatcatchers trying to feed fledgling cowbirds

easily twice their size. Cowbirds get a bad rap because of such observations, plus the fact their brood parasitism is infamously associated with decline of some species and puts enormous pressure on many others. I try to remember that cowbirds were once Buffalo Birds associated with grazing bison on the expansive natural grasslands of the Great Plains (Lowther 1993). I enjoy watching them in a natural situation associated with grazing bison at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma. It was our clearing of land and creation of vast cattle herds that opened enormous amounts of additional habitat suitable for cowbirds.

The cowbird brood parasitism problem is primarily a function of distance from open pastureland and feedlots (where they forage) to the nests of their potential hosts, including those in forested habitat. The greater the distance from open pastures, the lower the nest parasitism. Even though the area becomes open as a result of logging, dense tangles of vegetation associated with logging operations are not attractive to foraging cowbirds because logged areas are ecologically unlike short grass pastures. However, cowbird parasitism is a problem where forested areas abut private pastureland. The problem diminishes as the total forested habitat increases. Hence, it is little surprise that cowbirds are found in modest numbers on heavily forested Breeding Bird Survey routes like Boston Mountain and Ozark National Forest (where there is little cowbird foraging habitat) and in higher numbers on the three routes with much agricultural land (Avoca, Compton, and Lurton). On the Compton BBS, the mean was 12.9 (n=34, range 3-40). Breeding season point counts from the Ozark NF shows a declining trend based upon data within the period 1992-2004 (La Sorte et al. 2007).

#### **Orchard Oriole, *Icterus spurius***

STATUS: Fairly common summer resident; DATES: April 11 to September 9 (fall status poorly known).

Orchard Orioles are the most numerous and widespread of our two oriole species in summer. They occur in open, park-like expanses with scattered trees and especially around farms and other lightly developed and partially cleared areas in the countryside. I counted 22 in fields at Maysville on May 9, 2009 (International Migratory Bird Day). These birds were apparently grounded by unfavorable winds.

I have found Orchard and Baltimore orioles in the same places in both western Washington and Benton counties. Both seem to me most common in the former prairie grassland habitats with much open country and scattered tall trees. Frequently I find Painted Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks and Dickcissels in the same habitats, but unlike these other birds of open country, Orchard Orioles don't seem restricted to former prairies. For example, they are common in the Boxley valley in the upper Buffalo River area of Newton County. On the Compton Breeding Bird Survey, the mean was 5.2 (n=34, range 1-10).

#### **Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula***

STATUS: Common transient and uncommon summer resident; DATES: April 12 to October 5+.

Baltimore Orioles migrate through nwAR in good numbers, especially in the first half of May when the black locust trees are heavy with their masses of white flowers and are attended by numerous insects. In my yard in Fayetteville, I anticipate the gorgeously attired spring birds high among locust blossoms, their pleasing piping and scolding notes sometimes dominating the neighborhood. A big spring migration peak was indicated by presence of at least 38 Baltimore Orioles in small flocks in the Maysville area during International Migratory Bird Day, May 12, 2007. My party counted them in fields, fencerows and other places. They were apparently grounded by inclement weather for migration.

Many summer records involve western Washington and Benton counties in the watershed of the Illinois River: Lake Frances (now drained), Lake Siloam Springs, Illinois River bottoms, Lake Elmdale (Washington County), etc. In summer 2005, I found 4-5 birds in the Cherokee City area (Floyd Moore Road). Kimberly G. Smith and Joe Woolbright have noted them during summer on golf courses in western Benton County (e.g., Siloam Springs). The apparent clustering of breeding season records in Benton County is supported by atlas data in adjoining states with breeding confirmed in adjoining McDonald County, Missouri (Jacobs and Wilson 1997) and Ottawa and Delaware counties, Oklahoma (Reinking 2004).

There are also two December records. A bird observed and photographed by Alan Bowers of Rogers overwintered in 2002-2003.

#### **Purple Finch, *Carpodacus purpureus***

STATUS: Uncommon transient; irregular and now uncommon winter resident, though they are locally common at some feeders; DATES: October 8 to May 9+.

Purple Finches occurred regularly on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count until the 1990s. They have become comparatively rare since. The mean number on the first 29 years of the count was 58.4 (n=29); since the early 1990s, the mean is 3.4 (n=9). Slightly higher numbers have been recorded on the Crooked Creek valley CBC: 15 on the 2003 count.

During this same period, House Finches arrived as a permanent nesting population in the western Ozarks, largely replacing Purple Finches. The relationship between lower Purple Finch and higher House Finch numbers is complex. Lower Purple Finch numbers are derived, at least in part, from a steep decline in the breeding population in the northeastern US and southern Canada. House Finch invasion into these breeding areas is considered the cause (Wootton 1996).

Winter 2004-2005 was a relatively good year for Purple Finches here. I saw them on several occasions during walks on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville, with a peak of 5 on March 28, at a feeder also visited by House Finches and Pine Siskins. Purple Finches are regulars at feeders on the Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County, where as many as 12

visited during February 2009. Bob and Cathy Ross saw one on their feeders Beaver Lake on the late date of May 9, 1998. Smith (1935) reported nesting at Winslow, the only such record for Arkansas.

**House Finch, *Carpodacus mexicanus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: in all seasons.

House Finches have largely replaced Purple Finches here in the past 20 years (see Purple Finch above). The first House Finch record for the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count involved 11 birds at Johnny Bakker's feeder near Lake Fayetteville on November 26, 1988. Numbers have steadily increased. The peak Fayetteville CBC total was 240 in 1995. The 40 on the Crooked Creek valley CBC in 2003 is a high count there. Why have these finches become so successful? "The conversion of vast areas of forest, grassland, and desert into uniform areas of lawns, ornamental trees, and buildings created enormous areas of ideal habitat for House Finches" (Hill 1993).

**Red Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra***

STATUS: Rare, irregular or irruptive visitor; DATES: observed in all seasons.

The crossed bills of Red Crossbills are an evolutionary adaptation for prying open pine cones to obtain seeds. Hence, our crossbill observations are mainly associated with pine forests. Observations are scattered across most months with little obvious pattern. This species is well-known for its nomadic movements associated with searches for cone crops (Adkisson 1996). There are no nesting records. Here are a few high counts: 20 birds on April 10, 1997, in Boone County; of these, 6 birds remained for a week at a sunflower seed feeder at the home of Wayne Bell (this was in one of JoAnne Rife's Arkansas Breeding Bird Atlas plots). Seven birds were in pines at the Fayetteville Country Club on December 19, 1987, and for at least several days thereafter. At Fayetteville, crossbills (up to 12 at one point) arrived at a feeder in the last week of February 1997 and returned daily until June 10 (usually 4 males, 3 females), the only crossbills at this feeder in 12 years. I have seen Red Crossbills on my Mt. Sequoyah (Fayetteville) walks on several occasions: 10 in the pines there on May 8, 2005, and 2 flew over the same area on May 21, 2005.

Our understanding of Red Crossbill occurrences in western Arkansas is handicapped by the relatively small amount of extensive quality pine habitat likely to attract these birds, not to mention the very limited number of birding observations we have in habitat that is available. Bill Beall of Fort Smith stated that he has seen these birds in the Fern area of Franklin County (with much pine habitat) annually. The 47 there on January 23, 1993, was his highest number in many years of observations.

**White-winged Crossbill, *Loxia leucoptera***

One record. A White-winged Crossbill visited a home feeder in Benton County on April 4, 1982.

**Common Redpoll, *Carduelis flammea***

STATUS: Very rare winter visitor; DATES: December 4 to March 14.

There are six reports of Common Redpolls in the Arkansas Audubon Society bird record file for the Arkansas Ozarks. Five of these have involved sightings since 1982. These reports have typically involved single birds visiting feeders in association with goldfinches, siskins, and Purple Finches.

**Pine Siskin, *Carduelis pinus***

STATUS: Fairly common transient, uncommon winter resident; very rare during nest season; DATES: observations in all seasons.

This irruptive species is not really predictable in terms of when it may be seen here, though we see them primarily during migration. Look for siskins especially in stands of mature pines or mixed pine hardwood, but during migration or irruptive movements they can be heard overhead about anywhere. They opportunistically forage on seeds where available.

An early arrival date is September 21, but fall birds typically arrive in late October. Mike Mlodinow, Joe Woolbright, and I watched 4 siskins harvesting seeds from ashy sunflowers (*Helianthus mollis*) at Chesney Prairie NA on October 27, 2007. One year later, I saw six birds as they briefly perched on giant ragweeds near Chesney, October 26, 2008. I have also seen flocks harvesting seeds from alder (*Alnus serrulata*) cones along Lee Creek near Devil's Den State Park. They are unpredictable in winter, as shown on the Christmas Bird Count at Fayetteville -- recorded on only 9 CBCs, 1961-2000 (peak of 37 in 1977). We see them again in the spring, as they move north through nWAR. For example, more than 60 were harvesting ripe dandelion seeds on Mt. Sequoyah at Fayetteville on April 29, 1986, and a similar number was there on May 8, 2005. There are also a few interesting summer records.

One bird remained at Carroll and Velma Ridgway's feeder at Bella Vista during the period of June 4-9, 1987. Bob and Cathy Ross, who live in the extensive shortleaf pine region adjacent the Hobbes State Park Conservation Area near Rogers, have observed Pine Siskins for many years at their feeders, including during several years when nesting was possible. On August 8-9, 2005, they observed a juvenile and watched it begging for food. Jacque Brown, David Oakley, and Mike Mlodinow observed two siskins apparently building a nest at Lake Fayetteville on April 4, 2009, but the birds weren't found there later.

While the typical breeding range for Pine Siskins lies well to the north of Arkansas, they are present year around much closer to Arkansas both to the north and west. "Reproductive schedule and attachment to a particular breeding area appear to be less rigidly fixed in the Pine Siskin than in many other songbirds. In some cases, members of an irruptive population may linger on a favorable wintering ground long enough to breed" (Dawson 1997).

**Lesser Goldfinch, *Carduelis psaltria***

Two records. A single bird of the green-backed form first appeared at Art Evans' feeder in the summer of 1983 near Gravette, often being associated with American Goldfinches. It remained at this locale until an ice storm on January 1, 1991. A single bird was present at the home of Alan Bowers in Rogers May 14-17, 2006. Bowers photographed the bird and provided written documentation.

**American Goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

This "wild canary" is the symbol of the Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society. It is highly characteristic of shrubby, abandoned fields and is a regular visitor to home bird feeders in winter. In their study at Pea Ridge, Shugart and James (1973: Table 1) found highest numbers of goldfinches in early tree stage plots characterized by open fields with clonal persimmons and especially the woody field.

Goldfinches are present in nwAR throughout the year. However, marked population fluctuations are associated with migration. Goldfinches present during the nesting season are augmented by fledglings with numbers peaking by early to mid-September. However, there is a steep decline thereafter, and those remaining are probably late nesters and their fledglings. Relative high numbers are present again by late October and early November. These probably include migrants that nested north of Arkansas (see a discussion of data from banding in James and Neal 1986).

For example, at Chesney Prairie Natural Area, native ashy sunflowers (*Helianthus mollis*) are in full bloom in August, and numerous goldfinches are in attendance, harvesting seeds and filling the open country with their songs and flight calls. An estimated 125 were there on September 13, 2007. The numerous seed heads of sawtooth sunflowers (*Helianthus grosseserratus*) are also highly attractive: I saw a flock as big as that at Chesney swarming the sawtooth seedheads near Elkins in Washington County on October 26, 2007.

Goldfinches are widely distributed during summer. They are reported on all Breeding Bird Surveys. On

the Compton BBS in Newton County, the mean was 5.3 (n=34, range 0-16). Our goldfinches don't start nesting until mid-summer, quite a bit later than most other birds, and nesting runs until just about the start of fall. For example, I found an active nest with incubation underway at Pea Ridge NMP on September 12, 2008. Late season nesting seems to be associated with the ripening patterns of various thistles and thistle down that goldfinches commonly use in nests. The late nesting habitat may also help reduce problems with cowbirds, whose egg-laying is about over when goldfinches just start to nest.

Goldfinches are common here all winter. The Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count mean was 153.1 (n=39, range 4-440).

**Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus***

STATUS: Rare, irregular winter visitor; DATES: November 1 to June 16.

During those years when Evening Grosbeaks are present, they sometimes crowd around home feeders, with flocks sometimes including 20 to 30 birds. It has been found on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count (including the count week) four years since 1961: 1977, 1983, 1990, and 1994 (peak of 13). Russell Graham observed 125+ on March 19, 1986, at Nob Hill in Washington County; 1 bird remained until April 15. CBC data from the National Audubon Society shows a steep decline for the period 1980-2000.

**House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus***

STATUS: Common resident; DATES: observed in all seasons.

During the period 1961-1985, more than 700 House Sparrows were observed on the Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, up to a peak of 1800 in 1964. During the past two decades, House Sparrow numbers on the CBC have been much lower, with a peak count of only 368 in 1986, and most counts are much lower. Decline of House Sparrow numbers within the Fayetteville CBC circle coincides with arrival of House Finches here. House Finches prefer all kinds of settled areas and crowd feeding stations (Hill 1993), just like House Sparrows.



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## **NORTHWEST ARKANSAS AUDUBON SOCIETY (NWAAS)**

Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society is a non-profit organization affiliated with the National Audubon Society. NWAAS's mission is to preserve the natural world through education, environmental study, and habitat protection, and to promote awareness and enjoyment of local and regional natural areas. Society functions, including monthly field trips, are free and open to the public; membership is not a requirement for participation. Where possible, we seek to make our field trips user-friendly for those with mobility impairments.

The most complete information about NWAAS is available on the society's web site at [www.nwarkaudubon.org](http://www.nwarkaudubon.org). It serves as one stop shopping for conservation news, field trips, special events, plus a list of officers and board members. Other features include birding guides, photographs, and links.

Members and non-members interested in birds and birding in northwest Arkansas may also choose to join **Arkansas Audubon Society (AAS)**, a statewide, independent, non-profit with goals similar to those of NWAAS. More information about AAS is available at the society's website. AAS publishes a handy and inexpensive field list detailing information about birds throughout Arkansas. See the AAS website for a free downloadable copy of this field list or ordering information for a printed copy.

