

**FIELD REPORT**

**KANSAS: SHOREBIRDS ON THE PRAIRIE**  
**APRIL 18–24, 2022**



White-faced Ibis © Rick Wright

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**LIST COMPILED BY: RICK WRIGHT**

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**Kansas: Shorebirds on the Prairie**  
**April 18–24, 2022**  
**By Rick Wright**



*Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Photo Rick Wright*

**April 18:** Meet at hotel 6:00 pm. Dinner at Cheddars, 6:25–8:10 pm. 60° F, clear, light northerly breeze.

**April 19:** Breakfast in hotel 7:00. **Departure 7:45 am.** Great Plains Nature Center 8:15–11:00. Twin Lakes 11:30–12:00. Nellie's Pond 12:10–12:30. Lunch at Chili's, 12:35–1:30. Sedgwick County Park 1:40–2:55. Lake Afton 3:25–4:50 pm. At hotel 5:10 pm. Dinner at Applebee's, 5:45–7:40 pm. Mostly cloudy, breezy, occasional very light sprinkles; 44° F in the morning to 61° F in the evening.

**April 20:** Breakfast in hotel 6:45. Light rain, 57° F, windy. **Departure 8:00 am.** Lafarge Sandpits 8:10–8:30 ; cloudy, windy, occasional very light rain. Cheney Lake, west side, 9:00–12:15 ; cloudy, windy, dry, 70° F. Lunch at Rick's, 1:10–2:40 ; mostly sunny, windy, 80° F. Lemon Park, 2:45–3:40; sunny, windy, 81° F. Arrive Great Bend hotel 4:55 pm; departure 5:50 pm. Cheyenne Bottoms, western entrance, 6:10 –8:10 pm; clear, breezy, 78° F. Dinner at Perkins, 8:35–9:35. Clear, 64° F, light wind.

**April 21:** Breakfast in hotel beginning 6:30 am. **Departure 8:10 am.** Light overcast, calm, 50° F. Great Bend Veterans Park 8:15–8:45; country roads, Barton County, 8:45–9:40; Kansas



*Long-billed Dowitchers at Cheyenne Bottoms. Photo Rick Wright*

Wetlands Education Center 9:40–10:10; Cheyenne Bottoms 10:10–12:30: sunny, windy, 66° F. Lunch at Handlebar 12:40–1:50. Short break at hotel. Cheyenne Bottoms 2:30–6:05 pm. Cloudy, windy, 77° F. At hotel 6:25 pm. Rain, thunderstorms building, windy, humid, 71° F. Dinner at Applebee's 7:05–9:20 pm. Cloudy, windy, 63° F.

**April 22:** breakfast in hotel beginning 6:30 am. Clear, light breeze, humid; 70° F.

**Departure 7:40 am.** Quivira National Wildlife Refuge wildlife drive 8:25–11:25 am.

Cloudy, windy, 81° F. Lunch at Joan's Cafe 12:00–1:25. Quivira National Wildlife Refuge 1:45–3:05. Partly cloudy, windy, 87° F. At hotel 3:55 pm. Departure for dinner 5:05 pm. Dinner at Page 5:10–6:35. Drop off some at hotel. Cheyenne Bottoms 6:55–8:35 pm. Cloudy, very windy, 77° F. At hotel 8:50 pm.

**April 23:** breakfast in hotel beginning 7:00 am. **Departure 8:10 am.** 55° F, clear, light breeze. Wolf Pond Park 8:25–8:35.

Cheyenne Bottoms 8:50–12:15. 75° F, windy, clear followed by clouds.

Lunch at Handlebar 12:30–1:40.

Twin Lakes. Pawnee Prairie Park, Wichita, –6:20. 83° F, windy, clear.

Arrive at hotel 6:25. Departure for dinner 7:45; dinner at Bella Vita 8:00–9:40 pm. At hotel 9:55 pm. 75° F, clear.

**April 24:** departures from Wichita.



*Wichita's Great Plains Nature Center. Photo Rick Wright*



Quivira, the Spanish conquistadors were told, was a place of fabulous wealth, where servant girls wore robes of the finest cloth and even the drinking cups were made of silver. In 1541, Coronado immediately set out for this land of luxury, which he found, it is believed, at the Great Bend of the Arkansas River. He found the land. But he found no gold.

Almost five hundred years later, our own expedition to what is now central Kansas convinced us of one thing: Coronado was not a birder. If he had been, he would have found gold aplenty, on the glowing breasts of the meadowlarks, the burnished backs of the sandpipers, and the very grass itself, waving in the springtime winds of the prairie.

For some of us, this was the first birding visit to Kansas, but for all of us, it was the best birding visit to Kansas—so far. Our 21 species of waterfowl and 22 of shorebirds reflected our emphasis on migrants in aquatic habitats, but we did every bit as well in finding passerines, even on the breeziest days. A dozen sparrow species, all of the expected swallows, and nine icterids helped make a more than respectable list for such a short tour.

Such high species diversity is always exciting, but what is most impressive about the central Great Plains in spring is the sheer number of individual birds moving north. We saw hundreds of



*Franklin's Gulls, American White Pelicans, and Double-crested Cormorants. Photo Rick Wright*

Hudsonian Godwits, thousands of Baird's Sandpipers, thousands of Long-billed Dowitchers and Wilson's Phalaropes; there are not a few places in the US and Canada where even one or two birds of any of those species would be a sensation.

American White Pelicans and Franklin's Gulls, too, were present in imposing numbers, especially on our visit to Lake Afton, where a good thousand of each floated and fed in front of us. After missing American Kestrels entirely on our first day afield, we were delighted to

see an obvious migratory "push" over the next days, including an astonishing seven birds—six of them males—hunting a small soccer field at Cheney Lake. And Harris's Sparrows we had with us always: familiar to many birders only as scarce and irregular winter vagrants, these big, bulky, handsome birds perfectly bookended our tour, a flock welcoming us on our first morning before we even got out of the van at the Great Plains Nature Center, and another flock whistling their sad farewells on our final evening walk at Pawnee Prairie. In between, we saw Harris's Sparrows virtually everywhere we went, far outnumbering their more widespread congeners the White-



*Harris's Sparrow. Photo Rick Wright*

crowned and White-throated sparrows, and sporting plumages ranging from just faintly speckle-throated to fully black-faced and silver-cheeked.

Alongside these expected wonders of the prairie spring, we were fortunate enough to encounter a few uncommon, even rare species, chief among them two very surprising waterfowl. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are notorious wanderers; dramatically increasing over almost all of their US range, these gangly “tree ducks” now breed as far north as Nebraska—but to run across 26 of them (!) on a small

pond in central Kansas was still a shock. Less of a surprise, but still a great bird for the site and the season, was a female Long-tailed Duck, discovered by local birders the day after our first visit to Twin Lakes and still there, happily, on our return a few days later.

Though our emphasis was firmly on the birds, of course, we still took time to appreciate the plants and other animals at the sites we visited, from chorus frogs to prairie dogs and redbud trees to swallowtails. Our finest quadruped surprise was certainly the four (!) sightings of American mink over two days at Cheyenne Bottoms; common enough in wet habitats on the Great Plains, these sleek weasels are only infrequently seen by humans.



*Ducks and shorebirds at Cheyenne Bottoms. Photo Rick Wright*

It was a real pleasure to share so many exciting experiences—ornithological, conversational, and, in different ways, culinary—with such a congenial group; we may have met up strangers, but we parted friends, and I cannot wait for our next chance to take to the field and explore another new landscape together.

## WATERFOWL

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna autumnalis*:** a flock of 26 individuals at Wolf Pond, Ellinwood, most simply loafing on the edges but one perched high on a telephone wire.



*Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. Photo Rick Wright*

Once strictly limited to tropical areas, this species is now truly unexpected nowhere in North America, and it breeds as far north as the central Great Plains. As surprising as a flock of more than two dozen was, even more arrived at the pond after our departure, with a peak count of 47—the highest tally ever recorded in Kansas—April 27.

**Snow Goose, *Anser caerulescens*:** about a dozen in Great Bend park, April 20, glimpsed from the road as we passed by; we returned for a closer look the next morning, and found nineteen Snow Geese, of both white and blue morphs, keeping

company with a single Ross's Goose.

**Ross's Goose, *Anser rossii*:** one white-morph adult with Snow Geese at Great Bend's Veterans Memorial Park April 21. As we watched, the bird stepped into a tangle of discarded fishing line; it was eventually able to free itself, and we collected that and several other clumps of line for proper disposal.

**Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*:** one adult at Sedgwick County Park, April 19. Very abundant in late winter and early spring, but almost all are gone from this area by early March.



*Ross's Goose at Great Bend. Photo Rick Wright*

**Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii*:** four at Sedgwick County Park, April 19, and eleven at Veterans Memorial Park April 21. All were apparently of the nominate subspecies, known as the Richardson's Goose.

**Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*:** pairs, often violently territorial, at city park ponds and other bodies of water throughout; Nellie's Pond held the first goslings of the season on April 19.

**Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa*:** a pair at Twin Lakes April 19, followed by ten or so at Sedgwick County Park, several of them perched in the

cottonwoods above the ponds. Another or the same pair on Twin Lakes April 23.



Greater White-fronted Goose at Sedgwick County Park. Photo Rick Wright

**Blue-winged Teal, *Spatula discors*:** common throughout, in flocks of up to 20 individuals. Total daily counts at Cheyenne Bottoms were certainly in the hundreds, making this and the Northern Shoveler by far our commonest duck species.

**Cinnamon Teal, *Spatula cyanoptera*:** a drake at Quivira NWR was the only one seen all week; this species is near the eastern edge of its usual migratory range in central Kansas.

**Northern Shoveler, *Spatula clypeata*:** common throughout, present on

virtually every body of water, no matter how small; the biggest numbers, well into the hundreds or even low thousands, at Cheyenne Bottoms, where we watched several pinwheeling flocks.

**Gadwall, *Mareca strepera*:** small numbers throughout, though never more than three or four at a single site.

**American Wigeon, *Mareca americana*:** half a dozen on Lake Afton April 19; a few in the background at Quivira NWR and at Cheyenne Bottoms April 22 and 23.

**Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*:** small numbers throughout, mostly in pairs.

**Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*:** small numbers throughout, most of them males. This is a very early spring migrant, often on the move by the end of January, making the low tallies unsurprising this late in the season.

**Green-winged Teal, *Anas crecca*:** very common throughout on smaller bodies of water. Most authorities now consider the American birds distinct at the species level from those in the Old World, naming the former *Anas carolinensis*. Males in high plumage are easily distinguished in the field, but females present a difficult challenge, differing only in rarely visible details of the wing pattern.

**Redhead, *Aythya americana*:** one drake at Quivira NWR, a surprising count for a species that is both common and often tardy.

**Ring-necked Duck, *Aythya collaris*:** a female at Lake Afton April 19.

**Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*:** common throughout on all but the smallest bodies of water. The largest numbers, in the dozens, were on the Lafarge Sandpit and Lake Afton, the deepest on our itinerary.



**Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*:** five or six on the Lafarge Sandpit April 20. This is a very uncommon migrant on the Great Plains, generally found only on the deepest available waters. In spite of the wind and occasional sprinkles, we had good comparisons between these birds and the many Lesser Scaup with them, concentrating especially on the head shape of sleeping birds.

**Bufflehead, *Bucephala albeola*:** small numbers on all deeper bodies of water, never more than five or six at a time. Most were females or young males, but we had fine looks at a number of bright black and white adult males, at times even showing the odd but beautiful purple and bronze iridescence of the head.

**Long-tailed Duck, *Clangula hyemalis*:** one of the least expected birds of our trip was a female on Twin Lakes in Wichita; this bird was discovered the day after we left for Great Bend, but very obligingly lingered long enough for us to see it on our return. Very scarce even in winter on the Great Plains; a late April bird is almost unheard of.



*Bufflehead at Quivira NWR. Photo Rick Wright*

**Ruddy Duck, *Oxyura jamaicensis*:** common throughout, usually in tight rafts of several dozen birds far from shore. Unlike our other ducks, males of this species wear their bright plumage in summer rather than winter; we were fortunate several times to see males that had already assumed their orange breeding dress and powder-blue bills.

## NEW WORLD QUAIL

**Northern Bobwhite, *Colinus virginianus*:** a roadside covey of about 15 birds at Cheyenne Bottoms the evening of April 22.



*Pawnee Prairie Park. Photo Rick Wright*

## PHEASANTS, GROUSE, TURKEYS

**Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*:** one to three seen or heard every day, typically slinking through the corn stubble or crouching, even the colorful males surprisingly well camouflaged, in a nearby ditch. Native to much of the Old World east of the Black Sea, and introduced virtually around the world as a gamebird, pheasants were first released in Kansas in 1906 and are now common across most of the state.



**Wild Turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo*:** our best views were our first views, of a male and a female at the Great Plains Nature Center. Historically abundant as far west as the eastern Great Plains, but shot out of most of its native range by the early twentieth century; reintroductions of birds of both the eastern and the Rio Grande subspecies took place in the 1960s, and turkeys are once again common across most of Kansas.

## GREBES

**Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps*:** common on virtually all bodies of water, but especially so on Lake Afton and other, deeper lakes; this species is generally thought of as largely solitary, and most of the time we saw only one or two together, but on those deeper bodies of water we occasionally saw small flocks of up to eight, obviously northbound migrants.

**Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*:** this is one of the most widespread birds in the northern hemisphere, and a locally abundant breeder on the Great Plains; we were slightly early for large numbers, though, and the largest concentration we observed was the half dozen on the Lafarge Sandpit, with scattered single birds and pairs elsewhere.

## PIGEONS

**Feral Pigeon, *Columba livia*:** common in towns and around grain elevators, less frequently encountered flying over open grasslands. Domestic pigeons and their feral descendants have been in North America for four centuries; genuinely wild Rock Pigeons are restricted to seaside cliff habitats in western Europe, Africa, and Asia.



*Birding Cheyenne Bottoms. Photo Rick Wright*

**Eurasian Collared-Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*:** fairly common in small towns and around grain elevators, this species was not recorded in Kansas until 1997, after having been released or escaped from an avicultural facility in the Bahamas in the mid-70s. Anecdote suggests that in North America these birds have locally displaced Mourning Doves.

**Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*:** common throughout. Notably early nesters, these birds were already in conspicuous display flight, the males soaring hawk-like in tight circles. The Mourning Dove is said to be one of the two or three most abundant land birds on the continent.

## SWIFTS

**Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*:** we saw only a few birds overhead in flocks of migrating swallows; the usual arrival dates at the latitude of central Kansas are in mid-April.

## RAILS

**Virginia Rail, *Rallus limicola*:** one sneaking along a small creek at Cheyenne Bottoms on our evening visit; these furtive rails are rarely seen even where they are common, as in the large marshes of central Kansas.

**Sora, *Porzana carolina*:** great views of a single bird feeding in that same little creek at Cheyenne Bottoms, at one point in sight with the Virginia Rail. This inconspicuous little bird can be surprisingly abundant in the Midwest in April, but its true numbers are hard to discern without getting extremely wet feet.

**American Coot, *Fulica americana*:** very common on almost all bodies of water of whatever depth.

## STILTS AND AVOCETS

**Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus*:** not especially common, but very conspicuous at Cheyenne Bottoms and again at Quivira, where they were impossible to miss whether feeding daintily in the water or flying noisily overhead. Our daily high totals were less than 20.



*American Avocet. Photo Rick Wright*

**American Avocet, *Recurvirostra americana*:** amazingly common at Cheyenne Bottoms, with dozens almost constantly in sight; avocets require somewhat deeper water than many other shorebirds, and as we observed, frequently swim, looking like huge phalaropes. Several times we were able to see the differences in the bill shapes of the male and the female, the latter

having a shorter, more abruptly upturned bill.

## PLOVERS

**Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*:** this is an uncommon bird on the Great Plains, but we were surprised to see only a single bird, at Cheyenne Bottoms; this individual was beginning to show black on the breast and face.

**American Golden-Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*:** the center of springtime abundance for this species lies slightly to the east of our sites, but we found it at Cheyenne Bottoms, where the bright eyeline and oddly long-legged appearance made the bird easy to pick out among the many other shorebirds it associated with.

**Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*:** common in open habitats, almost always in pairs and usually vocally aggressive at our approach. Killdeer are much less social in spring than most other shorebirds, though they sometimes gather into flocks of hundreds on the southbound flight; most that we saw were almost certainly already on their nesting territories.

**Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus*:** very small numbers our first days, then an obvious arrival, with dozens at Cheyenne Bottoms on our last visit there.



**Piping Plover, *Charadrius melodus*:** seen twice at Cheyenne Bottoms, where it is a scarce



migrant on the way to the breeding grounds along the Platte and Missouri Rivers; the inland population of this species is federally listed as endangered, while the Atlantic coastal birds are hardly less imperiled.

**Snowy Plover, *Charadrius nivosus*:** the saline marshes of central Kansas are a classic “hotspot” for this scarce bird, which we saw several times; our high daily count was at Quivira, with a tally of more than 50 individuals on the alkali flats.

*Snowy Plover, Quivira NWR. Photo Rick Wright*

## SANDPIPERS

**Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*:** this small, heavily marked curlew is one of the rarest sandpipers found on the Great Plains, preferring the coasts at all seasons. We had stunningly good views of a single individual at Cheyenne Bottoms, where we eventually saw the bird fly off giving its classically seven-noted call. Most authorities once again consider the American bird a separate species from the whimbrels of the Old World, naming ours the **Hudsonian Whimbrel** (or **Hudsonian Curlew**), *Numenius hudsonicus*.



*Hudsonian Godwit at Cheyenne Bottoms. Photo Rick Wright*

**Hudsonian Godwit, *Limosa haemastica*:** Cheyenne Bottoms is probably the best place in the world to see this uncommon species in good numbers; this year, we encountered hundreds on April 21, a notable concentration even by Great Plains standards. Numbers dropped precipitously the next two days, and we did not see any at all on our final (admittedly rushed) visit.

**Marbled Godwit, *Limosa fedoa*:** far outnumbered by Hudsonian Godwits, as expected, but still common at Cheyenne Bottoms, where it seemed that every dowitcher flock held at least two or three.

**Sanderling, *Calidris alba*:** seen only at Cheyenne Bottoms, April 21; some were still in their white basic plumage, others already showing the rich reddish tones of alternate plumage, a dress often unfamiliar to those of us who know these birds best from wintertime beaches.

**Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*:** a scant half dozen total for this handsome sandpiper, uncommon at any season on the Great Plains.

**Baird's Sandpiper, *Calidris bairdii*:** hundreds, if not thousands, on the flats at Cheyenne Bottoms, making this by far the most abundant of the small sandpipers. Because the spring migration is concentrated in the Great Plains and the fall migration in the east takes most

birds far offshore, this common bird is decidedly unfamiliar to most birders. We relished the chance to admire so many in their glowing golden alternate plumage, and to learn better such important structural characters as the long wing, flat back, and slender bill.

**Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*:** only very small numbers each day, certainly reflecting not any scarcity on the part of this common bird but the wide-open habitats we focused on; Least Sandpipers generally prefer to feed on mud very near shoreline vegetation.



Marbled Godwits. Photo Rick Wright

**Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos*:** often an early migrant through the Great Plains, at least by shorebird standards, but small numbers were still present at Cheyenne Bottoms; our high daily count was about eight individuals.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper, *Calidris pusilla*:** small numbers at Cheyenne Bottoms, where their stumpy look and overall gray aspect made them easy to pick out among the hordes of Baird's Sandpipers. Our total for the entire trip barely exceeded 100.

**Western Sandpiper, *Calidris mauri*:** its name notwithstanding, this is generally a very uncommon bird anywhere and at any season on the Great Plains. We saw two, one at Quivira and one at Cheyenne Bottoms, both very handsome alternate-plumaged birds with rusty cheeks and neat black streaks below.

**Long-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus scolopaceus*:** abundant at Cheyenne Bottoms, with thousands almost constantly in view. The dowitchers pose notorious identification challenges, especially in the middle of the continent, where the common Short-billed subspecies *hendersoni* is extensively red beneath, like the Long-billed; but all of the birds we saw well, and all of the birds we heard, were clearly Long-billed Dowitchers.

**Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago delicata*:** it is hard to imagine how many snipe use the marshes of central Kansas each year, but the fact that on most days we had no trouble seeing ten or twelve of these secretive sandpipers is a hint. At times in the past, considered conspecific with the Old World Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*, but now once again accorded full species rank.



**Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor*:** this most colorful of North American shorebirds was also among the most abundant on our visit, outnumbered on some days perhaps only by Long-billed Dowitchers and Baird's Sandpipers. We had many excellent views of swimming



Wilson's Phalarope. Photo Rick Wright

and feeding birds, and enjoyed comparing the elegant females with the more somberly clad males.

**Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria*:** one at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21, four there April 23.

**Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*:** common throughout, and conspicuous for its size and ringing voice. We also grew to appreciate the much more heavily marked under parts in this species' alternate plumage than in the blander Lesser Yellowlegs.

**Willet, *Tringa semipalmata*:** common throughout, especially at Cheyenne Bottoms, where birds could almost constantly be seen or heard. These big, lanky Willets with the softly patterned



Western Willet. Photo Rick Wright

gray plumage were **Western Willets**, accorded species rank by many authorities as *Tringa inornata*.

**Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes*:** common throughout, though outnumbered at most sites by Greater Yellowlegs.

## GULLS AND TERNS

**Bonaparte's Gull, *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*:** small numbers at Lafarge Sandpit and Cheyenne Bottoms; one or two at Lake Afton with the large numbers of Franklin's Gulls.

**Franklin's Gull, *Leucophaeus pipixcan*:** common to abundant at all wetland sites, with especially good views of the hundreds at Lake Afton feeding with pelicans and cormorants.

**Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*:** common throughout, but outnumbered perhaps 100:1 at most sites by Franklin's Gulls. Nearly all that we saw were first-cycle birds.

**Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*:** rare at Cheyenne Bottoms, with our daily counts in the single digits.



*Lesser Black-backed Gull. Photo Rick Wright*

**Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*:** populations of this Old World species continue to increase across North America, but it was a surprise to encounter at least three individuals at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21. All were immature birds.

**Least Tern, *Sterna antillarum*:** one, or perhaps two, at Cheyenne Bottoms April 23 were early for this typical May arrival; nesting on the major river systems of the Great Plains, the Interior Least Tern was removed from the federal endangered species list in 2021.

**Forster's Tern, *Sterna forsteri*:** two or three at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21 and April 23.

## LOONS

**Common Loon, *Gavia immer*:** one in full breeding plumage on Lake Afton April 19.

## CORMORANTS

**Double-crested Cormorant, *Nannopterum auritum*:** common throughout, with day counts in the high double-digits.

## PELICANS

**American White Pelican, *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*:** present and common on all deeper bodies of water, but nowhere more abundant than on Lake Afton April 19, when a thousand birds or more were on the water, leapfrogging into the wind. Many of the pelicans we saw during our trip exhibited the variably shaped vertical "breeding plate" on the upper mandible.

## HERONS

**American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus*:** one at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21 and another at Quivira April 22, both seen only in flight and neither seen by all of us.

**Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*:** common and conspicuous throughout, with an impressive tally of nearly 20 on the roadsides during our final visit to Cheyenne Bottoms.

**Great Egret, *Ardea alba*:** small numbers throughout, daily counts reaching only half a dozen or so.

**Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*:** small numbers seen every day, at sites ranging from the Arkansas River right in Wichita to Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms.



*Snowy and Cattle Egrets. Photo Rick Wright*

**Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*:** one at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21, with an impressive 17 there on our evening visit; one or two in attendance on cattle April 19 and April 23. This species was first seen in Kansas in 1964; after the first breeding at Cheyenne Bottoms in 1973, it has become established as a fairly common nesting bird, especially in south-central Kansas.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*:** no fewer than three, all adults, at the Great Plains Nature Center April 19; small numbers, almost all adults, then at

Cheyenne Bottoms each of the days following.

## IBIS

**White-faced Ibis, *Plegadis chihi*:** fairly common on the large marshes, with counts ranging from about 20 at Cheyenne Bottoms April 20 to nearly three times that many April 23. This species was quite rare on the Great Plains before the mid-20th century, but it has expanded its breeding range considerably since the 1970s; it has nested regularly at Cheyenne Bottoms since the 1960s.

## NEW WORLD VULTURES

**Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*:** common in the countryside, rarely out of sight against the sky.





*White-faced Ibis. Photo Rick Wright*

## OSPREYS

**Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*:** migrants seen over the Great Plains Nature Center, Lake Afton, and Cheyenne Bottoms.

## HAWKS

**Northern Harrier, *Circus hudsonius*:** small numbers in open habitats, including the large marshes. All were brown birds—females or immature males—except for one nearly adult male at Cheyenne Bottoms April 22.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus*:** one at the Great Plains Nature Center April 19, one at Cheyenne Bottoms April 20.

**Cooper's Hawk, *Accipiter cooperii*:** surprisingly, only one seen all week, at Quivira April 22. Once quite uncommon, this is now the expected *Accipiter* species over most of North America, and it has become a common breeder in woodlots on the Great Plains.

**Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*:** a single immature bird over Nellie's Pond April 19.

**Broad-winged Hawk, *Buteo platypterus*:** one adult with Swainson's Hawks over Cheney Lake April 20.

**Swainson's Hawk, *Buteo swainsoni*:** small numbers on three days, including five or six at Cheney Lake April 20 and one perched on a lawn near Quivira on April 22. One of the Cheney birds was a dark morph, uncommon in this species.

**Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*:** small numbers throughout; the Red-tailed Hawks of the Great Plains are quite variable in plumage, as illustrated by a decidedly rusty-headed individual with virtually unmarked underparts at Sedgwick County Park April 19.

## OWLS

**Great Horned Owl, *Bubo virginianus*:** one flushed near the campground at Cheyenne Bottoms April 22.

## KINGFISHERS

**Belted Kingfisher, *Megasceryle alcyon*:** one at Twin Lakes, Wichita, April 19, unfortunately not seen by all as it streaked across the water.

## WOODPECKERS

**Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Melanerpes carolinus*:** two at Lemon Park in Pratt April 20, one at the Cheyenne Bottoms campground April 23. This classically southeastern species reaches Colorado along the Arkansas and South Platte Rivers.

**Downy Woodpecker, *Dryobates pubescens*:** one at Lemon Park in Pratt April 20, and one at Cheyenne Bottoms each of the days April 21, 22, and 23.

## FALCONS

**American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*:** missed entirely the first day, to our surprise, but there was a clear movement around Cheney Lake April 20, when several spots held multiple birds, most notably the soccer field, where six males and single female were hunting.

**Merlin, *Falco columbarius*:** a lovely male perched at Cheney Lake April 20.

**Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*:** an immature bird perched and then in flight at Cheyenne Bottoms April 23; this species is a very scarce spring migrant on the Great Plains, best found by watching the sky above large shorebird flocks.

## TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

**Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe*:** single birds seen at the Great Plains Nature Center, Cheney Lake, and Cheyenne Bottoms; phoebes still present this far south this late in spring are probably breeding birds.

**Say's Phoebe, *Sayornis saya*:** one seen by the leader near Quivira April 23. Eastern and Say's Phoebes overlap in the breeding season over a wide area on the central Great Plains.

**Western Kingbird, *Tyrannus verticalis*:** one giving fantastic views in the parking lot of the Great Plains Nature Center was followed by one near Cheyenne Bottoms April 21; three or four seen April 23. Numbers of this very common summer bird tend to rise rapidly at the end of April.



*Western Kingbird. Photo Rick Wright*

**Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus*:** one on the fence at the Nature Conservancy preserve north of Cheyenne Bottoms April 23. This common breeding species typically arrives a few days later than the Western Kingbird.

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus forficatus*:** surprisingly scarce this week, with one seen north of Wichita April 20 and another near Hutchinson April 24.

## SHRIKES

**Loggerhead Shrike, *Lanius ludovicianus*:** one April 21 just north of Great Bend.

## JAYS AND CROWS

**Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*:** small numbers in open wooded habitats.

**American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*:** small numbers throughout.

## CHICKADEES AND TITMICE

**Black-capped Chickadee, *Poecile atricapilla*:** seen well at the Great Plains Nature Center and Cheney Lake. The large size and long tail were suggestive, the considerable white in the greater coverts definitive.



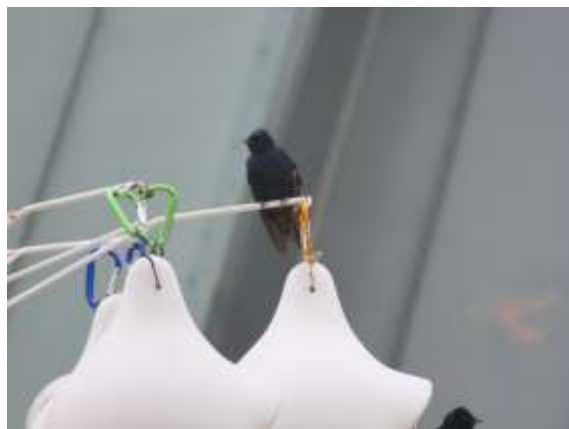
**Tufted Titmouse, *Baeolophus bicolor*:** seen at the same sites as the chickadee, as well as Nellie's Pond and Pawnee Prairie, but the titmice were much more vocal this week, singing loud even on cloudy, windy days.

## LARKS

**Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris*:** this is perhaps the most abundant breeding passerine on the Great Plains, but spring finds larks paired up and busy with nests and young, making it hard sometimes to get the same good looks frequently afforded by winter flocks. We saw Horned Larks virtually every time we left pavement to take gravel roads, but it took some time to pin down a pair close enough for all to get good views.

## SWALLOWS

**Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*:** a small flock at Lake Afton, totaling perhaps 15 birds.



*Purple Martins. Photo Rick Wright*

**Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*:** a few at Lake Afton.

**Purple Martin, *Progne subis*:** colonies in place at the Great Plains Nature Center, Cheney Lake, and the town of Stafford; most of the birds we saw were adult males, suggesting that migration was still underway for females and young birds.

**Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*:** seen throughout, especially over the large marshes.

**Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*:** far outnumbered the other swallows combined; bridge colonies appeared to be fully occupied, with birds working on nests.

## KINGLETS

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *Corthylio calendula*:** one at the Great Plains Nature Center April 19.

## WAXWINGS

**Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*:** flocks at the Great Plains Nature Center and at Cheney Lake, gluttonously living up to their name in the eastern red cedars. Numbers were hard to tally, but at Cheney Lake, at least 70 birds were moving through the woods.

## GNATCATCHERS

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, *Polioptila caerulea*:** two at Cheney Lake April 20.

## MIMIC THRUSHES

**Brown Thrasher, *Toxostoma rufum*:** single birds at the Great Plains Nature Center, Cheney Lake, and Quivira. This is a common breeder across the Great Plains in thickets and fencerows, most arriving in mid- to late April.

**Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*:** bizarrely, only one bird, seen fleetingly on our last day together.

## STARLINGS

**European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*:** common throughout wherever trees or abandoned buildings were in sight. Introduced in New York (and likely other locations) at the end of the nineteenth century, this Old World species reached Kansas in the 1920s.

## THRUSHES

**Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis*:** a pair busily feeding in the parking lot at the Great Plains Nature Center.

**American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*:** common throughout.

## OLD WORLD SPARROWS

**House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*:** small numbers throughout, especially in smaller towns.

## FINCHES

**House Finch, *Haemorhous mexicanus*:** very small numbers in Great Bend and surrounding areas. It is unclear whether the birds in the central Great Plains colonized from the west or from the east, or perhaps from both directions.

**Pine Siskin, *Spinus pinus*:** one slightly late bird feeding at Lemon Park with goldfinches.

**American Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis*:** very small numbers, with one at the Great Plains Nature Center, four at Lemon Park, and a few in Wichita on our return April 23.

## NEW WORLD SPARROWS

**Grasshopper Sparrow, *Ammodramus savannarum*:** two migrant birds in fields north of Great Bend April 23, at first characteristically shy, but finally perching on corn stubble to give excellent views. This is a common prairie nester, easily seen when males are singing on territory but rarely encountered on migration.

**Lark Sparrow, *Chondestes grammacus*:** one roadside bird April 20 and two more April 21; ten or more north of Great Bend on April 23, when there appeared to have been a push of migrant sparrows.

**Chipping Sparrow, *Spizella passerina*:** small numbers throughout, with noticeably higher numbers April 23.

**Clay-colored Sparrow, *Spizella pallida*:** a clear arrival event April 23, when we saw half a dozen in a flock on a driveway north of Great Bend and more that evening at Pawnee Prairie; the Pawnee birds were singing, one of the great sounds of the midwestern spring.

**Field Sparrow, *Spizella pusilla*:** singing birds seen well at the Great Plains Nature Center.

**White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*:** three or four in the garden of the Kansas Wetlands Education Center April 20, and similar numbers at Pawnee Prairie April 23. Most were pale-lored, pale-billed Gambel's Sparrows, but at least one at Pawnee Prairie was a dark-lored bird, presumably but not necessarily a representative of the nominate race.

**Harris's Sparrow, *Zonotrichia querula*:** a highlight of any April visit to the central Great Plains is the sheer abundance of this uncommon, range-restricted bird as it moves in small flocks from the wintering grounds to the breeding areas in the Canadian Arctic. We started our tour with a dozen or more feeding in the parking lot at the Great Plains Nature Center, then saw numbers of birds each day, typically near patches of red cedar. We saw individuals covering the entire "studliness scale," from obvious immatures with limited black to fully silver-cheeked adults bursting with enthusiasm to reach the nesting grounds. The plaintive song quickly became a familiar part of the soundscape; on our last evening, at Pawnee Prairie, we also heard the seldom noticed pre-roost chanting.

**White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*:** three or four at Great Plains Nature Center April 19, one feeding with Harris's Sparrows at Cheney Lake April 20.

**Vesper Sparrow, *Pooecetes gramineus*:** a few April 21, then common on roadsides April 23.

**Savannah Sparrow, *Passerculus sandwichensis*:** small numbers throughout, with a noticeable increase on April 23.

**Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*:** probably less common on the central Great Plains than anywhere else in this widespread species' breeding range. We had good looks at several at Cheyenne Bottoms April 21.

**Lincoln's Sparrow, *Melospiza lincolnii*:** a singing bird heard at Cheney Lake April 20.

**Lark Bunting, *Calamospiza melanocorys*:** one fine male north of Great Bend April 23, obviously part of that day's sparrow push. This is near the eastern edge of this species' range.

## **BLACKBIRDS**



*Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Photo Rick Wright*

**Yellow-headed Blackbird, *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*:** good numbers in a massive icterid flock just south of Cheyenne Bottoms April 20; icterid flocks overhead at the Bottoms later that same day included more. Drought is hard on this species, which will nest only over water a foot or more deep.

**Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta*:** throughout, but to judge by singing birds, outnumbered everywhere by Eastern Meadowlarks.

**Eastern Meadowlark, *Sturnella magna*:** common throughout on

roadsides, often heard singing.

**Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*:** very common throughout, with both sexes present in good numbers and many males doing their best to impress potential mates. Unlike the Yellow-headed Blackbird, this species happily nests over shallow water and in sites with no water at all.

**Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus ater*:** common throughout.

**Brewer's Blackbird, *Euphagus cyanocephalus*:** good numbers April 20 in the same huge flock of icterids containing our first Yellow-headed blackbirds.

**Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula*:** very common throughout, especially in cities and towns. All birds in Kansas are Bronzed Grackles, formerly considered a species distinct from the coastal Purple Grackle.

**Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus*:** very common in urban parking lots and on irrigated lawns; much less often seen away from cities and towns in Kansas, where the species was first found in 1963.

## NEW WORLD WARBLERS

**Orange-crowned Warbler, *Leiothlypis celata*:** one or two at the Great Plains Nature Center April 19; two at Pawnee Prairie April 23. This is one of the more abundant spring warblers in this part of Kansas, with large numbers typically arriving the very end of the month.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler, *Setophaga coronata*:** small numbers of Myrtle Warblers at most forested sites; a fine male **Audubon's Warbler** was a nice surprise in a small flock at



Cheney Reservoir April 20, notably far east for this western bird, formerly (and probably again to be) recognized as a distinct species.

## **CARDINAL GROSBEAKS**

**Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis*:** common in brushy areas.



*Franklin's Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. Photo Rick Wright*

## **MAMMALS**

**Virginia Opossum, *Didelphis virginiana* †**

**Nine-banded Armadillo, *Dasypus novemcinctus* †**

**North American Beaver, *Castor canadensis*** considerable sign, especially at Cheney Lake

**Pocket Gopher sp., *Cratogeomys* / *Geomys* sp.** considerable sign throughout

**Black-tailed Prairie-Dog, *Cynomys ludovicianus***

**Thirteen-lined Ground-Squirrel, *Ictodomys tridecemlineatus***

**Eastern Fox-Squirrel, *Sciurus niger***



*Eastern Fox-Squirrel with Osage orange fruit. Photo Rick Wright*

**Eastern Cottontail, *Sylvilagus floridanus***

**Coyote, *Canis latrans*** considerable sign

**Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*** †

**American Mink, *Neogale vison*** a total of four (!) over two days at Cheyenne Bottoms

**Raccoon, *Procyon lotor***

**White-tailed Deer, *Odocoileus virginianus***

## **AMPHIBIANS and REPTILES**

**Blanchard's Cricket Frog, *Acris blanchardi*** heard only

**Chorus Frog sp. *Pseudacris sp.* heard only**

**Pond Slider, *Trachemys scripta***

**Yellow Mud Turtle, *Kinosternon flavescens***

**Bullsnake, *Pituophis catenifer***

**Garter Snake sp., *Thamnophis sp.***