

Long-billed Curlew

CA 1880

Kossuth Co., IA

J. W. Preston

Preston 1893, Anderson 1907

Record Number: 93-DM
Classification: A-D

REFERENCES

Preston, J.W. 1893. Some prairie birds. Oologist and
Ornithologist 18:82 [quoted by Anderson].

Anderson 1907

VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, Appears to be a direct quote from a first-hand observer
with considerable detail about circumstances and including song.
Evidence of at least two nests. /thk

Anderson 1907
pp 225-226

116. (264). *Numenius longirostris* Wils. Long-billed Curlew.
□The Long-billed Curlew is the largest of our species of *Limicola* and is known by its sickle-shaped bill, four to eight inches long. It was formerly a common summer resident in Iowa, but now appears to be only a migrant, having disappeared from its former summer haunts with the breaking up of the original prairie sod.

Thomas Say mentions the arrival of the Long-billed Curlew at Engineers' Cantonment April 1, 1820 (Long's Exp., i, 266-270).

J. A. Allen stated that it was common in spring in western Iowa, and doubtless bred about the marshes (Mem. Bost. Soc., i, 1868, 501). T. M. Trippe says "a few seen in spring in Decatur county, where I was informed that formerly it bred quite commonly" (Proc. Bost. Soc., xv, 1872, 241). In 1884 the species passed through central Iowa April 15, and in 1885, from April 10 to 15, it was noted at Emmetsburg, Iowa, Heron Lake, Minn., etc., (Cooke, Bird Migr. in Miss. Val., 1884-85, 97-8). Keyes and Williams give it as "migratory, rather common. A few remain during the summer and nest on the open prairies" (Birds of Iowa, 1889, 123).

In early May, in the '80's, J. W. Preston found the species nesting in northern Iowa. He says "Lying away to the west were the dim flats of Kossuth county. Not a sound, no shrubs for sighing winds, the wheels rolled muffled in the prairie grass. At one point, where the ground lay more rolling and dryer, were many Long-billed Curlews guarding their nests, and hovering near the wagon, uttering that peculiar mellow whistle so characteristic of the wild free prairie. Soon I was delighted to see an old Curlew flutter from the horses' feet, leaving the four speckled eggs exposed. Further on a mother Curlew led her mottled downy chicks from danger." ("Some Prairie Birds," O. & O., xviii, 1893, 82).

Dr. Trostler reports the Long-billed Curlew as a common migrant in Pottawattamie and Mills counties. A. I. Johnson reports it as a migrant in Sioux county, northwestern Iowa, saying: "I do not know of its nesting since I came to the state in 1890. Have only known of them during migration, and not very many at that." All others who reported list the species as a rare migrant.

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HYDE PARK, MASS., JUNE, 1893.

No. 6.

Some Prairie Birds.

Years ago, when northwestern Iowa was a vast prairie, out into which few settlers had ventured and the monotony was seldom broken save by some wood-fringed lake or a herder's shanty, I drove to that region about Spirit Lake, Iowa, which is now so well known as a summer resort. My way lay along the Iowa River, from the head waters of which stream, westward, was the great, flat prairie, interspersed with marshes and small lakes, about which swarmed countless numbers of shore birds. Here were troops of White Cranes, some far a-marsh, guarding their nests, Brown Cranes, Canada Geese, fighting each other and whipping the water into foam; Long-billed Curlews; Godwits; Red-bellied Snipes; Golden Plover; Upland Plover; American Bitterns; Ducks of many kinds: Mallard; Pin-tails; Red-heads; Spoon-bill, Blue-winged Teal and occasionally a flock of White Pelicans settled on the shores and waters of a lonely lake; their great white forms glistening brighter than the waters on which they floated. Swans were frequently seen; and Night Herons could be observed moping among the bogs.

The larger number of these species remained during the summer and the naturalist had a wide and interesting field for research. One memorable afternoon in early May I left the tent in kindly shelter of the fringe of woods on Crystal Lake, Winnebago Co., Iowa, the lakelet in whose sparkling waters classic Iowa River finds birth. Following the stream as it wound about through

flat meadows or by low, gravelly hills, I reached the immense marsh lying north from Eagle Lake. Here were secured a number of the large, drab-and-spotted eggs of the White Crane. They had chosen the centre of the marsh for a nesting-place, and there, a mile from the higher shores, the mother birds could be seen upon the nests, which were formed of soft grass gathered together in a firm heap about one and one half feet high, and placed on firm sod, out of water, but very near it. In the top of this heap was a very slight depression for the eggs. Upon these nests the birds sit in the same posture that a goose assumes, the legs protruding behind. They often let the head and neck lie down along the side of the nest in a wearied way, which is usual for the Canada Goose, especially if the hunter is near. Upon my approaching the marsh these birds moved away with stately tread, walking much faster than I cared to do, yet apparently taking it easy. The White Crane is certainly a strikingly handsome bird in its wild retreats. One does not tire of watching their peculiar movements. When walking at a distance they appear almost as tall as a man. They are far more alert and much wilder than the Brown Cranes.

Several sets of Brown Crane's eggs were taken. Their nests being uniformly in the water, formed by tramping rush stalks down until the pile reached the surface, these nests often float about with the mother birds upon them.

So interested had I become that on looking about only a vague, red glow lay close

along the horizon, shadowed by grim, cold clouds; and the night was upon me, seven miles from camp, with many marshes between and not a road nor cow path, alone; too light clad for the night's chill. Casting about for directions and landmarks I began the lonely trip, and long before the dark line of ridges was reached there was utter darkness. Now I had come upon a marsh, hip-deep of water and saw-grass. Through it I waded, fearing to lose the way should I deviate. At length the hills were reached, bestrewn with great boulders, among which was difficult walking, the prairie grass having been burned away by a recent fire. Against one of these great stones I stumbled, when from off its top flew an Eagle, fanning the night wind into my face, and disappearing from directly over me. For a moment could be heard the heavy beating pinions, and then all was still but the ever whistling night wind.

Along this ridge and on and on I wandered, misguided by a red glow sent up against the cloud by a distant prairie fire. Lost! and for a moment the cold chills crept up along my frame and a strong effort was necessary to compose the nerves. Then at length my foot struck a path which led me to the lake, where weary and worn I spent the few remaining hours of that frosty night.

Next day I was wheeling on across the prairies towards Spirit Lake, and the far sweeps of vision from occasional elevations were inspiring. Lying away to the west were the dim flats of Kossuth County. Not a sound, no shrubs for sighing winds; the wheels rolled muffled on the prairie grass. At one point, where the ground lay more rolling and dryer, were many Long-billed Curlews, the males guarding their nests, and, hovering near the wagon, uttering that peculiar mellow whistle so characteristic of the wild, free prairie. Soon I was delighted to see an old Curlew flutter from the horse's feet leaving the four speckled eggs exposed. Further on a mother Curlew led her mottled downy chicks from danger.

Then a Marbled Godwit flew flapping from her nest of chocolate-colored eggs. In this locality a number of prairie wolves strolled leisurely along just out of gunshot. One sneaked away from a newly dug burrow. Now and then a jack rabbit sprung from its "set" to disappear like a spectre. Yellow-legs and Phalarope picked up their meal from the wet meadows; while the flocks of Golden Plover that wheeled about over the burned tracts were the delight of a sportsman. Occasionally were fields of blue anemone.

J. W. Preston.

Baxter, Iowa.

(To be continued.)

Distribution of the Black-Crowned Night Heron in Illinois.

J. E. Dickinson. No. 3.

Summer resident; abundant. Arrive April 5th; leave October. Breeds in colonies in oak groves adjacent to swamps or creeks. Nest placed from 25 to 45 feet high—composed of dead sticks. Sets found from May 10 to early June. Has found nearly hatched young and birds building in same colony on May 27th. Set, 4 to 5; 6 eggs average 2.10 x 1.50; largest, 5.04 x 1.51, smallest, 1.99 x 1.54; color of eggs, blue. Common names, "Qua bird," "Quak," "Shite Poke."

F. A. Gregory. No. 3.

Summer resident. Not common.

Breeds in colonies.

Nests in second growth timber from 2 to 3 feet high, of twigs loosely laid together. Eggs may be seen from below.

Full sets found May 12.

Sets, 3 to 5; 4 average.

Measurements, 2.01 x 1.51, 2.04 x 1.52, 2.00 x 1.50, 2.02 x 1.50. Average, 2.02 x 1.51.

Color, pale bluish green, but are much stained and dirty as incubation advances.

W. E. Pratt. No. 6.

June 30, 4 young.

(As this is his only note of the nesting of this bird in Lake and Cook counties, we may