

Some Notable Illinois Records from the Chicago Academy of Sciences Oology Collection

by VICTORIA J. BYRE

The egg collection at the Chicago Academy of Sciences (CAS) consists of over 2400 sets of eggs representing about 440 species of North American birds. Among the 650 sets collected in Illinois are several that may be of special interest to Illinois birders.

A set of three Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) eggs (CAS 1338), collected along Lake Michigan at Waukegan by W.I. Lyon on 19 July 1936, represents the first recorded set of this species to be taken in Illinois. The terns had apparently been at that site for several seasons but no one had reported a nest. See Lyon (1937) for an interesting account of the discovery of the nest and the subsequent banding of several young.

The first recorded set of Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) eggs for the Chicagoland area is also in the Academy's collection. The set (CAS 681) was collected across the state line in Millers, Indiana, however, on 13 June 1902, by F.M. Woodruff. E.R. Ford made the following observations on a Piping Plover nest located along Lake Michigan in Illinois, near Zion, from which he collected a set of 4 eggs (CAS 2213) on 30 May 1911: "The nest site was distant from the water. The extreme width of the beach at this point [was] about 100 yards. Incubation was advanced. The nest was a depression in the sand amidst the shingle. The slight hollow was distinguished by being laid over with minute flat pebbles. The pebbled area represented the nest and was 3.5" in diameter and .5" in depth." Both the Common Tern and the Piping Plover are on the Illinois endangered species list (the Piping Plover is on the federal list as well); a testament to the loss of suitable breeding habitat along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), the original population of which has been extirpated from Illinois, used to nest in wooded areas in several parts of the state (Bohlen 1989). The Academy's oology collection includes a set of six Ruffed Grouse eggs collected in Highland Park by E. Pratt on 8 May 1893 (CAS 324), and a set of 15 (CAS 1900) from 2.5 miles southeast of Haldron in Kankakee County, collected on 2 May 1888, by Charles Krueger. Krueger noted that the nest was "on the ground in a slight depression and was loosely lined with dry leaves and a few of the bird's feathers."

The Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) whose eggs used to be collected by the bucketfuls by early settlers, is represented in the oology collection by a set of 13 eggs collected near Bloomingdale in Du Page County by E.R. Ford on 22 May 1910 (CAS 1902), and by a set of 11 (CAS 1072) collected by F.H. Letl in Lee County on 25 June 1926. Note the rather late date in the year for the latter set. Fewer than 200 of the state-endangered Greater Prairie-Chicken now exist in Illinois.

The extinct Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) was once a common nester in Illinois. The Academy's collection of Passenger Pigeon eggs includes one egg collected in Evanston (CAS 261) on 6 August 1883, by John M. Hugh, and another, from Lake Forest (CAS 260) also collected by John M. Hugh in 1883 (no other date given). The last breeding record of Passenger Pigeon for the state occurred in 1893 (Bohlen 1989).

Blue-winged Warblers (*Vermivora pinus*) are considered uncommon breeders in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). On 29 May 1914, E.R. Ford collected what was judged to be the first eggs of this species to be taken in northern Illinois (CAS 2073). The set of 4 eggs was found one mile west of Fort Sheridan in Lake County. Ford's extensive notes on the nest include the following remarks: "[The nest] was on the ground in woods, situated in a deep part of the cover and placed at the base of a choke cherry whose three stems supported it. Incubation was fresh. The nest was composed of dry leaves, principally oak, the stems generally extending upward. The inner nest [consisted] of a few coarse grasses, strips of grape-vine bark, etc., lined with brown plant fibers and some horse hair. I found the nest on 23 May without contents, birds very little in evidence; 29 May the nest contained 4 eggs, birds still away from nest - only female seen. Nest diameter exterior, 3.5"; interior, 2.25"; depth exterior, 4.5"; interior, 2"." Ford collected another set of Blue-winged Warbler eggs (CAS 2074) from the same general location seven years later (4 June 1921).

Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) are considered uncommon migrants and even rare summer residents in Illinois, with only a few documented nest records (Bohlen 1989). On 12 June 1910, E.R. Ford collected a set of four Le Conte's Sparrow eggs (CAS 2021) from a nest found along the Calumet River in Chicago Ridge, Will County. Ford's notes describe the nest as follows: "[The nest] was on the ground but not sunk therein, concealed within a tussock of old grass escaped from last year's mowing. The site adjoined an old weedy field on rolling land sloping to a small marsh. Incubation was advanced. The nest was composed entirely of dry grass with a lining of fine hair-like wiry grass, the whole plant including the root being used. Diameter of exterior, 3.5"; interior, 2.25"; depth exterior, 2.25"; interior, 1.4"." Ford also noted that he was present earlier that year (on 28 May) when G.A. Abbott collected, from this same location, the first Le Conte's Sparrow eggs ever recorded for Illinois (Abbott 1911). Ford's set may well represent the second laying of "Abbott's birds". The most recent nesting record of this species is from the Lake Calumet area where a nest and eggs were found in 1960 (Mlodinow 1984).

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) is a rare summer nester in northern Illinois (Bohlen 1989). The first nests to be reported for the state were observed by W.I. Lyon on 17 June 1929, near Lake Michigan at Winthrop Harbor north of Zion (Lyon 1930). On 7 June 1930, E.R. Ford collected the first eggs of this species to be taken in Illinois; a set of five (CAS 2123) from drained marsh land near Winnetka. Ford described the nest as follows: "[The nest] was situated in drained marsh land prepared by plowing and rolling for the purpose of golf links, but at this season partly covered with water dock, wild parsnip, and similar plants. The nest was placed at the base of a clump of the wild parsnip so as to be entirely surrounded by it. The bare earth had been scooped out and the nest built in the hollow so that the rim of it was nearly at a level with the surface of the ground. Incubation was slight. The nest was composed of the roots and stems of plants, those used in the inner nest being much finer. Diameter of exterior, 6.5"; interior, 3"; depth exterior, 2"; interior, 1.25"." Brewer's Blackbird is on the Illinois threatened species list.

In addition to the above mentioned records, the Academy's collection contains hundreds of egg sets with accompanying notes which provide valuable insights into the history of bird distribution and nesting throughout Illinois and the United States. The entire oology collection has recently been inventoried and the records entered into a computerized data base program for quick and easy access. A search of the records and printout are available upon request to serious researchers, amateur or professional.

Literature Cited

- Abbott, G.A. 1911. Le Conte's Sparrow at home near Chicago. *Wilson Bull.* 23:53-54.
- Bohlen, H.D. 1989. *The Birds of Illinois*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Lyon, W.I. 1930. Brewer's Blackbird nesting in Illinois. *Wilson Bull.* 42:214.
- Lyon, W.I. 1937. First record of Common Tern nesting in Illinois. *The Audubon Bulletin* 27:29.
- Mlodinow, S. 1984. *Chicago Area Birds*. Chicago Review Press. Chicago.

--Chicago Academy of Sciences
Lincoln Park - 2001 Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60614Clark St.