

The Nebraska Bird Review

A Magazine of Ornithology of the Nebraska Region

VOLUME XXXI

JANUARY, 1963

NUMBER 1



Published by the
NEBRASKA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, INC.

Founded 1899

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Published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union as its official journal and sent free to all members who are not in arrears for dues. Subscriptions at \$3.50 per volume in the United States and \$3.75 in all countries, payable in advance. Single numbers, \$1.00 each. All dues and subscriptions should be remitted to the Treasurer, Lee Morris, Bradshaw, Nebraska. Orders for back numbers should be sent to the Custodian, Miss Bertha Winter, University of Nebraska State Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska. All manuscripts for publication should be sent to the Editor, Nebraska State Teachers College, Chadron, Nebraska.



M. A. Carriker, Jr.
taken in 1952

M. A. CARRIKER, Jr.

As a charter member of The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, Mr. Carriker read a paper ("Nesting Habits of the Raptors of Otoe County") at the first meeting held in Lincoln, Nebraska, in December of 1899. In 1949, the members decided to make all living charter members Honorary Members and thus Mr. Carriker became an Honorary Member. In his long and active life (he was born at Sullivan, Illinois, Febr. 14, 1879) he has brought much honor and credit to the field of Ornithology. Though he was born in Illinois, his family moved to Nebraska City in 1886 and he attended the University of Nebraska for two and a half years.

Mr. Carriker began his collecting career in January, 1902, when three men, one being Lawrence Bruner from the University of Nebraska, sailed for Costa Rica where Carriker was to collect birds for the Carnegie Museum and mammals for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and Bruner was to collect Orthoptera (insects). At the end of six weeks, the others returned to the States while Carriker stayed on for a total of six months.

He returned to Costa Rica in 1903 to participate in a commercial venture which did not materialize, but he secured a position with the United Fruit Company from which he resigned in 1907 in order to continue with collecting. Soon after, he returned to the States to become Assistant Curator of birds under W. E. Clyde Todd at the Carnegie Museum.

In June of 1909 he went to Trinidad where he remained for two months collecting birds and mam-

mals. From there, he went to Venezuela where he remained until 1911. In this time his travels took him along both the Orinoco and Cauca rivers. He spent several months on the Cauca, and worked at numerous points as far as the frontier of British Guiana where he "had a most wonderful view of Halley's Comet for several nights." Then he went to Caracas, and to western Venezuela in the range back of Puerto Cabello and later in the interior as far as Paramo de Rosas. He arrived in Santa Marta in Colombia in May of 1911 and this became his home and base of operation until 1927.

Myrtle Flye, daughter of an American manager of a large coffee plantation, became his bride in 1912. She traveled with him and in fact helped in preparing specimens which he and his native assistants collected. A part of this work is reported in "The Birds of the Santa Marta Region" by Todd and Carriker, a book awarded the Brewster Medal.

A trip in 1916 lasted 10 months and yielded 5,464 birds and took them to snow line on the Sierra Nevada de Cucui and on the western slope down to the savannas of the Rio Casanare.

In 1918, the Carrikers, their baby daughter and two servant girls began a long collecting trip. They left a small son with his grandparents. They worked along the Atrato River in northwestern Colombia up to Quibdo and on to the portage to the San Juan River which they descended to the ocean. They sailed to Buenaventura and then traveled to Cordoba and Caldas (now called

Dagua) and on to Bitaco, La Cum-bre, Cali, down the Cauca River to Cartago, Manizales, Paramo del Ruiz (camped at 12,000 feet), Mariquita, Barranquilla and home. They had collected 4,160 birds.

In 1922, leaving their children with their grandparents, and forming a party of three, they made one more trip to western Venezuela. This time they spent most of their time between Lake Maracaibo and the summit of Sierra Nevada de Merida, and camped as high as 10,300 feet. This trip yielded 2,564 birds and mammals.

Between trips the Carrikers developed their plantation, Vista Nieve in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, back of Santa Marta, and finally sold it in 1927 so that they could return to the States to educate their five children. They lived in Beachwood, New Jersey.

Mr. Carriker joined the staff of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and from the end of 1929 to the middle of 1938 collected for them in Peru and Bolivia, making the trip by steamer from New York each year. The fifth year when his oldest son, Melbourne Romaine, accompanied him, he describes the trip, in part, as follows: "We worked from 15,000 feet, east of La Paz, down into the steaming jungle of the Rio Beni traveling first in a small gasoline car on the Yungas Railway over the pass and down to Hichuloma where the rain-soaked jungles begin. We then descended with mules to the Rio Coroico, and then continued by balsa-wood raft to Rio Beni eventually reaching Rurrenabaque. It was and still is a land of savage jungle, a few Indians and millions of vicious little black flies by day and mosquitoes by night making life one long misery. We passed several bad rapids, rushing

down the narrow channel between huge boulders through foaming waves. Two large rafts had been lashed together and the crew of six men clutched the lashings while wave after wave swept over them. Many rafts have been dashed to pieces in these rapids and lives lost, and they are the nightmare of all 'balseros.'" The result of this trip was 146 species of birds 98 of which had not been taken previously in this region.

James Bond, a member of the Ornithological staff at the Academy says of the Bolivian collection: "Of the 1153 species of birds recorded from Bolivia, Mr. Carriker obtained more than 80%. He deserves unstinted praise for his work, for not only did he assemble superb series of beautifully prepared skins of most of the species but he also was most successful in ferreting out the rarities. Furthermore, he secured as many as 45 birds new to science."

In 1940 he made a four months collecting trip to Veracruz, Mexico, for the U. S. National Museum and then returned to Colombia. From 1941 to 1952 he made collections in northern Colombia for the Smithsonian Institution.

In addition to his collecting and identifying birds, Carriker has worked on their mallophagan parasites having described two families 52 genera and over 650 species and subspecies.

In 1941 he was divorced and in 1944 married a Colombian lady who accompanied him in his field work, assisted in his camps, and later helped in skinning specimens. "At the end of 1952 I considered that I had done enough bird collecting and retired. We moved to Popayan, a very old Colombian city in the mountains. However, after such a long life of strenuous activity, I

could not long endure the sedentary life and we began collecting birds again in a small way for the Peabody Museum at Yale University." Later he made collections for the Chicago Museum of Natural History, the Los Angeles County Museum and the Wester Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (also in Los Angeles). He is still collecting in a small way for the last two institutions.

Popayan seemed too cold, so they moved to the coast at Santa Marta but stayed only nine months and then moved to Bucaramanga, Colombia, where they now live. (Calle 35 No. 34-20)

Between 1902 and 1962 Mr. Carriker has collected approximately 80,000 birds and mammals (mostly birds), and has described more genera and species of Mallophaga than any other person. He traveled countless miles by foot, horseback, mule, boat, steamer, launch, balsa-wood raft, four horse coach, train, gasoline car on rails, and automobile. He has suffered tropical ulcers of the legs, black-water fever, amebic dysentery, malaria (often until 1922); black flies and mosquitoes. He set a broken arm (twice) of his daughter's nurse, and treated his daughter for stomach worms. (He learned about some of these things from his doctor father.) He suffered dictators, red-tape of getting into countries and getting specimens out, and narrowly escaped a water spout in Lake Maracaibo. And he is still active. "I still do considerable field work, always accompanied by my wife, but I do the driving and shooting. We have a British Land Rover car. My wife still skins the birds and I do the stuffing. My retirement in 1952 failed to retire me and I have no intention of stopping work on birds and their lice until forced to do so."

The Carrikers had five children (one daughter died at age 21) and 14 grandchildren. Alvita is married and lives in Wilmington, Delaware. Mel is the director of the Systematics-Ecology Program, Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Howard is a commercial artist in New York, and Dick is an eye surgeon in Phoenix, Ariz



Mr. Carriker sent two pictures — one of himself taken in 1952, and the other of him and his wife taken in 1960. He hoped we could use the picture in which his wife, Felisa, appears because she "helped so much in all of the field work since 1945 and very much of our success has been due to her untiring energy and helpful assistance especially in all matters dealing with Colombians."

This article was prepared from two long letters from Mr. Carriker. Copies of the article were sent to him, to his son, Dr. Melbourne R. Carriker, and to Dr. A. Wetmore all of whom returned corrections and suggestions. Appreciation is here expressed to each.

Mr. Carriker made several contributions to *Proceedings of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union* as follows: Jan. 1900, "Some Notes on the Nesting of the Raptores of Otoe County, Nebraska," pp. 29-34; Oct. 1901, "Notes on the Breeding of the Prothonotary Warbler," pp. 42-43, "Observations on the Traill's Flycatcher," pp. 44-46, "Nashville Warbler," pp. 96-97, and "Yellow-throated Vireo," p. 97. In the Dec., 1902, issue, his article "Notes on the Nesting of Some Sioux County Birds" appeared on pages 75-89.

Since these articles are not easily accessible, some of the information of the last one is given here. The names he used are given and the names presently used are given in parentheses.

In 1901, Mr. Carriker along with Lawrence Bruner, Merritt Cary, and R. H. Wolcott spent two months, beginning in May, in Warbonnet Canyon about 10 miles north of Harrison. Some records other than from the Warbonnet Canyon are included.

The Bartramian Sandpiper (Upland Plover) was abundant but they only found three nests. Sickie-billed Curlews (Long-billed Curlews) were "breeding in abundance." There were only a few Prairie Sharp-tailed Grouse. Though Sage Grouse were abundant in Wyoming, only a few were sighted in Nebraska including one female and half grown chicks. There were few Sharp-shinned Hawks but they succeeded in taking pictures of one nest with the female nearby. She seemed quite unafraid. They found two nests of the Krider's Hawk and two of the Prairie Falcon (one on Saddle Butte near Crawford). The Sparrow Hawk was the "most common Raptores of the Pine Ridge." Cabanis's Woodpecker (subspecies of the Hairy Woodpecker)

was not common. (According to the description of its range in the 1957 A.O.U. Check-list, this was probably a miss-identification). Of the Poor-will he says, "Not long after the setting of the sun and when the depths of the canyon are beginning to be wrapped in darkness, there come two clear elusive notes from somewhere along the rim-rock of the canyon. It is the first call in the nightly serenade of the Poor-wills and is quickly taken up by the remainder of the orchestra along the rocky walls. There is something exceedingly weird and uncanny about it all, that fascinates the listener. The sound is echoed, magnified, and distorted by the canyon walls until one is almost led to believe that the sounds are of supernatural origin, and when a bird is by chance seen, as it flutters and glides silent as a shadow down to the bottom of the canyon, its very appearance lends support to the belief. Very seldom indeed are the birds seen in the daytime and in spite of the fact that at least three pairs were positively known to be somewhere within our canyon, a nest was searched for in vain." However, another worker in the area found one nest.

Efforts to reach the nests of White-throated Swifts were described as follows: "After various plans for reaching the nests had been discussed, I volunteered to make an attempt to climb the cliff. (When) The trunk of a small pine was erected I was able to ascend about one-third of the distance to a narrow projection of rock at a point where several nests were supposed to be there is a shoulder of rock but a few feet in width running perpendicularly up the side of the cliff and ending in a projection. This shoulder was made by a vertical section of the

face of the cliff slipping down and still remaining in an upright though rather unstable condition and it was up the narrow side of this section that I must climb in order to reach the much desired nests above. This cliff consists, as do all the rocks of the region, of a soft sandstone which is rapidly disintegrated by the action of the elements upon it I was able, with the small hand-ax which I carried, to cut foot and hand holds in the rock and thus gradually make the ascent.

" . . . persistence finally overcame all obstacles and I stood at the top within easy reach of three nests, one of which was still empty while another contained one egg and the third, two By this time Dr. Wolcott had climbed by a round-about way to the top of the cliff and let down a coil of rope over the face of the rock to assist me in the descent. Owing to the overhanging nature of the cliff the rope hung out several feet beyond reach and I was compelled to draw the end up by means of a stout cord which I happened to have. Taking a turn of the rope around one leg I started to slide down but stopped a short distance below at a fourth nest. Clinging to the rope with one hand and leg I chopped away the rock with the other hand until the nest was reached and the four fresh eggs

safely transferred to my mouth and later to the ground."

They found one pair of Bullock's Orioles, and saw flocks of McCown's Longspurs but found only one nest. Next to Lark Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows were most abundant. Brewer's Sparrows were found only along the draws on the north side of Indian Creek. One White-winged Junco nest was found. The Arctic Towhee (Red-eyed Towhee) was probably the most characteristic bird of the canyons. Lazuli Buntings were abundant along the creeks and the Louisiana Tanager (Western Tanager) was fairly abundant on the piny slopes. One nest of the Plumbeous Vireo (Solitary Vireo) was found. Audubon's Warblers were common. Long-tailed Chats (Yellow-breasted Chats) were abundant in the thickets along the streams. They saw a total of three Mockingbirds.

The last bird he names is the Rock Wren and of this he says, "The Rock Wren is very abundant along the Pine Ridge and in the Bad Lands where its cheerful, though not at all melodious song and sprightly manners greatly relieve the monotony. Nesting as it does in the cracks and crannies of the rocks and clay banks, it is very frequently to be met with in the most inhospitable and usually the most inaccessible spots."