

our first thought was: "western kingbird." It was about the same size as a Western Kingbird, had a dark back and yellow belly and flew like a flycatcher. Upon closer observation of the bird in a perched position, it was seen to have a flycatcher profile. However, the call was completely unlike any I have ever heard from a Western Kingbird, a bird with which I am completely familiar.

We followed and observed the two birds with 7 x 50 binoculars for about three-quarters of an hour, and had several good close looks at them. They had dark backs, gray throats (white in Western Kingbird), two white wing bars per wing (absent in Western Kingbird), long rusty tails (black with white outer tail feathers in Western Kingbird) and yellow bellies. In consultation with the field guide, *Birds of North America* by Robbins, Brunn, Zim and Singer, which we had with us, we identified these birds as Great Crested Flycatchers.

We could hardly believe our eyes, since these birds were not even on the hypothetical list in the first edition of *Birds of Alberta* by Salt and Wilk. (They are on the hypothetical list in the latest edition of the book, since Edgar T. Jones of Edmonton saw a pair about 30 miles east of the city a few years ago.) There was no doubt in our minds that they were Great Crested Flycatchers.

While we observed the two birds, their call was given repeatedly, often with a short trill on the end of it.

When we began our Breeding Bird

Survey the following morning at 3:26 a.m. the birds were again heard calling at the same spot. I returned to the same place at 4:45 a.m. on June 22 and stayed for an hour without hearing or seeing any sign of the birds. It was a calm morning with an overcast sky and cattle were bellowing and making a lot of noise in the area. I returned at 4:30 a.m. on a sunny calm June 29 and again heard the birds calling. I wandered through the woods for two hours searching for a nest, but was unsuccessful.

On June 30, a sunny calm morning, I watched both birds between 5:00 and 5:30 a.m., but still found no nest. Two more Great Crested Flycatchers were heard calling and were seen between 6:00 and 6:30 a.m. on the same morning, three miles west of the original location. They could have been the same birds. On this occasion I noted that the call was given singly, or repeated several times in succession.

I did not again return to the area until 4:45 a.m. on July 7. It was a cloudy, windy, cool morning, and no Great Crested Flycatchers were heard or seen. I arrived at 4:40 the following day on a sunny, calm, cool morning, and heard and saw one of them. I spent two hours searching for a nest, but again was unsuccessful.

I heard and saw two again one mile east of the original location at 8:30 a.m., July 15, and saw one at 8:00 a.m. the following morning in this same area.

I did not observe the birds again in 1971 but I was absent from the area between July 15 and August 26.

A RARE OBSERVATION OF THE ESKIMO CURLEW

by Fred W. Lahrman, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina

On January 21, 1972, while on vacation in Texas, Dr. Fred G. Bard and I observed a bird which we are convinced was an Eskimo Curlew. The bird was sighted at about 11:40 a.m.

on Padre Island, where we were watching birds at a location approximately one-half mile northeast of the end of the causeway connecting the island to the mainland at Port Isabel.

We were especially interested that morning in a number of shorebirds, gulls and terns resting on a large expanse of shallow water and mudflats, bordered on the far side by a belt of green grass beyond which could be seen the blue water of Laguna Madre Bay. It was bright and sunny and we were able to get good views of the birds with a 32X telescope, securely mounted on a window-mount tripod. Dr. Bard was looking at a group of Willets on the far side of the mudflats, approximately 200 yards away, when suddenly he said, "Have a look, Fred — another bird has just alighted with the Willets." I could detect a note of excitement in his voice, and when I looked through the telescope which was "locked on the bird" I was surprised to see a small curlew. It was walking rather briskly, with brief pauses, among the Willets. Because of its small size, we considered the possibility of its being an Eskimo Curlew. It was too far away from us for us to see fine details or to photograph it, but we could see clearly that it was considerably smaller than the Willets, and that it had a slender, down-curved bill. The upper parts of the body were brownish-gray and the underparts and breast were lighter in shade — a buffy gray, but not quite as buffy in colour as the few Long-billed Curlews which were standing nearby. I could hear a few rather faint calls coming from the direction of the bird, which were strange and hard to describe. I attempted to make a recording, but the bird did not call again.

Meanwhile, the bird had been walking briskly towards the strip of grass on the far side of the expanse of water and mudflats, feeding as it went and taking occasional short runs, apparently to snatch up insects. Soon only its head could be seen bobbing about in the greenery, and then as it entered the taller grasses it was lost to view. It was not seen again, although we checked the area several times during the next two days.

Later, when I returned home from holidays, I consulted the literature for recent observations of the rare Eskimo Curlew. The curlew which we had seen conformed very closely in appearance to the bird pictured in an excellent black-and-white photograph taken in 1962 by Don Bleitz which I found in the *Audubon Magazine* (July-August, 1962) and in the *Auk* (82:495, July, 1965). At the time we saw the bird, however, it should have been in southern South America, as the winter range given by A. C. Bent in his *Life histories of North American shore birds* (1929) includes Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

The Eskimo Curlew was once considered to be extinct and recent observations of this rare species are therefore important evidence that there may still be a small breeding population in the far north. The note by F. M. Weston and E. A. Williams in the issue of the *Auk* mentioned above (82:493-496), gives 11 recent records, nine of which were recorded within less than 20 years, from 1945 to 1963. Five of the 11 observations were made on the Atlantic Coast, representing the fall migration southward; the other six were observed in the spring on the Texas coast and are of special interest to us here because of their close proximity to our Padre Island observation. The following are the spring records for Texas given in the *Auk*:

April 29, 1945 — two seen on Galveston Island.

April 27, 1950 — one seen on this date at Aransas Bay, and again on April 28, 29.

March 22, 1959 — one seen on Galveston Island.

April 3, 1960 — one seen on Galveston Island.

For six days in the latter part of March and early April, 1962 — a group of three, or possibly four, birds seen on Galveston Island.

April 11, 1963 — one seen south of Rockport, at Aransas Bay.