



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



The Natal Plumage of the Lesser Prairie Chicken

Author(s): George M. Sutton

Source: *The Auk*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Oct., 1968), p. 679

Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the American Ornithologists' Union

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4083376>

Accessed: 21/05/2009 10:05

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucal>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and American Ornithologists' Union are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Auk*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



Four newly hatched Lesser Prairie Chickens (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) from Roger Mills County, southwestern Oklahoma (above) and four newly hatched Greater Prairie Chickens (*T. cupido*) from Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma. The plate fails to show the brownish tone that characterizes the underparts of the Greater chicks. (See page 679.)

The natal plumage of the Lesser Prairie Chicken.—Ascertaining precisely how the natal plumage of the Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) differs from that of the wide-ranging, much better known Greater Prairie Chicken (*T. cupido*) has taken almost a century. *T. pallidicinctus* was described in 1873; its eggs, oddly enough, had been collected 13 years earlier; yet the first description of its natal plumage was published only 4 years ago (Sutton, *Southwest. Nat.*, 9: 1-5, 1964, and frontispiece). As an illustration for this paper I made a watercolor drawing of a chick "two or three days old." The drawing was based largely on the dried skin of a specimen that had been crushed by the wheel of an automobile 31 May 1961 near Forgan, Beaver County, in northwestern Oklahoma, and presented to me by Robert E. Jones, whose automobile had killed it. The drawing represents the coloration and patterning of the natal plumage fairly well despite the virtually rumpless condition of my model; but the toes are not as bright as they should be in so young a chick, the bill is a bit dull, and the iris is too dark.

With the assistance of George B. Wint, Superintendent of the State Game Farm at El Reno, Oklahoma, I have recently been able to examine in the flesh and prepare as skins nine perfect Lesser Prairie Chicken specimens ranging in age from 8 hours to about 20 days. These were hatched from eggs found in two nests in habitat described by Wint as "a huge pasture of shin-oak and little bluestem" 7 miles north and 2½ miles west of Sweetwater, Roger Mills County, southwestern Oklahoma. The nests were found by Malcolm M. Exendine, Biologist of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The first nest, holding nine eggs, was found during a shinnery oak mowing operation on the morning of 12 May 1967. When Exendine visited the nest that evening, he found the hen incubating. The following morning he and Wint removed the eggs from the nest, took them to El Reno, and placed them in an incubator at the State Game Farm. They hatched 24 days later (5 June). Two chicks were taken as specimens when they were 8 hours old; two died 9 June, when almost 4 days old; a fifth died 10 June (5 days old), and a sixth 24 June (about 20 days old). The second nest, containing 8 eggs, was found 20 May 1967. These eggs, too, were transferred to an incubator at El Reno, where they hatched 24 days later (13 June). One of the brood died 16 June (3 days old), another 20 June (about 7 days old), a third 24 June (11 days old).

The toes of the 8-hour chicks were a warm, fairly bright, yellowish orange. The bill was of about this color also, except at the base of the mandible, where it was pinkish flesh-color. The irides were dark hazel brown rather than blackish brown. The toes and bills of the older chicks were less bright than those of the 8-hour birds.

The yellow of the underparts in all nine chicks was slightly paler and purer (less brownish) than that of the underparts in five Greater Prairie Chickens of comparable age obtained for me by Wint near Shidler, Osage County, in northeastern Oklahoma, in the summer of 1956. Too, the brown of the upperparts in the *pallidicinctus* chicks was a good deal paler (less rufescent) than in the *cupido* chicks. The patterning of the upperparts was much the same in the two species. As is evident from the colorplate, however, the dark spots on *cupido* are consistently darker than those on *pallidicinctus*, and in *cupido* the dark element tends to form a broad streak down the middle of the lower back and rump. As the frontispiece clearly shows the coloration and patterning of the two species, no detailed verbal description is necessary.

I want to thank Messrs. Wint and Exendine for their assistance in making specimens available to me, and Paul F. Nighswonger for taking the excellent photograph on which the colorplate is based.—GEORGE M. SUTTON, *Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73069.*