

Middle-western Prairie Region

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Following a mild December, the Region experienced one of those old-fashioned winters characterized by brutally cold temperatures, ice storms, and a modicum of winter finches, ice storms, and a modicum of winter finches. December temperatures were quite moderate, stimulating scores of birds to tarry north of their normal range. Old man winter took revenge in January when a polar air mass bulled into the Region at mid-month. The temperature plunged to -22° F in Louisville, Kentucky, January 17, and considerably lower temperatures were recorded in the northern states. The associated freeze eliminated open water, sending waterbirds southward, and took a heavy toll on lingering passerines. In Indiana, Alan Bruner reported scores of "bob-tailed" birds at his feeder following a night of freezing rain. The cold lasted through mid-February, when a welcomed warm spell stimulated the first northward movement of migrants.

Most correspondents deemed the winter

birding less than exciting. Notable aspects of the season included a Regionwide Red-necked Grebe invasion, scarce waterfowl, ever expanding gulls, and a host of late records. Rarities included Mew Gulls in Iowa and Illinois, Anna's Hummingbird in Missouri, Rufous Hummingbird in Illinois, Varied Thrush in Kentucky, and Black-throated Gray Warbler in Ohio. Although the season produced the best winter finches since 1977-1978, the anticipated boreal invasion failed to materialize; neither Bohemian Waxwings nor Pine Grosbeaks were reported in the Region.

Abbreviations: L. Cal. (*Lake Calumet, Chicago*); R.E.D.A (*Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO*); Spfld. (*Springfield, IL*).

Loons to Ibises

It was a good winter for loons. Red-throated Loons were widespread with reports from every state except Iowa, and Pacific Loons were reported on Clinton L., IL Dec. 10-12 (TF, MS) and on L. Jacomo, MO Dec. 2 (CH, TBk). Both Pied-billed and Horned grebes were also widely reported, but Red-neckeds provided the most exciting grebe news.

SA In February an unprecedented movement of Red-necked Grebes occurred across the Region, producing records in every state except Iowa. The largest concentration was in Ohio, where the appearance of 53 birds was described as an invasion (LRo). The Ohio flight

peaked with eight birds at Avon L., Feb. 15 (TL). Remarkably, eight Red-necked Grebes wandered S to Kentucky, where they are quite rare. Elsewhere Red-necked counts included six in Illinois, three in Indiana, and one in Missouri. Over the past decade the Region has averaged about two birds per winter, a statistic that clearly reveals the magnitude of this winter's movement.



An unprecedented invasion brought about 70 Red-necked Grebes to the Middlewestern Prairie Region, where the average winter count is about two! Of the three found in Indiana, this one was at Scales Lake, Warrick County, February 27, 1994. Photograph/Jim Campbell.

The only Eared Grebes were in Illinois where six birds were recorded at 4 locations. Western Grebes appeared e. of the Mississippi R. at Chicago Dec. 2 (JP) and at the Port of Indiana Dec. 18 (CFi).

An imm. Northern Gannet was seen briefly at the Sunset Marina, Rock Island, IL Dec. 19 (fBBv). Small numbers of Am. White Pelicans wintered at sites in Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois. As is usual, a few Great Blue Herons lingered in the n. states; the peak count of 44 was recorded at Eastlake, OH Feb. 5 (KMe). More surprisingly, a Great Egret wintered in Jackson, IL (D K, CS) and another was at the Fort Wayne, IN Terminal Ponds Dec. 12-Jan. 6 (TH). Other lingering herons included a Cattle Egret in Mason, IL Dec. 18 (VKJ *et al.*) and seven Black-crowned Night-Herons at L. Cal., Dec. 5 (WM).

Waterfowl

The Missouri midwinter waterfowl survey produced fewer birds than usual; apparently summer flooding reduced food availability, forcing most of the waterfowl farther south (*vide* BJ). Small numbers of Tundra Swans were observed in every state except Kentucky. Introduced Trumpeters are now appearing regularly in the Region; this winter small groups were seen in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. Greater White-fronted Geese wandered eastward to Ohio, where singles were reported at Ottawa N.W.R., OH Dec. 5 (EP) and at Miami-Whitewater Dec.



5-Jan. 9 (FH, NK *et al.*). Scattered Ross' Geese were reported in the w. states; the most noteworthy was a rare blue-morph at Smithville, MO Jan. 9 (*fide* BJ). The season's only Brants were seen at Clinton L., IL Jan. 9 (MDe, †R Ch) and in Chicago's Jackson Park Feb. 21-22 (DL, PC).

Throughout the last two-thirds of the season ice reduced puddle duck habitat across most of the Region. Among the few noteworthy reports was a possibly injured Blue-winged Teal at Clinton L., IL Dec. 19 (†RCh) and an Am. Wigeon at Rathbun Res., IA Jan. 16 (RCu). An impressive number of Greater Scaup wintered on s. Lake Michigan. Some 4400 were counted along the Evanston-Chicago lakefront Dec. 2 (LB), and an estimated 2000 were seen off the marina at Hammond, IN Jan. 2 (KB, SB, LH). In addition, a count of 40 Greaters at L. Jacomo, MO Dec. 2 (CH, TBk), was excellent for that location. An imm. ♂ King Eider at the Blackhawk Forest Preserve, Kane, IL Jan. 2-4 (†RN, †AH, †JM, ph.), generated excitement among Chicago-area birders. Harlequin Ducks were scarce; the only report consisted of a female that lingered at Lake Spfld. Jan. 16+ (†DBo). Once again Oldsquaws turned up at numerous inland locations; peak counts included four birds at Lock & Dam #13, Whiteside, IL Dec. 22 (KMc) and four on the Clinton, IA CBC Dec. 22. Inland scoters were also scattered across the Region. Noteworthy were two Black Scoter reports at Cedar L., IA Dec. 1-7 (MPr, m.ob.). Surf Scoters wandered SW to Binder L. in Jefferson City, MO, where three females were seen Dec. 4 (KP). White-wingeds were the most widespread, with small numbers appearing in every state.

Vultures to Shorebirds

Sizeable Black Vulture flocks were confined to traditional sites in Kentucky, where 80 were reported Dec. 18 at Ghent and 56 at East Bend Jan. 1 (LMc). Farther east, a Black Vulture in Hueston Woods S.P., Preble, OH Jan. 8 was unexpected (DDt). Turkey Vultures ranged farther north than usual in Indiana, establishing winter records across the n. tier of counties. An Osprey was in Carroll, IL Dec. 22 (PP, DM) and another wintered near the fish hatchery at Table Rock Res., MO (LRi). Despite extensive ice cover, wintering Bald Eagle populations remained strong across the Region; mid-winter eagle surveys produced 111 in Indiana (*fide* JCs) and 2054 in Missouri (*fide* BJ). The largest among several impressive N. Harrier concentrations consisted of 59 counted in Jasper, IL Dec. 27 (TE). In addition, 42 harriers were seen Dec. 30 in extreme n. Jasper, MO (MRo) and 35 were found in the strip-

mine areas of Ohio and Muhlenberg, KY Dec. 11 (BBC). Some 30 N. Goshawks were counted in 5 states, suggesting a modest winter invasion. Rough-legged Hawks were unevenly distributed; few birds were reported in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa, but good numbers appeared in Missouri and a fine count of 12 was made at Ottawa N.W.R., OH Feb. 6 (EP). Mid-winter eagle surveys yielded four Golden Eagles in Indiana (*fide* JCs) and ten in Missouri (*fide* BJ). Merlin numbers remained above normal throughout the Region. This winter's 14 reports were distributed across all 6 states. Most noteworthy were four Merlins that wintered at Bath, Summit, OH (NI, LK, ph.). Winter Prairie Falcons reports are also increasing, especially e. of the Mississippi R. In addition to expected observations from the w. states, the Ohio, KY bird returned for the 6th consecutive year (*fide* ASm) and another Prairie Falcon was documented at Wolf L., Chicago Dec. 5 (WM).

The Iowa Ruffed Grouse population fared poorly; only one was reported on that state's CBCs (*fide* RS). A ♂ Greater Prairie-Chicken was at the airport in Cherokee, IA Jan. 4+ (†DBi, †TK, ph., †m.ob.); this is the 2nd consecutive year in which singletons have appeared in n.w. Iowa. In addition, more than 100 Greater Prairie-Chickens, with 85 in one flock, were flushed from the Taberville Prairie Conservation Area, MO Feb. 27 (KZ, MRo). A road-kill King



Numbers of wintering Merlins in the region seem to be increasing. Most notable this season were four that wintered at Bath, Ohio, where this one was photographed February 27, 1994. Photograph/Larry Rosche.

Rail, found in Jasper, IL Jan. 19 (TE), provided one of very few winter records for that state. The Region's only Virginia Rail reports also came from Illinois, where two were seen in Will Dec. 18 (JM) and two in Jackson Jan. 18 (CS, TF). Most unexpected were two Com. Moorhens discovered at Wolf L. on Chicago's s. side Jan. 2 (MDa, FD). Good numbers of migrant Sandhill Cranes were seen in w. Ohio, with 87 in Hamilton, Dec. 11 (*fide* NK) and 115 at Ottawa N.W.R., Feb. 6 (EP). An intrepid Ruddy Turnstone tarried at Headlands



Not your typical vagrant, but a species known to wander somewhat in winter, this Greater Prairie-Chicken put in a rare appearance in Cherokee County, northwestern Iowa, in January and February 1994. Photograph/Tom Kent.

Beach S.P., OH Dec. 4-26 (RHs, LRo). Other lingering shorebirds included three Least Sandpipers in Alex, IL Dec. 21 (VKI). The Region's only Purple Sandpiper was reported at Edgewater S.P., OH Dec. 31 (RHs, LRo).

Gulls

A breeding-plumaged Franklin's Gull was at Saylorville Res., IA Dec. 21 (SD) and six early migrants arrived at Burlington, IA Feb. 17 (CFu). The Region's only Little Gulls were seen along Ohio's lakefront: singles at Headlands Beach S.P., Dec. 5 (LRO, RHs) and Eastlake Dec. 21-23 (KM, CH, RHn). The peak Bonaparte's Gull count was 6000 at Headlands Beach S.P., OH Dec. 5 (LRO, RHs). This winter Iowa gullwatchers were treated to two Mew Gulls; a first-year bird was at Red Rock Res., Dec. 19 (†AJ, †RWi, †SF) and an adult was seen at Saylorville Res. the following day (†SD, SG, E&EA). In addition, an ad. Mew Gull was found at Waukegan Harbor, IL Feb. 1 (†DDz). An ad. California Gull, identified at Avon L., OH Feb. 27 (†LRO, †JDu, m.ob.), showed field characters suggesting the large interior race *albertaensis* (*fide* JDu). A second ad. California Gull was seen in Madison, IL Jan 6 (†JVB). Following the pattern established in recent years, Thayer's Gulls wandered far from the Great Lakes, providing records for every state except Kentucky. Iceland Gulls were restricted to 2 states; 15 were reported in Illinois and nine in Ohio. Surprisingly, most of these birds were seen at inland sites. A majority of the Illinois Icelanders were seen away from L. Michigan, and in Ohio inland birds were seen at Garfield Heights Jan. 12 (RHn) and in Cuyahoga Feb. 13 (ES). The expansion of Lesser Black-backed Gulls continued across the Region. Lessers, mostly adults, were reported in every state except Kentucky, with eight in Illinois, three in Indiana, two in Iowa, one in Missouri, and at least eight in Ohio. Glaucous Gulls were exceptionally

common; noteworthy were ten at Eastlake, OH Feb. 27 (JDu, m.ob), nine at R.E.D.A., Jan. 24 (JVB), seven in *Lake*, IN Jan. 2 (KB, SB, LH), six at L. Cal., Feb. 27 (JL), and two at Saylorville Res., IA Dec. 10 (SD). With winter reports from every state except Kentucky, Great Black-backed Gulls continued to proliferate across the Region. Inland reports included an adult at L. Spfld., Jan. 24 (DBo) plus first-year birds at Keokuk, IA Dec. 25 (†RCe) and Winfield Dam, MO Feb. 12 (BR). On L. Michigan seven Great Black-backed were at the Port of Indiana Feb. 27 (JCd, CFi) establishing an all-time-high daily count for the state. The season's only Black-legged Kittiwake appeared on the Cuyahoga R. in Cleveland Feb. 7 (FG, m.ob.).

Owls to Woodpeckers

A family of six Barn Owls was discovered in *Johnson*, IL Dec. 21 (CS, TD, JDe) and dead single birds were reported in *Posey*, IN and near Hardy L., IN in February (*vide* JCs). Snowy Owls staged a major invasion with 32 birds distributed across every state except Kentucky. The main flight was concentrated in the w. states, with 12 in Iowa, ten in Indiana, and six in Illinois. An imm. Snowy wandered to central Missouri, where it was seen s.w. of Sedalia Feb. 24 (DC). The largest wintering Long-eared Owl concentration occurred in n.w. Missouri, where about 40 birds were counted at 3 roosts. The largest roost outside Missouri consisted of 16 Long-eareds in *Fremont*, IA Dec. 18 (*vide* RS). Short-eared Owls were reported in every state, with excellent numbers in Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. Peak counts included: 30 in *Jackson*, IL Dec. 15 (CS), ≤30 in *Cass*, MO at various times Dec. 28–Mar. 5 (JJ, m.ob), 20 in *Jasper*, IL Dec. 27 (TE), and 10–25 in *Steuben*, IN Dec. 11–Jan. 9 (BSI, *et al.*). The season's 20 N. Saw-whet Owls were scattered across every state except Kentucky.

Remarkably, the ♂ *Anna's Hummingbird* that appeared in Columbia, MO last fall was still coming to the Barksdale feeder Jan. 3 (TBk, m.ob). An imm. ♀ *Rufous Hummingbird*, identified by measurements, remained in Murphysboro, IL Oct. 28–Jan. 15 (RD, ph.). Red-headed Woodpeckers wintered throughout the Region; the peak count consisted of 12 at Killdeer Plains, OH Feb. 12 (DO). The Region's highest Yellow-bellied Sapsucker count was 18, seen in Hamilton, OH Dec. 11 (NK).

Flycatchers to Shrikes

Eastern Phoebes lingered in *Sangamon*, IL until Jan. 10 (DBo) and at Mingo N.W.R., MO until Jan. 13 (BL). The only Am. Crow concentration reported consisted of 10,000 at a winter roost in Ames, IA (JDi). Last fall's

Red-breasted Nuthatch invasion produced good winter numbers throughout the Region. The highest concentrations were in s. Illinois and Ohio. Though the brutal winter took a toll on Carolina Wren populations, the devastation wracked during the late 1970s was not duplicated. Most correspondents in the n. states reported reduced numbers, but definite survivors. In concert with other lingering passerines, mid-December House Wrens were reported from 6 Illinois locations. As expected, a few Marsh Wrens were detected during the CBC period. Both kinglets were reasonably common in December, but numbers decreased markedly following the onset of cold weather.

The cleaning of bluebird houses in Kentucky provided vivid evidence of winter's impact on E. Bluebirds; approximately 10% of the houses contained dead bluebirds (*vide* SK). It was a good season for thrushes. Hermits were reported in every state except Indiana and Am. Robins were abundant. Indeed, in central Illinois Bohlen proclaimed "this was the winter of the robin." Every correspondent reported unusually high robin numbers; some counts totaled 1000 birds. Kentucky's second *Varied Thrush* was seen in w. *Oldham* Dec. 19–20 (†JK, †DN, KC). A *Varied Thrush* arrived at the Scheib feeder in Iowa City, IA Jan. 15 and remained through the period (†JSc, m.ob.). As expected, a few Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers lingered into December; however, a midwinter thrasher at the Savage feeder in Marshalltown, IA Jan. 8, was unexpected. Tardy Am. Pipits were recorded at 2 Illinois sites: Rend L. where seven were seen Dec. 18 (CS) and one at *Alexander* Dec. 21 (MDe). Northern Shrikes were widespread, with reports from every state except Kentucky; the highest count was made in Iowa where 12 were observed. Loggerhead Shrikes were recorded in every state, and one hearty individual was found as far n. as Killdeer Plains, OH Feb. 5 (J&KS, †JDu, SU).

Warblers to Buntings

The mild December contributed to the appearance of an impressive 11 warbler species for the winter; the vast majority of these were not seen after cold weather arrived in late December. An Orange-crowned Warbler, seen s.e. of Columbia, MO Dec. 11 & 18 (†PMc), provided one of few winter records for that state. Also unexpected was a Nashville Warbler, discovered at Iowa City, IA Dec. 19 (†JF, †JSc). Cape May Warblers appeared at 2 locations: A female was seen in Spfld., Dec. 19 (†DBo) and two wintered in *St Louis*, MO (AMc, BR). The late fall ♂ Black-throated Blue Warbler reported in Garfield Heights, OH remained until Dec.

5 (ph. M&NH). A fair number of Yellow-rumped Warblers lingered in the s. states, especially during early winter. The winter's rarest warbler was a ♂ *Black-throated Gray* that visited the Turner's feeding station, showing a penchant for suet, in *Cuyahoga*,



A rare visitor to Ohio was this male Black-throated Gray Warbler at Independence, Cuyahoga County, December 14, 1993. Photograph/Larry Rosche.

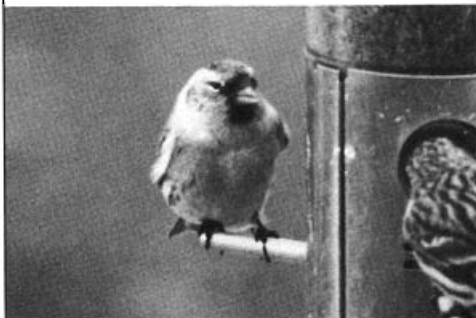
OH Dec. 11–18 (AT, †RHn, LRo, ph., m.ob.). The only Pine Warbler was seen in Madisonville, KY Feb. 21–Mar. 1 (JHn). Late Palm Warblers appeared at North Chagrin Res., OH (†KMe) and at Lisle Arboretum, *Du Page*, IL Dec. 19 (†PT). A Black-and-White Warbler was seen in Spfld., Dec. 10 (VKI). An exceptionally late Ovenbird was seen in Columbia, MO Nov. 27 (BE). Two Com. Yellowthroats were at the Lawrenceburg power plant, IN Dec. 18 (PWh, JB) and singles were found in Iowa at Montrose Dec. 26 (FM) and Forney L., Jan. 2 (DR). The identification of an Indigo Bunting at Rend L., IL Dec. 18 was confirmed by call note (†KMn).

Sparrows to Finches

Remarkably, four different early-winter Dickcissels were recorded in s. Illinois: *Clinton* Dec. 26 (TF), *Sangamon* Dec. 31 (DBo), *Franklin* Jan. 9 (TF), and *Saline* Dec. 16–Jan. 17 (JDe). American Tree Sparrows were unusually common across the Region; peak counts included 1220 in *Appanoose*, IA Feb. 26 (RCu) and 320 at Ottawa N.W.R., OH Jan. 2 (EP). Winter Chipping Sparrows were recorded in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Ohio. A Vesper Sparrow, seen in Chicago's Jackson Park Dec. 5, provided an exceptionally late local record. Three different Lincoln's Sparrows were reported in s. Illinois and one wintered at Burlington, IA (CFu). The larger *Zonotrichia* sparrows may be in trouble; correspondents in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio reported fewer White-crowned Sparrows than usual and in *Cass*, IA, Harris' Sparrow numbers were down by 60% (MPe). East of the Mississippi R. single Harris' Sparrows appeared in *Clinton*, IL Dec. 17–19 (MS), and in Mooresville, IN Jan. 10+ (†BSp, ph.). Lapland Longspurs were widespread; the peak count was 2000

in *Franklin*, IA Feb. 20 (TK, RCe). Four Lapland's ranged E to *Tuscarawus*, OH, where they were seen Dec. 31 with two Snow Buntings (ES). Smith's Longspurs were reported only in Missouri, where 15 were found in rural *Cass* Feb. 6 (JG *et al.*) and one was at the Bilby Ranch, *Nodaway* Feb. 18 (KG, BJ). Out-of-range Yellow-headed Blackbirds appeared in *De Witt*, IL Dec. 19–Jan. 9 (RP, MDe) and in *Springdale*, OH Dec. 16–Jan. 4 (*fide* NK). In concert with recent expansions into Missouri and Iowa, Illinois' second **Great-tailed Grackle**, an ad. female, appeared in *Murphysboro*, IL Jan. 23 (†TF, †CS).

Though winter finches were present in the best numbers in recent years, most correspondents were disappointed with the invasion. Common Redpolls and Evening Grosbeaks were the dominant invading species; the hoped for Pine Grosbeaks failed to appear. Modest to low numbers of Purple Finches appeared in every state; the peak count was 40 at Hooper Game Area, IA Jan. 29 (JSi). Despite the winter finch invasion there were only 3 Red Crossbill reports: 2 in Iowa (involving three birds) and about 20 birds w. of Popular Bluff, MO Feb. 6 (JG). White-winged Crossbills were equally scarce, with four birds at 2 Illinois locations and one–three that visited the Rienschneider feeder in South Bend, IN Dec. 1–Jan. 18. The dominant winter finch was



At Braidwood, Illinois, January 1, 1994, this male Common Redpoll (feeding with Pine Siskins) was one of the hundreds that invaded the region during this season. Photograph/ Joe B. Milosevich.

the Com. Redpoll, which was recorded in every state except Missouri. Maximum counts included 500 near L. James, IN Feb. 20 (BSI), 300 at *Orland*, IN Feb. 27 (Haw), 250 at *Clinton L.*, IL Jan. 29 (RCh), and 125 at *Hicksville*, OH Feb. 16 (MA). A bird showing characteristics consistent with Hoary Redpoll was carefully described as it visited a Du Page, IL feeding station Feb. 6 (MM, †ASK, BBx). Modest Pine Siskin counts were made in every state; the peak tally was 180 at *Caesar Creek*, OH Jan. 12 (LG). Following passage of last fall's Evening Grosbeak wave, a few winter birds were observed in every state except Missouri. The

high counts, which were concentrated e. of the Mississippi R., included 150 at *Mohican S.P.*, OH Jan. 29 (DDt), 110 in *Saline*, IL Feb. 3 (JDe), and 42 at *Murray*, KY Jan. 1 (WB).

Corrigenda

The nesting Golden-crowned Kinglets in *Medina*, OH during Summer 1993 (AB 47:1114) were reported as providing that state's 2nd confirmed breeding record. That statement should have read: provided Ohio's 2nd confirmed breeding record within the Middlewestern Prairie Region.

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Central Southern Region

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Following three consecutive winters of mild conditions, temperatures across the Region dipped to near normal levels this season. Rainfall in many areas exceeded seasonal norms and caused substantial flooding, but the meteorological event of the season was clearly mid-February's severe ice storm. It subjected vegetation in many northern sectors of the Region to lethal loads of frozen precipitation. A week after the storm, for instance, Memphis still resembled a war zone, with fully one-quarter of its large trees either felled or severely damaged. Effects on local avian populations remain unknown, but may have been considerable. Some important records will not be found in this report, primarily because necessary data were omitted by those submitting the records. Observers are especially reminded to include the dates of sightings with their re-cords; reference should also be made to the county/parish in which the sightings took place. Many thanks to the many observers, cited below, who carefully documented their sightings. Abbreviations: p.a. (*pending acceptance by the state bird records committee*).

Loons to Night-Herons

Santa Rosa, FL harbored a Red-throated Loon Dec. 12 (RAD), the only report of the season. A Pacific Loon in *Chicot*, AR Feb. 8 & 20 ((DRS) was the third locally; another appeared on the Gulf Shores CBC, AL Jan. 1 (RRR; p.a. A.R.B.C.). Sixty Com. Loons in *Baxter/Norfork* Jan. 8 (DM, JG) represented an "unprecedented number" (MP) in Arkansas during winter, while concentrations of 250 Horned Grebes in *Benton* Feb. 20 (MM) and 32 Eared Grebes in *Jefferson* Jan. 6 (LP, DZ) were similarly characterized. Eared Grebes were also present in *Livinston* and *Lafourche*, LA, while large numbers of Horned Grebes continued to winter on impoundments in Tennessee, perhaps partly explaining why this species "seem[s] to be in a continual decline" (RAD) in n. Florida. A Red-necked Grebe was noted in *Rankin*, MS Dec. 11 (TLS *et al.*); well-described and sketched, another on the Reelfoot CBC in *Lake*, TN Dec. 21 (JRW,