Dickcissels were widely dispersed and present in good numbers in Wisconsin, as evidenced by reports from about 30 counties, some where they have not been found in years. Henslow's Sparrows were present in both states in surprisingly good numbers, as indicated by sightings in about 15 Wisconsin and 3 Minnesota counties. By contrast, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows were reported less in Minnesota, with sightings in 4 counties. In Wisconsin, >seven were present in Crex Meadows Wildlife Area during the season. After the major Orchard Oriole migration in Wisconsin this spring, it was not surprising that they were sighted in many counties, with frequent nesting. Red Crossbills were found in the more n. counties in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. Even more significant was the appearance of a few to a dozen birds in several c. and s. counties in both states during June and even late July. Good numbers of White-winged Crossbills were also found in n.e. Minnesota and n.e. Wisconsin. Tardy Pine Siskins in s. Wisconsin included Grant June 1 and Dane June 1-3. Evening Grosbeaks nested in Minnesota's Cass (MN).

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# Middlewestern Prairie Region

#### **KENNETH J. BROCK**

Following the cold late spring, the Region experienced a cool, locally wet, summer. Most encouragingly, these conditions resulted in a generally favorable breeding season, especially for grassland species. Several correspondents speculated that the success of the prairie species might be attributed—at least in part—to renewal of the federal Conservation Reserve Program. The news was also bright for a few wetland species of concern, including bitterns and moorhens. On the down side, local flooding, especially in Iowa, took a toll on Piping Plovers and Least Terns.

The season was flavored by some unexpected breeding warblers, numerous late spring migrants, a few gull surprises, and a summer crossbill invasion.

Once again several correspondents reported a dearth of field reports.

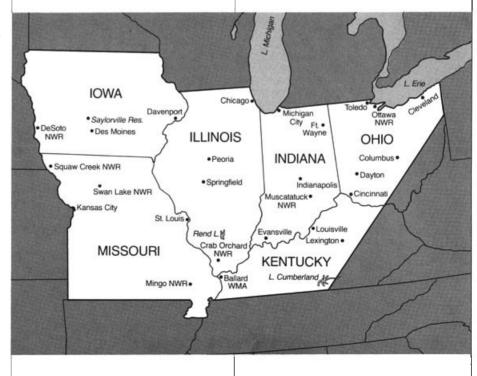
Abbreviations: H.B.S.P. (Headlands Beach S.P., OH), M.P. Ponds (Midwest Power

Ponds, formerly I.P.L. Ponds, Pottawattamie, Co., IA), L. Cal. (L. Calumet, Chicago); R.E.D.A. (Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, St. Charles, MO), S.C.R., (Squaw Creek N.W.R., MO); Spfld. (Springfield, IL).

#### **Loons to Ibises**

Summering Com. Loons were more common that normal, especially in Iowa where eight were reported. The Region's largest concentration of breeding Pied-billed Grebes was at S.C.R., where 32 nests were recorded (JHi). Among the unexpected summer grebes were a basic plumaged Red-necked, on Anderson L., IA July 4 (HZ, †MPr), an Eared at S.C.R., June 4 (DE), and three Westerns on Bilby L., MO June 1 & 3 (KG, DE).

It was a most encouraging breeding season for Am. Bitterns. In Hamilton, OH, 8 nests were found and at least 2 of 4 eggs hatched by June 24 (PWt). Additional breeding reports included a nest discovered at the Prairie-Chicken Sanctuary, Jasper, IL, where 4 eggs were found July 1 (SS), and an adult and three immatures at a Warrick, IN, strip mine Aug. 4 (JCp, ML). It was a superlative season for Least Bitterns, with nesting reported in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Missouri. By far the most impressive single report consisted of 185 nests, and 476 individuals, at S.C.R. (JHi). Following the spring egret incursion, considerable expansion in both extralimital numbers and new breeding sites occurred. Highlights included: 1200 Great Egrets at Clarence Cannon N.W.R., MO, late in the season (BT), 70 Snowy



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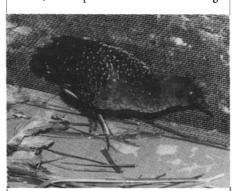
Egrets in Madison, IL July 31 (KMc), 80 Little Blue Herons at a new Horseshoe Lake W.M.A., IL, site (VK), and 100 Cattle Egrets at a new colony near Lawrenceville, IL (TE, VK). On May 5 an estimated >750 Black-crowned Night-Heron nests were occupied at the traditional L. Cal. colony (WM). An impressive 12 White-faced Ibis were at Sheldon Basin, IA June 27 (†MPr), while farther east two lingered in *St. Clair*, IL, from May 23–July (KMc).

## **Waterfowl to Cranes**

In early July five young Trumpeter Swans hatched in a nest w. of Ames, Boone, IA (JD), suggesting that the upper Great Lakes reintroduction programs are meeting with success. Surprisingly, summer period Greater White-fronted Geese were reported at 2 locations (both singletons): Swan Lake N.W.R., MO June 28 and July 8 & 16 (BO), and Dickinson, IA July 20 (LS). In June an impressive count of >200 Wood Ducks, including eight immatures, was made in s.w. Jackson, IL (BD). Opportunistic Blue-winged Teal nested farther south than normal, with one young seen in s.w. Jackson, IL (BD), and fledglings in Warrick, IN (JCp). For the 3rd consecutive year a ? Gadwall summered in extreme s. Indiana near Chandler, Warrick (†ML). Summer Hooded Mergansers were reported in every state except Kentucky, with breeding observed in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. It was an unusual season for Com. Mergansers, with singletons reported June 4 on the Holt/Andrew line, MO (DE, ME), June 4 on Spirit L., IA (ET), and June 12 at McGinnis Slough, IL (WS). Even more amazing was the June 7 discovery of a brood of seven Com. Mergansers on the Grand R., Lake, OH (JP), providing that state's first breeding record.

A failed nesting attempt at John J. Duffy Forest Preserve (CT) almost provided Illinois' first successful Osprey nesting in 40 years. Ospreys had better luck in Kentucky, where 3 nests at the Land Between the Lakes yielded five young (CP, HCh, JE et al.). Mississippi Kites remained widespread in the Region, with reports from every state except Ohio. Ten adults were observed at 2 s. Illinois locations (VK), and an adult found in Warrick, IN June 25 († Cp) provided a first county record. Though nesting was not confirmed, ≥two Mississippi Kites were seen repeatedly in the Des Moines, IA, area (†PA, PWI), and another was photographed at Ledges S.P., IA July 25 (†PA, RA). Successful nesting was reported in St. Louis, MO, where a pair fledged one youngster (RK). In contrast, Mississippi Kites numbers were reportedly down in Kentucky (CP). Bald Eagle nest counts included 15 in Indiana (JCs), 45 in Iowa (BEh), 23 in Missouri (fide JW), and 33 in Ohio (The Plain Dealer). Northeast Indiana's first N. Harrier nest in decades was discovered near Columbia City July 19 (JMc). After being missed by spring birders, a pair of Swainson's Hawks was found in n.e. Illinois at Kloempten's Marsh, McHenry, June 26 (DF).

It was a poor breeding season for several gallinaceous species. An Illinois Department of Natural Resources survey revealed a 37% decrease in that state's Ring-necked Pheasant population since 1995 (LD); in Iowa Dinsmore deemed the Gray Partridge population as "way down;" and in Ohio Rosche described N. Bobwhites as "beat-up after last winter." Surprisingly, ad. Black Rails were discovered at 2 different locations. One was observed at Matanzas Prairie, Mason, IL June 12-26 (KR) and another was accidentally caught in a snake trap at Oak Ridge Prairie, Lake, IN Aug. 5 (DBe, m.ob., ph). The only report of successful King Rail breeding came from the Jasper, IL, Prairie-Chicken Sanctuaries, where broods of ≤nine young were noted (SS). Good King Rail numbers were also reported elsewhere, with 16 additional birds in Illinois, one in Indiana, one in Iowa, and a pair in Missouri. A calling



Caught in a snake trap but released unharmed was this adult Black Rail at Oak Ridge Prairie Park, Indiana, August 5, 1996. Photograph/Joseph G. Koss.



Virginia Rail at Kingsbury Wildlife Management Area, Indiana, June 3, 1996. Photograph/Dick Plank.

Virginia Rail heard at S.C.R., June 4 (DE) was unexpected. After several dismal breeding seasons, Com. Moorhens appear to be flourishing. Nesting was reported in Illinois (though flooding destroyed some nests), Indiana, Iowa, and Missouri. The number of breeding-period Sandhill Cranes present in the Region is also on the rise; nesting evidence came from 3 Illinois locations, and summer birds were reported in Iowa and n.e. Indiana.

## **Shorebirds**

Reports on Iowa's nesting Piping Plovers were not encouraging. Four birds were seen at the M.P. Ponds (a traditional breeding area), but nesting was not reported. And although 13 young were counted at Port Neal June 19, most of them perished in a 10-inch rain (JD). A migrant Piping Plover was at Metzger Marsh, OH July 20-21 (†CH, RHa, SW). Following the recent Black-necked Stilt expansion in the Region, there was only one record this summer: five Stilts were reported at Combs L., MO, in late July (HS). American Avocets were generally sparse, though a group of 18 at Rathbun Res., IA July 19 (ABs) was noteworthy. Both yellowlegs were scarce, with peak counts of two Greaters and 89 Lessers. The season's largest Willet count consisted of 18 at Michigan City, IN July 6 (JMc). A remarkable nine Marbled Godwits were seen along Indiana's lakefront, where the peak count was three at Michigan City Harbor July 6 (JMc). A migrant Red Knot at Metzger Marsh, OH July 13 (RHa, SW) was early, and six White-rumped Sandpipers in Massac, IL June 11 (VK) were late. Most surprising was an alternate-plumaged Dunlin, still showing a black belly, near Swan L., KY July 13 (HCh, CP). Migrant Stilt Sandpiper numbers were low; the peak count was 13 at Heyworth, IL July 20 (MF). The Region's only sizable Short-billed Dowitcher flock consisted of 135 at Ottawa N.W.R., OH July 7 (EP et al.). A late-May Wilson's Phalarope nest at Harrier Marsh, IA, failed, though a subsequent nesting may have occurred as a female was seen 100 yards from the initial nest site June 19 (JD). Single non-breeding Wilson's Phalaropes were reported at East St. Louis, IL July 4 (RCh) and Metzger Marsh, OH July 13 (KMe, RHa, SW).

#### **Gulls to Terns**

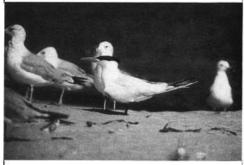
Following the recent pattern, small numbers of summer-period Laughing and Franklin's gulls were scattered across the Region. The easternmost record of the latter was at Caesar Cr., OH July 31 (LG).



Adult Franklin's Gull at Caesar Creek, Ohio, July 31, 1996. Photograph/Larry Gara.

For the 2nd time in 3 years a summerperiod Black-headed Gull was found in n.w. Iowa. From June 23-July 20, a breeding-plumaged adult was seen near Jemmerson Slough, Dickinson (†LS, †JF, †MPr, ET). This location is only a few miles from the site where a recently fledged juvenile was discovered in 1994 (fide JD). Are the gulls conquering our planet? Marcisz assessed the number of Ring-billeds at the L. Cal. colony as consisting of "thousands," with the first fledglings appearing July 27. An estimated 150-200 Ring-billeds were at the Meinking Marsh, IA, colony June 15 (JJ) and the appearance of numerous mid-summer juveniles along the Indiana lakefront suggests that local colonies are thriving. In addition to burgeoning breeding gull populations, several Arctic gulls provided summer records for the Region; a Glaucous Gull was at H.B.S.P., June 1 (RHn) and a first-year Black-legged Kittiwake appeared on the Indiana lakefront at Miller Beach June 1 (JO, †BEt) and at Michigan City Harbor June 6 & 9 (†DP).

Indiana's first confirmed Royal Tern was discovered at Michigan City Harbor June 29 (†JMc, CF, JCd, †m.ob., ph.). A count of 1100 Com. Terns at Metzger Marsh, OH July 28 was impressive for this early date. The nesting report for Least Terns was mixed. The good news occurred in Illinois, where breeding occurred at 2



Furnishing a first confirmed state record was this adult Royal Tern (consorting with Ringbilled Gulls) at Michigan City, Indiana, June 29, 1996. Photograph/John K. Cassady.

inland locations: >26 adults, eight chicks, and four fledglings were at Gorham (BD), and 50 adults, plus young, were in s.e. Massac (BL). These colonies are in addition to the 60 adults and 40 immatures at established sites along the Mississippi R. in Alexander (VK, BL, et al.). Also quite encouraging was a record 25 pairs that attempted nesting at Indiana's Gibson L. (fide ICs). Least Tern reports from Iowa were considerably darker, where eight adults were reported at the M.P. Ponds, but without evidence of nesting (JD), and all nests at Port Neal colony were destroyed by a 10-inch rain (BH). A dozen Least Terns were counted in Fulton, KY July 27, but nesting was not reported (HCh, CP). Good numbers (100-400) of migrant Black Terns were observed in Iowa and Missouri, but nesting was not reported. Breeding did occur in Illinois, where a pair was seen in Wauconda in May and June (EW), and at Deer Grove Forest Preserve, where an adult and immature were present July 10-20 (Carolyn Fields, J. McDaniel). Indiana's last Black Tern nesting site was apparently abandoned this year (fide ICs).

### **Cuckoos to Vireos**

Most correspondents deemed both cuckoos quite scarce. The Region's only Barn Owl report consisted of nesting (two fledged) in n.w. Marion, IL July 9 (TE). In contrast to last year's extremely successful nesting season, no Barn Owls were reported in Iowa, where Dinsmore hypothesized that the severe winter might have negatively impacted the breeding population. A downy Short-eared Owl, discovered near Columbia City July 10 (JMc), provided the first modern nesting record for n.e. Indiana. The 134 Whip-poor-will territories counted at Sand Ridge State Forest, IL June 20 & 25 (RBj) were noteworthy. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were relatively scarce in Illinois (VK), but as many as 30 frequented a Hanson, KY, feeder during the summer (KD). Redheaded Woodpecker numbers were down in both Illinois and along L. Erie in Ohio. Two young Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers fledged from a nest at Fort Atkinson, IA, in late June (L. Reis, fide DCa).

The list of late flycatcher reports included an Olive-sided in *Dubuque*, IA June 10 (MPr), plus Yellow-bellieds at Jackson Park, Chicago, June 11 (PC) and Ames, IA June 16 (MK). A singing Alder Flycatcher, heard repeatedly at Lacey-Keosauqua S.P., IA July 13 (RCu), provided one of few recent summer records for the state. Provocative Least Flycatcher reports included one at Buck Creek S.P., OH June 23 (DO), a calling

bird near Aldrick, Polk, MO July 16 (JHa), and a male at Wadsworth Savanna, Lake, IL July 25 (SD). Four W. Kingbirds were seen in East St. Louis, IL July 3-4 (KM, m.ob.), and the LaPorte, IN, nest failed this year (CF). Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were unusually common this summer in s.w. and c. Missouri (RF). Several state compilers noted low Purple Martin numbers and a poor nesting season; the only sizable migration flock was >300 at L. Shelbyville, IL July 27 (RCh). In contrast, Tree Swallows had widespread nesting success in Missouri (fide JW). Peak Bank Swallow counts included 1250 at Metzger Marsh, OH July 21 (RHa, SW) and 1000 at Port Neal, IA July 27 (BH). Cliff Swallows expanded to several new locations in Illinois (fide VK), and an estimated 1000 nests were still present in the Highway 17 bridge colony near Saylorville Res., IA (BEn). Five Fish Crows were seen at L. Taneycomo, MO July 1 (JHa) and two were inland at Mascoutah, IL July 24 (KMc), suggesting that the Regional expansion continues. In w. Kentucky, however, Fish Crows were deemed less numerous than in previous years (CP).

Red-breasted Nuthatches, a rare breeder in Ohio, nested in Hinckely, where >two young fledged about July 4 (NK). Brown Creepers nested at 3 sites in North Chagrin, OH (KMe), and two were discovered at Pokagan S.P., IN June 11 (Haw). Additionally, two singing Brown Creepers were seen along the Little Sioux R., Clay, IA June 5 (LS); this location is outside the normal Iowa breeding range. The summer's only Bewick's Wrens included a singing male in Chatham, IL July 19 (DBo) and two at Yellowood State Forest June 23 (JHv). It was an excellent summer for Sedge Wrens, with reports from every state except Kentucky, plus widespread nesting; the peak count was 16 at 3 locations in Palos/Orland Park, IL, in early June (WS). A Veery, found in Chicago's Jackson Park June 20 (PC), was certainly out of place. Most surprising was an Am. Pipit at H.B.S.P., June 8 (RHn), which likely constitutes the first June record for Ohio. Loggerhead Shrike numbers declined a bit in Iowa and Missouri, and a pair nested near Hickman, KY (CP). Bell's Vireos had a great summer, with multiple reports from every state except Kentucky and Missouri. The peak count, by a wide margin, consisted of 51 found in Warrick, IN (JCp). In Iowa, lingering Philadelphia Vireos were detected June 1 in both Clay (ET) and Kossuth (MK).

### **Warblers to Finches**

The cold spring led to numerous late records and may have contributed to the

presence of an unusual number of summering northern warblers in the Region. Nesting Nashville Warblers, discovered in Summit, OH June 13 (NK, SZ), provided that state's 3rd breeding record. A Nashville also lingered at Algona, IA, until June 5 (MK), and a singing male at Pokagon S.P., June 21 (†Haw) provided Indiana's first mid-summer record. Four territorial & Magnolia Warblers were found in Shades S.P., IN; this is the 3rd consecutive year in which Magnolias have summered there (AB). An ultra-tardy & Yellowrumped Warbler was seen in Chicago's Jackson Park June 23 (†PC). Black-throated Green Warblers are becoming established summer residents in the Region. This season, five males were found in Yellowood State Forest, IN, in mid-June (JHv); three males were in Lowden-Miller State Forest, IL June 23 (DJ); and one was ın the Indiana Dunes July 14 (SB). A ♀ Blackburnian Warbler was seen in Yellowood State Forest, IN, in mid-June (JHv) and, for the 2nd consecutive summer, a pair was present in Indiana Dunes S.P., June 22 (JCd, JMc). Adding even more peculiarity to the strange warbler season was the appearance of a singing  $\delta$ Bay-breasted at H.B.S.P., June 23, and a 3 Blackpoll at the same location June 16 & 23 (RHn). Despite the traumatic spring migration, Cerulean Warblers appeared to have had a successful nesting season, with good numbers in Illinois (fide VK) and eight counted June 23 at Middle Cr. Park, KY (LMc). Very late Mourning Warblers were reported in Jackson Park, Chicago, June 12 (PC) and at Springfield, MO June 11 (LRz). Also quite tardy was a ♀ Wilson's Warbler at Sangamon L., IL June 4 (DBo). For the 4th consecutive year, Canada Warblers appeared in Drury Mincy W.M.A., MO; this year a singing male was found June 3-4 (BB).

Blue Grosbeaks continued their northward expansion, with reports from every state except Missouri. A pair of Blue Grosbeaks in Campbell, KY June 12 (FR) was noteworthy. Following last spring's invasion, a & Lazuli Bunting lingered in Clay, IA, until June 1 & 2 (†LS, †JF). The Region was awash with Dickcissels; this prairie species was both widespread and unusually numerous. Noteworthy reports included 312 in Warrick, IN (JCp), 129 nests at the Jasper, IL, Prairie-Chicken Sanctuaries (SS), >80 reported in Ohio, and 20-30 in Clark, KY July 4 & 22 (FR). In Rockford, IL, two & Clay-colored Sparrows were observed calling from the same spruce tree (June and July), and a third male was seen in Rockton, IL June 30 (DW) A Vesper Sparrow was seen in

Greene, OH June 9 (DO) and a very outof-place Vesper was at H.B.S.P., June 1 (LRo, RHn). Both Grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows fared quite well. Peak Grasshopper counts included 29 males in n.w. Jackson, IL June 15 (BD), and 22 males at Matthieson S.P., IL June 2 (C&JMc). Henslow's Sparrows apparently took advantage of the widespread damp, weedy fields created by the heavy spring rains, and expanded to many new nesting sites. Henslow's were deemed plentiful in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Missouri. Among the unexpected Zonotrichia were a White-throated Sparrow at H.B.S.P., June 29-July 13 (RHn, LRo), and Iowa's first summer White-crowned Sparrow record at Cedar Rapids June 23 (†RBr). Dark-eyed Juncos nested in Breckville, OH (DCh), providing the south-westernmost nesting record for the state. A season highlight was an unprecedented summer Red Crossbill incursion in Iowa. The ten adults and juveniles that first appeared at Iowa City July 13 (†TK) proved to be the vanguard of a major invasion. In the final tally, >65 Red Crossbills were scattered across 6 widely dispersed counties in the n.e. half of Iowa. The peak count was 20 at Postville July 16-21 (G. Looney, fide DCa). Remarkably, a 9 and two imm. Red Crossbills pressed southwestward to Raytown, MO (a Kansas City suburb), where they were present July 16-21 (HCx, JG). A sprinkling of Pine Siskins was also reported in Iowa (eight total) during the summer.

## Addenda

Two updates from the Illinois Ornithological Rarities Committee: An ad. & Black-headed Grosbeak, seen May 10, 1996, in Downers Grove, IL, by Fisher, was accepted. The juv. Pomarine Jaeger reported at L. Spfld., Sept. 8, 1995 (*AFN* 50:62) was rejected.

#### Corrigendum

The statement "The Summer Tanager in Hart, KY Sept. 19 provided a new late departure date for that state," in the fall 1995 summary (*AFN* 50:64) is grossly inaccurate. A November record exists.

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