

being more common in s. Michigan than in the past few years.

CORRIGENDUM

Delete the Spring 1997 (*Field Notes* 51:872) Ross's Goose reports in Michigan from *Huron* Mar. 23 and *Muskegon* Apr. 14; documentation was not submitted to support the sightings.

Cited Observers (state compilers in bold):

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midwestern prairie region



KENNETH J. BROCK

This season numerous correspondents attributed birding quality to El Niño; others blamed this global phenomenon for everything from allergies to viruses. El Niño or not, the Midwestern Prairie Region experienced a very unusual winter. December temperatures were cool, but January and February brought April-like weather to the Region. In central Indiana, Alan Bruner noted that having to clean insects off his windshield was a rare treat for January. Even more extraordinary for January was the sight of a Yellow-breasted Chat feeding on bees in Chicago!

Virtually all water was open for the last two-thirds of the season. Winter precipitation levels varied across the Region; February was snowless in Chicago, but Louisville received a hefty 22+ inches from a storm that passed through February 4. Bob Danley suggested that the weather pattern was remarkably similar to the strong El Niño winter of 1982–1983.

The mild conditions and open water enticed scores of fall migrants to dally in the

Region. Others simply spent the winter. Brad Jacobs explained the dearth of American Robins wintering in Texas (to a puzzled Texan) by simply noting that they had all remained in Missouri. Taking advantage of the “early spring,” many migrants also headed north in February. Several correspondents concluded that the winter of 1997–1998, with its late departures, early arrivals, and comfortable birding conditions, was the most memorable ever. Indeed, there were far more birds present than in typical years. In January, Jim Haw found 101 species in northern Indiana (his previous maximum was 80), and a late February team count in northwest Indiana found 77 species in one day (previous maximum less than 50). Several observers were less sanguine about the season; in central Illinois, H. David Bohlen noted that following the departure of the December stragglers, this was one of the most boring winter seasons ever.

In addition to many more birds than normal, the season yielded great loons, excellent grebes, a bevy of shorebirds, and a dozen warbler species. With the mild tem-



Astoundingly, Iowa had visits by two adult Ross's Gulls this season. This one was at Red Rock Reservoir in the central part of the state on December 13, 1997. Photograph/ Reid I. Allen



A second for Indiana was this Mountain Bluebird at Lake Monroe on January 31, 1998. Photograph/ Alan Bruner

peratures the normal "dead of winter" gull build-up did not occur; however, gull diversity, highlighted by two Ross's Gulls in Iowa, remained high. In addition, a fine contingent of western species graced the Region, with the likes of two Say's Phoebes, a Mountain Bluebird, a Varied Thrush invasion, and a Lark Bunting. Finally, a February road-kill Sooty or Bridled Tern in Indianapolis served to keep the El Niño mystique alive.

Abbreviations: H.B.S.P (*Headlands Beach State Park, OH*); Jax.P. (*Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront*); L. Cal. (*Lake Calumet, Chicago*); R.E.D.A (*Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO*), Spfld. (*Springfield, IL*).

LOONS THROUGH HERONS

It was a good winter for loons. December Red-throated Loons were reported in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky; birds in the 2 latter states lingered into January. The most persistent Red-throated lingered at the Port of Indiana and was seen regularly through Feb. 1 (GW, m.ob.). In addition, two Pacific Loons spent most of the winter on L. Monroe, IN; the fall immature remained until Jan. 1 (†DWh, †RHe, m.ob.) and an adult was present from Dec. 19 through Mar. 7 (DWh, J&SH, m.ob.). Grebes were also more numerous than normal, with excellent numbers of Pied-billeds across the Region and wintering Eareds in 3 states. The only Red-necked Grebes were at L. Monroe, IN, where two were seen Dec. 4–31 (J&SH, †DWh, ph.). Single W. Grebes appeared at W. Okoboji, IA, Dec. 12–13 (ET, LS) and Jan. 9 at Jax.P. (PC). Clark's Grebes were discovered at Carlyle L., IL, Dec. 2 (†KL) and at Diamond L. Park, IA, Dec. 13–14 (RA, †PA, ph. †m.ob.).

American White Pelicans were recorded in every state except Ohio; the peak count was 55 at Chautauqua N.W.R., IL, Dec. 5 (R&SB). Taking advantage of the mild season, an Am. Bittern wintered at Cuyahoga Valley W.M.A. (P. Motz, *vide* LRo). Great Egrets were widespread, with reports from all the n. states except Iowa. The northernmost mid-winter record consisted of three at Sandusky Bay, OH, Jan. 25 (TB). Black-crowned Night-Heron reports included three in Hammond, IN, Dec. 27 (JB et al.) and a remarkable 17 in Toledo, OH, Jan. 25 (TB).

WATERFOWL

Winter period Tundra Swans appeared in every state; records in s. reaches of the Region included one at Green R., KY, Jan.

16 (DR) and five at Mingo N.W.R., MO, Feb. 1 (SDK). Peak counts among the flourishing Greater White-fronted Goose population included 1000+ at Reelfoot N.W.R., KY, Feb. 19 (BPB), 635 at Carlyle L., IL, Dec. 22 (KMc), and 600 at Spfld. Feb. 5 (DBo). The burgeoning Snow Goose population was also well represented, with reports from all 6 states and a record count of 220,000 at Swan Lake N.W.R., MO, Jan. 29 (BO). Ross's Geese were also plentiful, with reports from every state except Indiana and Ohio; highlights included a peak count of nine at the Long Pt. Unit of Reelfoot Lake N.W.R., KY, Feb. 25 (BPB) and a possible blue morph at Spfld. Jan. 26 (†DBo).

Open water allowed many dabblers to winter well n. of their normal range, resulting in the observation of virtually all puddle duck species in all 6 states. Bay ducks were also widespread; notable counts included 30,000 Canvasbacks at Montrose, IA, Dec. 22 (SDm) and 300 Greater Scaup on L. Barkley, KY, Feb. 24 (DR). An ad. female King Eider appeared briefly at Buffington Harbor, IN, Jan. 17 (RHu, †JCd, JO, †JMc, †m.ob.). The season's only Harlequin Ducks were seen on s. L. Michigan, where at least one male, one female, and an imm. male were noted along the Chicago and Indiana lakefronts. Small numbers of Oldsquaw and all 3 scoter sp. were scattered across the Region. An ad. male Barrow's Goldeneye was seen at the Chicago Botanic Garden Feb. 21 (†WWR, AW). Common Merganser numbers were down on L. Michigan, but excellent inland counts were logged at Red Rock Res., IA, Dec. 30, where up to 7000 were counted (SDm); on Truman L., MO, where 2500 were estimated Jan. 19 (MR); in LaSalle, IL, where 2000 were found Jan. 11 (C&JM); and in Grundy, IL, where 2000 were present Dec. 27 (JMi).

VULTURES TO SHOREBIRDS

The balmy winter enticed Turkey Vultures to wander farther north than usual. Representative of this pattern were three birds seen at Red Haw S.P., IA, Feb. 4 (D. Garner, *vide* BE). Peak Bald Eagle counts included 2009 in Missouri's statewide mid-winter survey Jan. 5–9 (*vide* JW); 380 at Savanna Army Depot, IL, no date given (AA et al.); 156 at Red Rock Res., IA, Jan. 16 (ABe); and 112 on Indiana's mid-winter survey (JCs). It was a fine season for N. Harriers, with counts of 37 at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL, Feb. 22 (JWa); 35 in Seneca, OH, Jan. 25 (TB); and 20–30 over grasslands of the Ayrshire mine, IN, Dec.

16–25 (DA). The Region's ten N. Goshawks were in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. Rough-legged Hawks appeared in modest numbers across the Region. Golden Eagles were reported in typical winter numbers; the southernmost records included an adult in Bernheim Forest, KY, Jan. 17 (DO), an immature at the same location Dec. 19 (BPB, RCa) and Jan. 21 (DR), and an immature at the Leach W.M.A., MO, Feb. 21 (†SSu). The Region's 22 Merlin reports were typical of recent winters. East of the Mississippi R. Prairie Falcons were reported in *DeWitt*, IL, Dec. 19 and Jan. 17 (GL, †RCh) and at Reelfoot W.M.A., KY, Dec. 16 (BPB, DR). Rarely reported in Illinois, a group of five Gray Partridge in *LaSalle* Jan. 27 (JHp) was noteworthy.

Rails were well represented, with five Virginia Rails in Ohio, plus singletons in Indiana and Iowa. In addition, a Sora was found in *Athens*, OH, Jan. 24 (TB).

Winter period Sandhill Cranes were reported in all 6 states; noteworthy January counts included 75+ at Green River L., KY, Jan. 2 (BPB); three at Chain O' Lakes S.P., IN, Jan. 13 (Haw et al.), and one at Creve Couer L., MO, Jan. 19 (SDk, BL).

The abundance of open water provided habitat that allowed some shorebirds to winter; others departed late and a few arrived early. Among the late departees were a Greater Yellowlegs at the Ayrshire mine in s. Indiana Dec. 13 (†DA), providing Indiana's first December record; a Least Sandpiper (one of many reported in the Region) that lingered at the Ayrshire mine through Jan. 13 (†DA); and a tardy Baird's Sandpiper seen on Stockton L., MO, Dec. 2 (MR). At the other extreme, a Lesser Yellowlegs at Carlyle L., IL, Feb. 14 (Bjo, KMc) was a very early spring migrant.

Most interesting among the wintering shorebirds were Spotted Sandpiper and Dunlin reports. The Spotted Sandpiper was in *Randolph*, IL, Dec. 27–31 (†TD). Dunlin reports included four–five individuals seen periodically at Lorain, OH, Dec. 21–Feb. 18 (D&JH, CH, LRo); one that lingered at the Ayrshire mine, IN, through Dec. 26 (†DA); five seen at Turtle Creek Res., IN, Dec. 27 (†SL, RL); and two that appeared on the L. Michigan lakefront at Jeorse Park Jan. 18 & 19 (BGr, CF, †Haw, Ssa, MW).

JAEGERS TO OWLS

For the 2nd consecutive year, winter period Pomarine Jaegers appeared in the Region. A first winter record for the Indiana lakefront was logged Dec. 19 when a juvenile was watched for an hour at Michigan City

Harbor (†JMc, JWh). Another immature, likely the same bird, appeared at this location Jan. 17 (LH, †JMc, m.ob.). In Ohio, two Pomarines were discovered at Fairport Harbor Feb. 28 (RHn, NB, LRo).

The mild winter failed to produce the enormous gull numbers that have accumulated in recent years. Despite the decreased numbers, some excellent birds were found. December Laughing Gulls were logged Dec. 16 through Feb. 8 below Kentucky Dam (DR) and Dec. 26 at the Ayrshire mine, IN (†DA). Franklin's Gulls were also surprisingly plentiful, with reports from 4 states, including an alternate plumaged adult at Wilmette, IL (lakefront n. of Chicago), Jan. 2 (†EW, ph. et al.). The only Little Gulls reported were in Ohio, where individuals were seen at H.B.S.P. Dec. 13 and Jan. 18 (RHn, NB), and at Lorain Jan. 8 (D&JH). An ad. Mew Gull was at Red Rock Res., IA, Dec. 20 (†MO, †SDi, MJ, et al.). Two different ad. California Gulls were identified at Chicago's Montrose harbor; the first was seen Jan. 18–19 (JL ph.) and the 2nd was found Feb. 8 (†GW, RHu). Iceland Gulls were reported in every state except Missouri; totals included 12 in Indiana, eight in Illinois, a remarkable six in Iowa, three in Ohio, and one in Kentucky. The latter was at Barkley Dam Feb. 6 (DR). Thayer's Gulls were plentiful on L. Michigan, with 41 reported from L. Cal. and 42 along the Indiana lakefront. Extralimital reports included up to five at Red Rock Res., IA (m.ob.), and at least three at Barkley and Kentucky Dams, KY, Dec. 14–24 (DR, BPB).

It was a better-than-normal winter for Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the w. states, with 50 birds reported in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Kentucky. Compared to recent winters, Glaucous Gull numbers were down somewhat. Three ad. Black-legged Kittiwakes were found in the Region this winter. The first was at Red Rock Res., IA, Dec. 15–18 (†JD, †JF, †MO, ABe); another was seen on the Waterloo/Cedar Falls, IA, CBC Dec. 21 (TS, †FM, et al.); and the final sighting occurred Jan. 8 at Chautauqua N.W.R., IL (†R&SB, SC). Not one but two ad. **Ross's Gulls** graced the Iowa landscape this winter. One was at Red Rock Res. (c. Iowa) Dec. 13–28 (†JS, RA ph., †m.ob.), and the other was discovered at L. Manawa (w. Iowa) Dec. 27 and remained through Dec. 30 (†LP, †BP, †BH, †SDm). Ten Forster's Terns were counted at Jonathan Cr., KY, Dec. 2 (DR), and an overzealous spring migrant appeared at Barren Res., KY, Feb. 18 (DR).

At least three of last fall's Iowa Eur.

SA Keepers of Rare Bird Alerts frequently receive calls reporting incredible birds that ultimately prove to be incorrectly identified. Consequently, when Scott Jackson received a Feb. 24 phone call from Chris and Roberta Kuonen reporting a road-kill **Bridled** or **Sooty Tern** on the w. side of Indianapolis, he was prudently skeptical. He did, however, diplomatically request that they retain the specimen. They declined to collect the remains, which were moderately damaged, but did return after dark and took photos; the bird was gone the following morning. A week later Scott received 2 prints of the bird and was astonished to see that the remains clearly belonged to either a Bridled or Sooty Tern. Photos have been forwarded to experts for specific identification. Neither of these species have been previously recorded in Indiana; indeed, only one earlier record exists for the entire Region. In 1995 a Sooty Tern was found on the Osage R., near Painted Rock, Osage, MO, Aug. 5 following a hurricane (AFN 50:63). The origin of this winter visitor remains a mystery.

Collared-Doves wintered in the Grinnell area (RA, ph., †m.ob.). Snowy Owls were confined to w. portions of the Region, with 12 in Illinois, nine in Iowa, and three in n.w. Indiana. Both "eared" owls were widespread and plentiful. Long-eared Owls were reported in every state except Kentucky; the peak counts were in Iowa, where 15 were found in *Appanoose* Feb. 14 (TJ) and up to 14 were at Red Rock Res. between Jan. 16 and Feb. 23 (ABe). The season was even better for Short-eareds, with reports from all 6 states, including an impressive 44 birds that wintered at the Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL (JWa, EK). It was also a good winter for N. Saw-whet Owls, with four or more birds reported in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio. The peak daily count of four saw-whets was recorded at Amanas, IA, Jan. 31 (JF).

HUMMINGBIRDS TO WARBLERS

Despite mild temperatures, the only hummingbird reports consisted of an unidentified bird at L. Monroe, IN, Dec. 20 (†BM, RMc), and a *Selasphorus* that wintered at Susan Cooper's feeder in Sikeston, MO.

Remarkably, two different **Say's Phoebe**



Orange-crowned Warblers often manage to hang on through the winter farther north than most of their relatives. No fewer than five wintered in Illinois this year, including this bird in Will County on December 30, 1997. Photograph/ Joe B. Milosevich



Out of season in name and in fact, this Summer Tanager at Iowa City on February 10, 1998, furnished a first winter record for Iowa. Photograph/ T. H. Kent

appeared in the Region this winter. Ohio's first Say's Phoebe appeared at Kososing Res., Knox, OH, Dec. 11 (†SA) and remained through at least Jan. 6 (BGL, LY, LRo, ph. m.ob.). Another Say's Phoebe was seen at Moore's Hill, Dearborn, IN, Dec. 27 and Jan. 2 (ph. †ND); an identifiable photo was obtained, providing the state's first confirmed record of this w. species.

The only sizable concentration of Am. Crows consisted of 25,900 counted at a roost near Cincinnati Dec. 1 (FR). Correspondents throughout the Region reported abundant Red-breasted Nuthatches; peak daily counts exceeding 20 birds were recorded in 3 states. The season's only Bewick's Wren was found in Barton, MO, Dec. 2 (MR). A Sedge Wren was found below the dam at L. Clinton, IL, Dec. 19 (DBo et al.). Marsh Wrens were unusually common, with reports from every state except Kentucky; the largest concentration was in Iowa, where an impressive six birds were found. Both kinglets were widespread and more numerous than normal. Indiana's 2nd **Mountain Bluebird** was discovered at L. Monroe Jan. 31 (†HT, †AB, ph. Indiana Audubon Society field trippers et al.) and, to the delight of Hoosier birders, remained through Feb. 25 (†m.ob.). Winter period Hermit Thrushes were reported in every state, and Am. Robin numbers were far above normal. Varied Thrushes "invaded" the Region with 7 reports: five in Iowa, plus singletons in Illinois and Indiana. Single Gray Catbirds were seen on Kelly's I., OH, Dec. 21 (TB), and near Decorah, IA, where

a bird survived the winter (Dec. 1–Jan. 23) by feeding on cat food and suet (RCe). Small numbers of Am. Pipits were found in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio, but the peak count was 62 on the Horseshoe L., IL, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* VK). Cedar Waxwings numbers were low across the Region; the only sizable count was 500 in Benton, MO (*fide* MR).

A White-eyed Vireo was observed in Kent, OH, Feb. 7–10 (S&MS, LRo ph.). The presence of 12 warbler species during the season attests to the mildness of the El Niño winter. Among the "expected" warblers were Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned (recorded in 3 states, with five in Illinois), Pine (reported in every state except Iowa and Kentucky), and Com. Yellowthroat (found in 3 states). The surprises included a Nashville in Spfld. Dec. 21 (VK); a Cape May at a Chillicothe, MO, suet feeder Dec. 28–Jan. 15 (SK) and another on the Union, IL, CBC Jan. 4 (†RCh); a male Black-throated Blue in Jo Davies, IL (EM, DWi); a Prairie in Pope, IL, Dec. 21 (†MB); a Palm in Warren, KY, Feb. 26 (DR); a N. Waterthrush in Tuscarawrus, OH, Dec. 30 and Jan. 4 (†ES, LRo); a male Wilson's at Spfld. Dec. 16 & 23 (†DBo); and, most remarkably, a Yellow-breasted Chat (eating bees) at the Palos Forest Preserve, Cook, IL, Dec. 28–Jan. 2 (m.ob.).

TANAGERS TO FINCHES

A female or imm. **Summer Tanager** frequented an Iowa City feeder from Jan. 23 through Feb. 10 (†TK, †JE, ph.), to provide

Iowa's first record for these winter months. In Charleston, IL, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak lingered until Dec. 1 (L. Barrie Hunt). Also tardy in departing the Region was an Indigo Bunting at Horseshoe L., IL, Jan. 3 (*fide* VK). Dickcissels lingered in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa; the latest departing individual remained n. of Burlington, IA, until Jan. 19 (ABe). Spotted Towhee reports included two from Illinois and two from Iowa. Chipping Sparrows tarried throughout the Region, providing reports from every state except Iowa. Holmes, OH, produced 2 fine reports: The first was a Lark Sparrow that was present from Dec. 30 through Feb. 16 (†ES, BGL, ph. m.ob.). The 2nd was a Lark Bunting, which was discovered in e. reaches of the county Dec. 31 (†ES) and remained through Feb. 16 (BGL, LRo, ph. m.ob.). Rarely reported in winter, a Vesper Sparrow found in Franklin, IL, Jan. 1 (LS), was noteworthy.

Le Conte's Sparrows were reported in every state except Missouri and Ohio. The southernmost sighting involved a bird that wintered in the Long Pt. Unit of Reelfoot Lake N.W.R., KY; it was seen Dec. 16 & 27, and again in mid-March (BPB, DR). The only Harris's Sparrow reported e. of the Mississippi was in Urbana, IL, Dec. 6 (RCh). Peak Lapland Longspur counts included 7500 in Clay, IA, Feb. 28 (LS) and 3000 in McLean, IL, Dec. 6 (MRe). Large Snow Bunting accumulations were restricted to Iowa, where 800 were counted in Winnebago Feb. 1 (MK).

Fine meadowlark numbers were report-



Lark Sparrow (foreground, with an American Tree Sparrow) in eastern Holmes County, Ohio, on February 1, 1998. Photograph/ Bruce Glick



Very rare for the upper Midwest was this Lark Bunting, present for several weeks and photographed on February 1, 1998, in eastern Holmes County, Ohio. Photograph/ Bruce Glick

ed in Illinois and Missouri; the peak E. Meadowlark tally was 300 at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL, Jan. 17 (JWa). Rusty Blackbird numbers were also up, with counts of 200 at Spfld, Jan. 24 (DBo) and in Dickinson, IA, Feb. 27 (ET). An impressive 100 Great-tailed Grackles were tallied near Contrary School, Buchanan, MO, Feb. 22 (LL). Baltimore Orioles were reported at Bettendorf, IA, Dec. 12 (†J. Statser) and in Wayne, MO, Feb. 17 (BR, BL).

The wave of winter finches that arrived in autumn quickly dissipated, leaving only modest numbers through the winter. Red Crossbills were reported in 3 states, with a peak of 22 in Mohican S.P., OH, Feb. 15 (LY). It was a good winter for White-winged Crossbills, with reports from every state except Kentucky; counts exceeding 20 birds were logged in the 4 n. states. Common Redpolls staged a feeble invasion, with small to modest numbers appearing across the Region. The peak count was 150 in LaPorte, IN, Dec. 27 (SB, CF, m.ob.), and one pressed S to Letcher, KY, where it was seen Dec. 17 (JLe). A Com. Redpoll of the large Greenland race *rostrata* was seen in Porter, IN, Jan. 17 (†KB, †JCd, LH, CF, Haw et al.). The Region's only Hoary Redpoll appeared at a feeder in rural Porter, IN, Jan. 17-27 (†JCd, †Haw, †KB, JO, m.ob.).

Small numbers of Pine Siskins, mostly in flocks of fewer than 75 birds, were scattered across the Region. One to five Evening Grosbeaks were reported in Illinois and Iowa. The only sizable grosbeak flocks were

in e. Ohio, where 30 were counted in Mohican S.P. Jan. 29 (BGI, LY).

CORRIGENDA

The 1230 Broad-winged Hawks reported at Conneaut, OH, Mar. 26, 1997 (FN 51:876), were actually observed Apr. 26.

RARITIES COMMITTEE UPDATE

After reviewing 20 slides of Eur. Collared-Doves taken at Carlyle L. in s. Illinois, the Illinois Rare Bird Committee has officially accepted this species for the state checklist. These doves are not associated with the Joliet, IL, "mixed-breed" birds, which are not pure Eur. Collared-Doves.

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