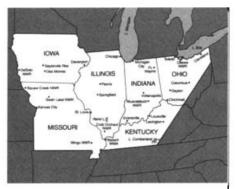
scarce throughout the Region. In contrast, Am. Goldfinches were found in excellent numbers in both n. Michigan and Minnesota.

Cited observers (state compilers in boldface): Ron Annelin, Philip Ashman, Karl Bardon (Minnesota), Glenn Belyea, Robert Bell, Dan Belter, Betsy Beneke, Dan Bennett (DBe), Ted Black (TBI), Jo Blanich, Steve Blanich, Tom Boevers, Al Bolduc (ABo), David Brasser (DBa), Margaret Brasser, Peter Bridge (PBr), Rick Brigham (RBr), Don Brooks (DBr), Paul Budde, Adam Byrne, Steve Carlson, Daryl Christensen, Phil Chu, Al Cornell, Bruce Cohen (BCo), Bill Cowart, Jeff Dains, Bob Domagalski, Dan Dusso, Kim Eckert, Joan Elias, Dave Evans, Bruce Fall, Dave Fallow, Jim Frank, Clare Geerts, Maurita Geerts, Robert Glassel, Jim Granlund, Bob Grefe, Bill Grigg (BGr), Dennis Gustafson, Chuck Heikkinen, Anthony Hertzel, Paul Hertzel, Jason Hoeksema, Ken Hoffman, Molly Hoffman, Aaron Holschbach (AHo), Robert Janssen, Paul Jantscher, Betty Johnson, Charles Kemper, Eugene Kenaga, Ron Kneeskern, Rose Kneeskern (RKn), Mark Korducki, Dennis Kuecherer (DK), Ken LaFond, Laura LaValley, Steve LaValley, Fred Lesher, Madeline Linke, Bill Litkey, Jon Little, William Longley, Steve Lubahn (SLu), Doug McWhirter (Michigan, DMc), Mike Mencotti, William Meuller, Diane Millard, Steve Millard, Brad Murphy, Lyn Murphy, Warren Nelson, Eric Nelson, Lynn Ott, Karl Overman, Walt Pawloski, Dave Peters, Cal Pomarius (CPo), Carolyn Pomarius (CPm), Jim Ponshair, Curt Powell, Caleb Putman (CPu), John Regan (JRe), Steve Santner (SSa), Russ Schipper, Roger Schroeder (RSc), Scott Shaum, Jane Simpson (JSi), Becky Smith, Drew Smith, Mike Smith, Tammy Smith, Jeff Stephenson, Scott Stewart (SSt), Peder Svingen, Charlotte Taylor, Daryl Tessen (Wisconsin), Kevin Thomas, Tom Uttech, Dick Verch, Jason Weckstein (JWe), Tex Wells, Steve Weston, George Wickstrom, Myles Willard, Bill Wilson, Bob Wilson (BWi), Susan Wiste (SWs), Tom Wood, Joe Youngman, John Will, Ray Ziarno.

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# middlewestern prairie region



# KENNETH J. BROCK

Region enjoyed near sub-tropical weather. Perhaps Robert Cecil captured the season most accurately with his comment, "this was about as close as we get to a nice winter." December temperatures were well above normal, and February brought almost spring-like conditions. Winter was compressed into a brief two-week period that began New Year's Day when the season's only major storm swept across the Region. The blanket of snow and subsequent bitter temperatures produced by this storm provided the season's only severe weather.

Mild temperatures kept all water open through the end of December. As a result, atypically high numbers of both water birds and passerines lingered in the Region until early January. Especially common and widespread were American Robins, which wintered in unprecedented numbers. However, it was the presence of a Purple Martin, two Barn Swallows, a Yellow-breasted Chat, and a colony of Sedge Wrens that characterized the winter of 1998–1999 as most extraordinary.

The early January storm and associated heavy snow cover also produced some unanticipated "yard birds." Scores of correspondents reported mixed flocks of Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings, searching for spilled seeds beneath their feeders. M. Stephenson's experience in west-central Ohio was typical; flocks of larks and buntings, seen afield January 2, were literally inside the city limits of Wapakoneta a few days later.

Warm February temperatures quickly melted the January ice, triggering the spring waterfowl migration. Thus, ducks lingered in the Region until early January and were back again by early February. It was indeed a short winter.

**Abbreviations:** Carl. L. (Carlyle L. in Clinton, Fayette, & Bond Counties, IL); H.B.S.P (Headlands Beach S.P., OH); Jax.P. (Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront); L. Cal. (L. Calumet, Chicago); R.E.D.A (Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO); Spfld. (Springfield, IL).

## LOOMS THROUGH HEROMS

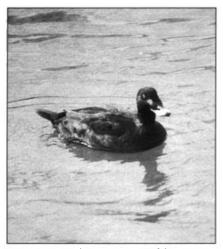
Accompanying the warm winter and associated open water were above-normal numbers of loons and grebes. Red-throated Loons were remarkably widespread with reports from every state except Missouri. The season's best diver, however, was a Yellow-billed Loon that lingered in Bloomington, IL, Dec. 19-29 (RCh, †RHe, KMc, SF, GW, m.ob.). Among the common grebes, the peak counts were in s. Illinois where 99 Pied-billeds were at Newton L. Dec. 21 (JWa, SSi) and 100+ Horneds at Carl. L. Dec. 13 (DKa, JZ). Among the rarer grebes three Red-neckeds were reported in both Illinois and Ohio, and a singleton was seen in Indiana, providing an above-average season tally. East of the Mississippi R. single W. Grebes were found in Henderson, IL, Dec. 19 (AR, PR); at Mississinewa Res., IN, Jan. 1 (†Haw, BK, SSc); and at East Fork S.P., OH, Jan. 20-Feb. 6 (†HA, FR, ph.).

A fly-by N. Gannet, seen at H.B.S.P. Dec 12 (RHn, †NB), provided the Region's first record since 1994. Wintering Double-crested Cormorants have become quite regular in the Region; however, the 1000 birds counted at Rend L., IL, Dec. 19 (KMc, RHa) were extraordinary. Both Great Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons were plentiful across the Region. Highlights included 132 Great Blues at Ottawa N.W.R., OH, Dec. 6 (EP, CC) and an impressive 29 Black-crowneds along a power plant warm water outlet in Lucas, OH, Jan. 16 (DD). Additionally, among many tardy Great Egrets, one lingered in Aurora, IL, until Dec. 16 (†JDr).

WATERFOWL

Once again geese numbers were uniformly high across the Region, with Greater Whitefronteds reported in all 6 states and Ross's recorded in every state except Ohio. Two White-fronted Geese wandered E to Holmes, OH, where they were observed Jan. 16 (MG, BGl). The remarkable 88,500 Snow Geese, tallied on the Jan. 20 Southern Illinois Goose inventory (MH), is surely among the Region's largest counts ever recorded e. of the Mississippi R. The easternmost Ross's Geese reports involved a singleton at Basil Griffin Park, Warren, KY, Jan. 20 & 24 (LD, DOb) and two at Kankakee W.M.A., IN, Feb. 12 (†JCd). A single Brant at Horseshoe Lake W.M.A., IL, Dec. 29 (†SBy) provided one of few records in the Region over the past decade.

Although excellent numbers of puddle ducks were noted across the Region and bay ducks were plentiful, it was a banner winter for sea ducks. Noteworthy among the dabblers was an ad. male Com. (Green-winged) Teal seen in e. Holmes, OH, Feb. 5, 6, & 20 (†ES et al.). It was perhaps the Region's best winter ever for Harlequin Ducks. On the Great Lakes, where this species is regular, eight were recorded in Indiana, five in Ohio, and one in Illinois. The most surprising report, however, came from R.E.D.A. and adjacent Alton, IL, where a female Harlequin was present Jan 30-Feb. 6 (SDk, †WR, ph. m.ob.), providing Missouri's first confirmed winter record and first report in 27 years. Small numbers of both Surf and White-winged scoters appeared in every state except Missouri where Surfs were not reported. Except for s. L. Michigan, where above average numbers appeared, Black



White-winged Scoters appeared in every state of the Region; some, like this bird in Holmes County, Ohio, were forced down by freezing rain January 15, 1999.

Photograph/Bruce D. Glick

Scoters were scarce. Inland Black Scoter reports included four birds in Indiana, three in Kentucky, and one in Iowa. The season's best duck was an ad. male **Barrow's Goldeneye** seen at R.E.D.A. Jan. 24 & 25 (†WR, †KL et al.).

# **OSPREY THROUGH SHOREBIRDS**

Basking in warm December temperatures, a female Osprey lingered in n. Illinois where it was seen at Rockford Dec. 23 (†RM). The peak Bald Eagle counts were made along the Mississippi R. in Illinois where 1049 were tallied in Whiteside and Rock Island Jan. 15-16 (KMk). Elsewhere eagle numbers were typical except in Indiana where the midwinter survey was rather low (JCs). Northern Harriers were unusually numerous in late winter with peak counts of 75+ at Prairie S.P., MO, Ian. 18 (MR) and 53 in s. Illinois Prairie Ridge W.M.A. Feb. 22 (JWa). Northern Goshawks were quite scarce with only eight counted across Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio. This total is low even for a non-invasion year. Rough-legged Hawk numbers were normal or below average in most areas; however, a superb count of 31 (12 dark and 19 light morphs) was made Feb. 5 in Ohio's e. central strip mines (JLr). Golden Eagle numbers were up this winter with observations in every state except Ohio. It was an especially good winter for this large raptor in Iowa where 13 were found. The Merlin population continues to flourish; this winter 29 were reported across the Region. Prairie Falcons are very rare winter residents in c. IllinoIs. This year, however, visiting birders from Iowa discovered one in the n.w. portion of the state at New Boston Dec. 18 (†TK, JF).

Some fine Virginia Rails counts were logged this winter with five at Beverly Shores, IN, Dec. 19 (JCd) and four in Holmes, OH, Jan. 3 (BGl). The presence of Sandhill Cranes in every state attests to both the expansion of this species and the mild winter season. An unprecedented 12,800 Sandhills were still at the Jasper–Pulaski, IN, staging area Dec. 2, and 6 days later 6300+ southbound birds flew over Monroe, IN (DWh, LSb). Other noteworthy Sandhill reports included 182 in Cook, IL, Dec. 22 (CF) and 56 at Findlay Res., OH, on the same day (KN).

This winter a dozen shorebird species were recorded in the Region, rendering this the best season since 1994–1995 when 15 species were logged. A major surprise was the two Semipalmated Plovers at L. Monroe, IN, Dec. 17–19 (†KW), which provided that state's first winter record. Other tardy

migrants included a juv. Black-bellied Plover at Coralville Res., IA, Dec. 2 (TK, JF) and a Spotted Sandpiper in Gibson, IN, that lingered through Dec. 20 (†G&†LB, m.ob.). Two Greater Yellowlegs remained at L. Monroe, IN, until Dec. 20 (DWh); one was in Clark, OH, Dec. 19 (DOv); and a singleton was still at Cone Marsh, IA, Dec. 18 (†TK). Lesser Yellowlegs reports were even more remarkable with mid-winter singletons at McElroy L., KY, Jan. 31 (DR) and in Johnson, IL, Feb. 11 (†SO).

Perhaps the season's most remarkable shorebirds were Least Sandpipers, which were recorded in every state except Ohio. A phenomenal 52 Leasts were counted at Rend L., IL, Dec. 19 (†LSn, DL), and six were still in *Calloway*, KY, Jan. 2 (DOb). One to five Purple Sandpipers were at H.B.S.P Dec. 6–Jan. 3 (RHn, m.ob.) while singles were found at Avon L., OH, Jan. 1 (ES) and at Waukegan Beach, IL, Dec. 3 (†RB). Winter period Dunlins, primarly in early to mid-December, were reported in Indiana, Iowa, and Kentucky; the latest consisted of two at Mississinewa Res., IN, Jan 1 (†Haw).

# **GULLS THROUGH OWLS**

This was not a good winter for large gulls on the Great Lakes; correspondents in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio all noted a dearth of gulls, especially in January and February. Interestingly, inland reports were near normal. Vestiges of last fall's record Franklin's Gull flight lingered into the winter period in every state except Missouri. The latest report consisted of a basicplumed ad. at Red Rock Res., IA, Dec. 19-27 (SDm, MP, CE). Little Gulls were reported in only one state apparently because they all congregated in Ohio. Records included a phenomenal 26 Little Gulls at Fairport Harbor Feb. 27 (RHn, EB et al.); this remarkable total doubles the Region's previous daily maximum. Additionally, an imm. Little Gull was seen inland e. of Cincinnati at East Fork S.P. Ian. 22-29 (†FR, LG, ph. et al.). The winter's only Mew Gulls consisted of two first-basic birds found on CBCs (both accepted by the Iowa Bird Records Committee): one on the Saylorville count Dec. 20 (†SDm) and the other at Keokuk (†SDm).

A basic-plumed ad. California Gull was photographed on the Chicago lakefront Jan. 23–24 (†GW, JL, ph. m.ob.). Glaucous Gulls were surprisingly scarce across the Region. Oddly, 2 inland reports constituted the season's highest daily counts. Three Glaucous Gulls were reported both at

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# middlewestern prairie



Ohio hosted remarkable numbers of Little Gulls on the Great Lakes during the season; this immature, however, was "inland," being found January 22–29, 1999 east of Cincinnati at East Fork State Park where it was photographed January 27. Photograph/Frank Renfrow

R.E.D.A. Jan. 30 (WR) and in Dayton, OH, Jan. 16 (DD). The latter birds, all in first-winter plumage, were accompanied by an ad. Great Black-backed Gull (DD). Black-legged Kittiwakes were more common than normal with six birds scattered across Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio.

The Region's Eur. Collared-Dove population continues to grow. This winter 14 Collared-Doves were reported at 3 Illinois locations, and the small colony at Grinnell, IA, has now expanded to 10 birds (JF). Most Snowy Owls remained n. of the Region. The season's tally consisted of a single bird at Meigs Field, Chicago, Dec. 30 and Jan. 13 (DSt), and four birds in Iowa. Following the pattern of recent winters excellent counts of the "eared" owls were logged. This winter Long-eareds were reported in every state except Kentucky, and Short-eareds were found in all 6 states. Noteworthy observations included 12 Long-eareds at Orland Grassland W.M.A., IL, Feb 14-25 (LSn) and nine in Lake, IN, Dec. 1 (JB et al.). The peak Short-eared Owl tally consisted of 26 at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL, Feb. 18 (JWa, EK). Northern Saw-whet Owls were also more widespread than normal with five in Iowa, three in both Illinois and Indiana, and singletons in Missouri and Ohio.

# **HUMMINGBIRDS**

# THROUGH WAXWINGS

The fall Rufous Hummingbird reported at N. Perry, OH, lingered until Dec. 2 (JPg). Winter period E. Phoebes were reported in all 6 states with some records approaching mid-winter. The latest birds were in *Hart*,

KY, Jan. 4 (MS) and at Willow Slough, IN, Jan. 1 (EH). The latter phoebe was reportedly searching for morsels in spider webs beneath the eaves of a building. The Region enjoyed a major N. Shrike invasion with reports from every state except Kentucky. The tally by state included 21 in Iowa, 12 in Ohio, 10 in Illinois, five in Indiana, and two in Missouri. A dozen Loggerhead Shrikes counted at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL, Feb. 14 (JWa, JHo) constituted a fine winter tally.

An over-eager Purple Martin arrived at Mt. Hope, Holmes, OH, Feb. 12, only to fall prey to a Cooper's Hawk Feb. 13 (BGl, ph.), but not before providing Ohio's first February record. Also in the competition for earliest arrival was a Barn Swallow that appeared at Mermet L., Massac, IL, Feb. 12-13 (†FBe, m.ob.). This report also constitutes Illinois' first February record. Another Barn Swallow lingered in the Chicago area where it was seen at Winthrope Harbor Dec. 5 (†GW). Redbreasted Nuthatches were uniformly scarce across the Region. A tardy House Wren lingered at Strongville, OH, until Dec. 27 (CR), and a late-winter Marsh Wren was found at Mermet L., IL, Feb. 13 (†FBe).

Golden-crowned Kinglets were unusually common in December as evidenced by a peak single-party count of 37 at Horseshoe Lake W.M.A., IL, Dec. 29 (KMc, TD). A female Mt. Bluebird, at Waterman Cr., O'Brien, IA, Feb. 7–21 (†LS, †TK, †JF, †ET,

Historically, winter-period A Sedge Wrens have been accidental in the Region, most often appearing as single birds on CBCs. Winter-period records have perhaps become slightly more frequent in recent years with singletons reported in 4 of the past 5 winters. The traditional pattern, however, was shattered this winter with an absolutely unprecedented discovery near Barton, in n.w. Missouri. On the morning of Dec. 4, Robbins used a tape recording at Prairie S.P. to locate a phenomenal 31 Sedge Wrens. Responses of the birds suggested that they were territorial. A repeat of the survey Dec. 17 produced 29 birds, including some at sites where birds were not detected on the earlier census. Consequently, Robbins speculated that as many as 43 individuals might have been present. Are we beginning to see population shifts related to global warming?

ph.) adds to the dozen existing records for that state.

A very cooperative Townsend's Solitaire frequented Chicago's Morton Arboretum Feb. 1-13 (VK, DBo, MDe, JR, m.ob.). Ohio's 2nd Northern Wheatear inhabited Marion from Nov. 8 until at least Nov. 18 (VF, †RCo, †JDu). Thrush numbers were up noticeably this winter. A peak count of 15 Hermit Thrushes was logged Dec 20 on Kelly's Is., OH (TBa), and the Region was awash with Am. Robins, producing several mid-winter counts that exceeded 100 birds even in n. reaches. Varied Thrushes were reported visiting feeding stations (no dates specified) in Columbia, MO (S. Brundage) and near Bloomington, IN (J&SH, ph. m.ob.). More Gray Catbirds lingered into winter than normal with four in Ohio and two in Illinois.

An extraordinarily high Eur. Starling count was made Dec. 5 when 200,000 were estimated to be present in Urbana, IL (RCh). American Pipits were unusually widespread (recorded in every state except Missouri) and tarried later than normal; one-three birds were recorded throughout January in Kentucky (LMc, Dob); ten were in Holmes, OH, Jan. 12 (ES); and one lingered at Ahquabi S.P., IA, until Jan. 1 (†JSi). The distribution of this winter's Bohemian Waxwing reports was quite strange; the disparate reports included a single bird in Poweshiek Jan. 6, in c. Iowa (†TK, †JF) and a flock of 15 adults on Chicago's s. side Jan. 27 (†DSt). Cedar Waxwing numbers were low; counts exceeding 100 birds were made only in Iowa where the peak was 400 in O'Brien Feb. 8 (ET).

# **WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES**

Seven species of warblers lingered in the Region. The more unusual records included an Orange-crowned in Louisville, KY, Dec. 5 (DOb); a Palm Warbler at Four Rivers W.M.A., MO, Dec. 17 (MR); a Palm Warbler in Millersburg, OH, Dec. 19 (BGI); and an Ovenbird (killed by a cat) near Bloomington, IN, Dec. 20 (J&SH). Pine Warblers, which occur infrequently during winter, were especially common with three in Ohio, two in Illinois, and one in Kentucky. Common Yellowthroats were also widespread; five birds were scattered across Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Ohio. The most remarkable warbler, however, was a Yellow-breasted Chat in Chicago's Grant Park Dec. 14-22 (DSt, †DJ, †JSa). This is the 2nd consecutive winter in which Chicago has hosted a chat.

Indiana's first confirmed Black-headed

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**Grosbeak**, an imm. male, thrilled scores of Hoosier birders as it lingered at its W. Lafayette discovery site Dec. 19–31 (†BD, TBr, DK, †EH, JCd, m.ob. ph). Missouri's 3rd winter period Indigo Bunting, an ad. male, was found at Four Rivers W.M.A. in s.w. Missouri Dec. 18 (†DE, JHi, ph.).

East of the Mississippi R. Spotted Towhees were found at Carl L. Dec. 28 (†KMc, DWe) and in Union, IL, Dec. 30 (†VK). A superb find was a Brewer's Sparrow at Midewin Prairie, IL, Dec. 4 (†DSt). An impressive 27 Field Sparrows were tallied Dec 29 at Horseshoe Lake W.M.A. (KMc, TD). In Holmes, OH, a Lark Sparrow was found Dec. 26 within a few miles of the site at which last winter's bird was located (LY). Although Le Conte's Sparrows are now regular winter residents within the Region, a count of 16 made in Franklin, IL, Dec. 19 (Fbe) still constitutes a fine winter tally. This winter Fox Sparrows were unusually numerous, especially at feeding stations in the n. states. East of the Mississippi R., Harris's Sparrows were reported in Kane, IL (†MM) and in Holmes, OH, Dec. 22-Feb. 2 (ES, LY, m.ob.). The early January snowstorm pushed scores of Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings (along with Horned Larks) into the yards of startled bird feeders. The peak Lapland Longspur count, however, consisted of 3500 birds in LaSalle, IL, Jan 30 (C&JM). The season's only Dickcissel report consisted of a single bird in Vermilion, IL, Dec. 14-15 (†JSm).

Large numbers of icterids returned to the Region early as evidenced by 25,000 Red-winged Blackbirds in *LaSalle*, IL, Feb. 14 (DSh); 10,000 Com. Grackles in Urbana, IL, Feb. 21 (RCh); and 5000 Brown-headed Cowbirds in *LaSalle*, IL, Feb. 14 (DSh). As is typical, small flocks of Brewer's Blackbirds were recorded sporadically across the Region. This winter's reports included 16 in *Clinton*, IL, Dec. 28 (†WR, CA) and 15 near the Kankakee W.M.A., IN, Feb. 20 (J&PK). The Region's only lingering Baltimore Oriole was at N. Olmstead, OH, Nov. 27–Jan. 2 (II, CR).

To state that this was not a winter finch season is an understatement; even Purple Finches were scarce. Only a handful of crossbills, redpolls, and siskins were reported, and these were confined to Illinois and Iowa. Evening Grosbeaks were not recorded. Iowa's first Eur. Tree Sparrow population away from the Mississippi R. floodplain was detected in mid-February when eight birds were discovered at the S & G sandpits in e. *Johnson* (MDo, TK, CE).

## **RARITIES COMMITTEE UPDATE**

The Illinois committee rejected the Brewer's Sparrow reported at Fermilab, May 31, 1998 (FN 52:339). The Ohio committee approved a Ross's Gull seen Dec. 14, 1997, in Ashtabula (CH, JPg); this bird now becomes Ohio's first state record.

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Jim Sinclair (JSi), James Smith (JSm), Leonard Stanley (LSn), Lee Sterrenburg (LSb), Doug Stotz (DSt), Mitchell Sturgeon, Ed Thelen, Jeff Walk (JWa), Debbie Wesselman (DWe), Don Whitehead (DWh), Geoff Williamson, Kevin Willsey, Leroy Yoder, and Jim Ziebol.

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *North American Birds* are keyed on page 138.

