

# midwestern prairie



## Kenneth J. Brock

Dept. of Geosciences  
Indiana University Northwest  
3400 Broadway  
Gary, Indiana 46408  
(Kebrock@ucs.indiana.edu)

Following a "tropical" winter, the Region's birders enjoyed a mild dry spring. March was especially warm; early in the month a four-day period in Iowa averaged 20° above average. April temperatures were more seasonal but the month was extremely dry, especially in the western states (Missouri recorded the driest April in 106 years). Warm conditions returned in May. The last half of the month brought significant precipitation at least to the Great Lakes area. The mild climate affected migrational rhythms by stimulating an early flight; there were scores of new arrival dates at both local and state levels. The warm spring was also accompanied by early leafing of the trees; in central Illinois Keith McMillan noted that by 15 April "the vegetation was going wild." By mid-May much of the countryside looked more like June.

Observer assessments of the season varied widely; however, there was unanimous agreement that the shorebird flight was superb. Songbirds were decidedly scarce in western reaches of the Region where the drought was most intense. Evaluations of passerine migration were more favorable farther east; however, there were precious few fallouts and those that occurred were

along shores of the Great Lakes. Although warbler numbers were good in many areas, several correspondents noted that the May flight had no peak. Indeed, Paul Clyne captured the sentiments of many, comparing May to a really good party at which the guest of honor failed to show.

**Abbreviations:** Carl. L. (Carlyle Lake, s. IL), H.B.S.P. (Headlands Beach S.P., OH), L. Calumet (Lake Calumet, s. Chicago); JaxP. (Jackson Park, on Chicago lakefront); P.R.N.A. (Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, Jasper, IL); R.E.D.A. (Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO); S.C.R. (Squaw Creek N.W.R., MO)

## LOONS THROUGH IBISES

Despite a rather mediocre year for divers, Red-throated Loons were unusually widespread, with 2–9 reported in each of the four n. states. Pacific Loon reports included one at L. Lemon, IN, 30 Mar–10 Apr (†J&SH) and a record-late basic-plumaged bird in Ames, IA, 29–31 May (JJD, m.ob.). It was a below-average spring for Common Loon, the only count exceeding 50 birds being 150 at Clearfork Res., OH, 8 Apr (BCo). Red-necked Grebes appeared in the best numbers in a decade, with 11 in Ohio, 5 in Illinois, and 3 in Iowa. The peak count was of 5 at Paulding Res., OH, 24 May (D&MD). East of the Mississippi R., a Western Grebe appeared at Kentucky L., KY, 21 Mar and 21 Apr (DR, HC) and two record-late birds were at Springfield, IL, 22–24 May (HDB, BD).

The Region's Pelicaniform populations continue to flourish, as evidenced by American White Pelican counts exceeding

100 birds in every state except Indiana and Ohio; the peak of 4525 in Putnam, IL, 25 Mar (C&JM) more than doubled the previous Illinois maximum. Double-crested Cormorant counts ranged from a minimum of 200 in Missouri to 2520 in Illinois. Reports of the rarer species included an ad. **Neotropic Cormorant** at Carl. L., 20 May (†DKa), which provided a first local and county record, and Iowa's 3rd **Anhinga** at Dudgeon Park, Benton, 14 May (†FM).

Following the pattern of recent years American Bittern reports were extremely encouraging; an impressive 75 birds were scattered across all six states. A **Tricolored Heron** at Cardinal Marsh, Winneshiek, IA, 27 Apr–2 May (BCp, †JLE, m.ob.), provided that state's 3rd record. Elsewhere this seldom-seen heron appeared at Swan Lake N.W.R., MO, 15 Apr (TMC, SK), Carl. L., 2 May (LHa), and at Pickerel Creek W.M.A., OH, 25 May into Jun (JPg, ABI). A White Ibis was reported without details at Mingo N.W.R., MO, 24 Apr and 24 May (BR, BE). An ad. **White-faced Ibis** at L. Shelby, KY, 20–21 May (HB, BPB, ph.) provided that state's 2nd record and the first photographic evidence. Another adult was seen n. of Winnebago, IL, 29 Apr (DWM, m.ob.).

## WATERFOWL

The Region's prosperous goose populations continue to swell. Many fine tallies accompanied the state-record count of 2500 Greater White-fronted Geese at Anderson Lake W.M.A., IL, 8 Mar (KV). The diminutive Ross's Goose was also numerous, with reports from every state except Kentucky; 42 at Carl. L. 19 Mar (DKa) provided a new state record (the previous high was 13), but three other counts exceeded 10 birds, including a flock of 13 at R.E.D.A. 3 Mar (LHo). Farther east, two Ross's wandered to Summit L., IN, 13 Mar (SP, Haw, et al.) and another was at Grand Lake St. Marys W.M.A., OH, 1 Apr (†DD et al.).

Much of the duck population departed during the mild February weather. Consequently, duck numbers were generally low. Vying for "odd duck" of the season honors was a female believed to have been a hybrid Wood Duck × Mallard in Springfield, IL, 15 Apr (HDB, DOe, reportedly ph.). Reports of the rarer dabblers included male Eurasian Wigeons at Chain-O-Lakes S.P., IL, 17–18 Mar (GAW et al.) and Ottawa N.W.R., OH, 26 Apr–13 May (NB, DOv). A legitimate male Cinnamon

Teal in *Henderson*, KY, 8–10 Apr (DR, BPB, reportedly vt.) was accompanied by a male Blue-winged × Cinnamon Teal hybrid (BPB). Another such hybrid remained at Carl. L., 23 Apr–13 May (DKa, KAM, FB). A remarkably tardy female Canvasback lingered in *St. Clair*, IL, until 27 May (WR) and a female Redhead was still at the Peabody W.M.A., KY, 4 May (DR). The Region's only Harlequin Duck, a female, loitered at Waukegan, IL, until 9 Apr (JMc, SH, AFS). Surf Scoters were more numerous than normal, with many lingering into Apr; the latest date was 21–26 Apr in *McLean*, IL, (MRe, TP). White-winged Scoters were scarce, but one wandered to Thomas Hill Res., MO, 2 Mar (SK). The season's only Black Scoter, also a female, was at East Alton, IL, and Mel Price Lock and Dam 3–13 Apr (CMA, FH, KAM). The only sizeable Long-tailed Duck count consisted of 32 on L. Michigan off Miller Beach, IN, 1 Apr (JKC, SB, KJB et al.). A fine Ruddy Duck tally of 1847 was logged at Chautauqua N.W.R., IL, 6 Apr (R&SB).

#### HAWKS THROUGH CRANES

A report from the Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources indicated that Ohio now has ten active Osprey nests. At least ten Mississippi Kites returned to the Region to establish breeding areas and 3 out-of-range birds strayed eastward across Kentucky, one of which reached Bowling Green 13 May (DR, MB). Northern Goshawks were frightfully scarce, with only two reports for the entire Region; typical spring totals are near a dozen. An excellent Red-shouldered Hawk flight of 158 birds was recorded at Maumee Bay S.P., OH, Mar. 8 (VF). The Region's singular substantial Broad-winged Hawk movement occurred 20 Apr, when an estimated 650 were counted by multiple observers in three e. Ohio counties (*fide* BG) and a flock of 200 was seen in *Knox*, IL (MJB). An ad. light-morph Swainson's Hawk was seen in n. *Porter*, IN, May 13 (†LHi, et al.), where the species is casual. Rough-legged Hawks were in short supply this spring, although, a laggard remained at Ottawa N.W.R., OH, until 7 May (*fide* RHa). Golden Eagles were unusually plentiful, including an unprecedented 7 in Ohio, only one of which was documented: an imm. in *Wayne* 15 Apr (†LEY, †LRM). The 35 Merlins logged across the Region included one of the w. *richardsonii* form near Springfield 1 Apr (HDB).

The Gray Partridge population appears to be increasing in nw. Iowa, where the best numbers since 1980 were reported (DCH). Although dry conditions apparently limited

Yellow Rail habitat in Iowa, singles appeared in Calamus Marsh, *Pickaway*, OH, 11 Apr (†J. McCormac) and at Clinton L., IL, 15 Apr (RTC). Illinois birders enjoyed an "invasion" of Black Rails this spring, with single birds reported at four locations: Middle Fork Creek, *Franklin*, 30 Apr (†LSt); *Pulaski* 13 & 20 May (KAM, FB); Springbrook Prairie, *Du Page*, 24–29 May (†BF, PH, GAW, m.ob.); and at Clinton L., *DeWitt*, 29 May (RTC). King Rails were also unusually plentiful, with 16 in Illinois, 4 in Missouri, and 3 in Ohio. Common Moorhen numbers have improved somewhat, with spring reports from every state except Ohio. The peak tally was 6 at L. Calumet 6 May (WJM, et al.). Following last spring's invasion, the only Purple Gallinule report involved a bird that lingered at L. Logan, *Hocking*, OH, 30 Apr–27 May (CW, EP, JFr, JLe, et al.). Sandhill Cranes continued their expansion, with multiple reports from all six states. Records from the geographical cusps included two birds at S.C.R. 6–30 May (DAE, m.ob.) and 20 in *Darke*, OH, 10 Mar (BW).

#### SHOREBIRDS

It was a fine year for shorebirds, especially large ones; they were both early and numerous. Indeed, this group arguably provided the season's most interesting birding. The migration got off to a resounding start with a strong American Golden-Plover flight. In cen. Illinois, tens of thousands were reported in "wave after wave" at P.R.N.A. 1 Apr (m.ob., *fide* JWW). This massive tally was accompanied by four other Illinois counts that exceeded 1000 birds. Other impressive golden-plover reports included 1140 near Lake Park, IA, 2 May (DCH) and 380 at Big Island W.M.A., OH, 14 Apr (VF). Two Snowy Plovers, casual in the Region, were reported this spring. The first was in *Appanoose*, IA, 6 May (†RLC, †TJ, ph. P. Johnson), and the second (and Indiana's 4th) **Snowy Plover** appeared at L. Waveland 10–12 May (†AWB, †Haw, m.ob.). The highest among several fine Semipalmated Plover counts were 125 at Arcola, IL, 20 May (GL, *fide* RTC) and 91 in Gary, IN, 20 May (JKC, m.ob.). One to three Piping Plovers were reported in Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio; a dozen with five nests were counted 11 May at the w. Iowa Mid-American Ponds breeding site (BKP, LJP). Black-necked Stilts returned to favored areas in Illinois and Missouri; however, reports of one at Cone Marsh, IA, 14–15 Apr (P&RA, THK, CE, reportedly ph.) and 2 at Van Wert Res., OH, 22–23 May (JPe, JR,

ph.), were unexpected. Exceptional Greater Yellowlegs reports included 205 at Funk Bottoms W.M.A., OH, 15 Apr (SSn, LEY) and a record-early arrival at Springfield 3 Mar (HDB).

**SA** Large shorebirds provided a season highlight. Whimbrels, which moved through the Region in exceptional numbers, provided perhaps the most impressive flight. In Kentucky, where this species is casual, four reports involving an unprecedented 25 birds were logged. The largest concentration consisted of 15 birds at the E. W. Brown power plant, *Mercer*, 17 May (WK). Other extraordinary Whimbrel reports came from *Wood*, OH, where 80 were seen 23 May (CAN) and Mosquito Lake W.M.A., OH, where 61 were counted 19 May (DHo). These tallies are among the highest ever recorded in the Region. Hudsonian Godwits were also plentiful, with numerous high counts w. of the Mississippi R. The easternmost maximum tally involved 17 migrating along the Waukegan, IL, lakefront 18 May (EWW, JIE, ÜDBJ), an excellent spring tally for the Great Lakes region. Perhaps the most remarkable shorebird report involved a phenomenal 52 Marbled Godwits that made a brief appearance on L. Monroe, IN, 20 Apr (†JVR), more than quadrupling that state's previous high count. This species was also reported in every other state in the Region, with a maximum of 30 in *Hardin*, IA, 30 May (MPr).

The smaller shorebirds moved through early and in above-average numbers. Noteworthy reports included Ruddy Turnstones, which were unusually common especially at inland locations; 36 Red Knots at Waukegan, IL, 18 May (EWW, JIE, †DBJ) and 15 knots at L. Springfield, IL, 23 May (HDB); 125+ Sanderlings at Lincoln Park, Chicago, 18 May (TVB); tens of thousands of Pectoral Sandpipers at P.R.N.A. 1 Apr (m.ob., *fide* JWW); and 357 Short-billed Dowitchers at Sheldon Marsh W.M.A., OH, 12 May (VF). Rarities included a Curlew Sandpiper in transitional plumage at the Ward Branch of Rend L., IL, 20 May (†BLC) and a Ruff in *St. Clair* and *Monroe*, IL, 2–6 Apr (†CMA, †KAM, DKa, MLR, ph. m.ob.). Wilson's Phalaropes, which had been vanishing faster than nickel slots in Vegas, staged a stunning turnaround, especially in the western states. In addition to above-



Kentucky's second White-faced Ibis, and the first physically documented, was this adult in full breeding condition at Lake Shelby 20–21 May 2000. This ibis is increasingly turning up east of its usual range, mirroring the pattern of the Glossy Ibis in the West (see the paper elsewhere in this issue). Photograph by Shelby Landers

normal numbers in most states, a phenomenal count of 500+ was recorded at S.C.R. in mid-May (DAE), the Region's highest tally in several decades. Red-necked Phalaropes were also plentiful, with one to 14 birds reported in every state except Kentucky.

#### JAEGERS THROUGH TERNS

An adult light-morph Pomarine Jaeger frequented Barkley Dam, KY, 22–30 Mar (DR, LP, et al., reportedly vt.). Laughing Gull numbers were up a bit this spring, with 1–6 birds reported from every state except Iowa. In Illinois, where Little Gulls are rare, adults were found at Mermet Lake W.M.A., 25 Mar (KAM, FB, DKa, reportedly vt.) and in Springfield 3 & 6 Apr (BD, †HDB). At Ohio's Conneaut Harbor, where this species is uncommon, numbers gradually increased from one on 11 Mar (JPg) to a peak of 21 birds 22 Mar (JHd, DSa, DBu). The season's only Black-headed Gull, an adult, also came from Conneaut Harbor, where it was watched 18–25 Mar as it molted rapidly into breeding plumage (ES, m.ob.). With the mild February most of the wintering large gulls departed the Region by early March; however, one first-year Lesser Black-backed lingered at Barkley Dam, KY, until 16 Apr (DR).

Caspian Terns arrived early on L. Michigan, establishing new arrival dates for both Illinois and Indiana. Single birds were seen at Miller Beach and Michigan City Harbor, IN, 25 Mar (SB, JKC, KJB, m.ob.); the Illinois bird was at JaxP. 31 Mar (PRC).

Common Terns were not especially common this spring; most states reported only small numbers and the peak count of 650 was at Waukegan, IL, 19 May (DFS). One of the season's best finds was an ad. **Arctic Tern** at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Lake, IL, 3 Jun (†DWm, †AFS, MMA, JRS), providing one of only a handful of spring records for the Region. Two Forster's Terns at Lorain, OH, 2 Apr (HA, JLe) were quite early. Black Terns were refreshingly common, with most correspondents commenting about above-normal numbers; peak counts included 480 in Jasper, MO, 13–14 May (LHb) and 225+ in LaSalle, IL, 9 Mar (JHp).

#### PARAKEETS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

In addition to the entrenched Monk Parakeet population on the Chicago lakefront, a colony of 25 birds was reported 8 Mar at L. Calumet (DFS) and 15 adults and eight nests were reported 24 May in nearby Burnham (WJM). Although Greater Roadrunners are well established in se. Missouri, the appearance of one 29 May in a Herculaneum, MO, yard (near St. Louis) was remarkable (B & C Black). The season's only Snowy Owl was at Dunbar Slough, IA, 1–4 Mar (PJW, P&RA, m.ob.). "Eared" owls were widespread. Peak counts of both species were logged 5 Mar at Killdeer Plains W.M.A., OH, when 9 Long-eareds and 6 Short-eareds (JHo) were seen. Northern Saw-whet Owls were recorded in typical numbers everywhere except in Kentucky,

where extensive surveys yielded one to 5 birds between 28 Feb and 9 Apr (SSt). Three additional saw-whets were also found in Kentucky.

A Common Nighthawk at Iowa City 18 Apr (MCD) and 2 on that date at Ames (D. Flanagan, *vide* HZ), provided all-time early arrival records for Iowa. The 40 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at feeders in Mode, IL, 20 May (KF) and 30 recorded at H.B.S.P. 12 May (LRO), constitute excellent spring counts. Several observers noted a dearth of Red-headed Woodpeckers this spring; the peak count was 13 in Union, IL, 13 Apr (KAM). In contrast, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Northern Flickers were plentiful, with "tree-threatening numbers" of 50+ sapsuckers along with 200 flickers reported in St. Louis, MO, 7 Apr (WR, JZ).

#### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH PIPITS

Olive-sided Flycatchers were unusually plentiful this spring, with many arriving quite early; the vanguard appeared 1 May at Hickory Hill Park, IA (JLF). *Empidonax* flycatchers also arrived early and in good numbers. Noteworthy high counts included 15 Yellow-bellieds at Illinois Beach S.P., IL, 18 May (EWW, JIE) and 7 Alders in Cook, IL, 18 May (CF). A Say's Phoebe 29–30 Mar, in Chicago's Humboldt Park (JEL, RHe), provided a 2nd spring record for Illinois. Western Kingbirds were more common than normal; the peak count was 7 in Granite City, IL, 16 May (KAM). An excellent inland count of 104 Eastern Kingbirds was made in Clay, MO, 13 Apr (JEl). Early vireo reports included a record-early Blue-headed Vireo at Natural Bridge S.P., KY, 21 Mar (MMo) and a Yellow-throated in Cape Girardeau, MO, 1 Apr (BE). A Black-billed Magpie was reported in Plymouth in w. Iowa 22 May (S. Moats, *vide* JJD), where there have been sporadic reports over the past two years. Noteworthy Fish Crow reports included 16 in Union, IL, 22 Apr (KAM) and 5–6 at Uniontown Lock and Dam, Posey, IN (BPB, JDu).

Purple Martins were scarce across the Region. Most swallows arrived early and in good numbers; the largest single count was 5000–7000 Tree Swallows at L. Waveland, IN, 21 Apr (AWB). The 500 Northern Rough-winged Swallows in McLean, IL, 1 May (MLR) also constituted an excellent spring count. The departure of wintering Red-breasted Nuthatches produced no major movements; the maximum count was 7 in Union, IL, 22 Apr (KAM). Sedge Wren numbers were below normal, and no concentrations were reported. Kinglets staged a strong flight, with peak counts of

150+ Golden-crowneds in Urbana, IL, 2 Apr (RTC) and 52 Ruby-crowneds in Sangamon, IL, 21 Apr (HDB). In Bowling Green, KY, a tardy Ruby-crowned lingered until 24 May (JEm), establishing a new late date for that state. A Mountain Bluebird, keeping company with a female Eastern, was near Peterson, IA, 1–26 Apr (PE, LAS). A superb movement of 272 Eastern Bluebirds was logged between sunrise and 1030 CST on 8 Mar as they flew past Maumee Bay S.P., OH, (VF). Several correspondents lamented a poor thrush flight, but numbers were not uniformly low. At Illinois Beach S.P., IL, 60+ Veeries were reported 20 May, 9 Gray-cheeked were counted 20 May, and 92+ Swainson's were present 18 May (EWW, JIE). A very early Wood Thrush arrived in Adams, OH, 1 Apr (PW). Though migrant Brown Thrashers appear regularly in lakefront parks, the count of 20 at H.B.S.P. 15 Apr. (LRO), was noteworthy. It was a good spring for American Pipits, with eleven counts exceeding 100 birds; the maximum was 500+ in Marion, IL, 25 Mar (MAH).

#### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Although the assessment lacked unanimity, several observers deemed the spring warbler migration outstanding. Migration was early, establishing numerous early dates, only a handful of which are mentioned below. An out-of-range Blue-winged Warbler was discovered in extreme nw. Missouri at S.C.R. 3 May (PMc). Two extraordinary Tennessee Warbler counts were logged in Illinois: 300 at Urbana 9 May (RTC) and 220 in sw. Cook 15 May (DFS), the former furnishing a record high for the state. Early warbler reports included a Chestnut-sided at Mermet Lake W.M.A. 21 Apr (FB), providing a record early date for Illinois, plus Black-throated Greens at the La Rue-Pine W.M.A., IL, 25 Mar (KAM, FB) and Buck Creek S.P., OH, 26 Mar (DOv). A female **Kirtland's Warbler** was banded in Navarre Marsh, Ottawa, OH, 13 May (J. Shieldcastle, VF, ph.), providing that state's 3rd spring record in four years. A singing male Cerulean Warbler in JaxP. 8 Jun (PRC) was most intriguing. It was a good spring for Swainson's Warblers in the s. states, with 4 in Kentucky and 3 in Missouri. Connecticut Warblers were unusually widespread and numerous with reports from all six states; an incredibly late singing male was in JaxP. 18 Jun (PRC). A very early Canada Warbler was seen near Cincinnati, OH, 26 Apr (SR).

Clay-colored Sparrows were remarkably plentiful along the Chicago lakefront; the best counts included 12 in Evanston and

Wilmette 12 May (EWW) and 12 at Montrose Harbor 14 May (AFS). An amazing 140 Savannah Sparrows were counted in Chicago's Grant Park 1 May (DEW, DFS). Henslow's Sparrows were widely reported in good numbers; two overzealous birds arrived at Green River Lake S.P., KY, 5 Apr (BPB, MMo). It was also a good spring for both Le Conte's Sparrows and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows; each was reported in four states. A Lincoln's Sparrow, seen in Platte, MO, 8 Mar (LL), was quite early. Harris's Sparrows remained in the west; the only birds e. of the Mississippi R. were in Illinois, where 6 were reported. A tardy female Dark-eyed Junco lingered in Chicago's Grant Park 1 Jun (TSS). Except for a fine count of 350 Smith's Longspurs at P.R.N.A. 13 Apr (JWW, ELK), the longspur flight was not noteworthy.

A season highlight for many was a first-year **Painted Bunting**, likely a male, that visited a backyard feeder in Gurnee, IL, 21–22 Apr (SH, DM, EWW, †DBJ, m.ob.). In addition a female which frequented the Magee Marsh W.M.A. feeders 13 May (RHa, DBI, m.ob., ph) provided Ohio's 2nd record. For the fifth consecutive year a male Lazuli Bunting visited the feeder near Craig, MO, 30 Apr–3 May (E.&W. Wright). Another male was in Boone, MO, 13 May (†JPa et al.). Dickcissels were both widespread and numerous this spring. It was clearly a good season for Bobolinks; at Kellerton W.M.A., IA, they were deemed "abundant almost beyond belief" (JSi), and a hefty 181 were counted in s. Shelby, IL, 6 May (KF). The latter may well be the highest count ever made in the state. For the second year Yellow-headed Blackbirds returned to Metzger Marsh, OH, where they apparently nested last year; 5–6 males were on territory this year (*vide* RHa). An extremely late male Rusty Blackbird was still in Chicago 16 May (AA). a phenomenal 720 Brewer's Blackbirds were reported in s. Illinois 1 Apr in Bond and Clinton (DKa). The male Bullock's Oriole that wintered in Elk Horn, IA, was last seen 25 Mar (*vide* MCK). White-winged Crossbills remained in the Region until mid-April; the peak count consisted of a flock of 20 that lingered in Davenport, IA, until at least 16 Apr (CAR). Small numbers of Common Redpolls dallied until late March; the last report was in Monroe, IN, 27 Mar (J&SH). The Skokie, IL, Hoary Redpoll first reported in the winter summary remained until 3 Mar (*vide* EWW).

**CONTRIBUTORS CITED (Subregional editors in boldface):** The following 142 individuals are cited in this report. Some 150 other observers

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