

Middlewestern Prairie

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Observers: Brian Allen, Judy Allen, Christian Artuso, Philip Ashman, **Karl Bardon (Minnesota)**, Jim Baughman, Tom Beachy, Elizabeth Bell, Tom Bell (TBe), Dave Benson, Tom Boevers (TBo), Marilyn Bontly, Connie Brunell, Paul Budde, Dixie Burkhart (DBu), Adam Byrne, Dave Chalander (DCa), Steve Carlson, Allen Chartier, Daryl Christensen, Phil Chu (PCh), Paul Cypher, Nelvina DeKam, Herb Dingmann, Bob Domagalski, Kim Eckert, Dave Evans, Marty Evanson, Chip Francke, Carl Freeman (CFr), Jim Granlund, Cory Gregory, Mark Grulke, Pam Grulke, Dennis Gustafson, Kent Hall, Iris Hallauer (IHa), Jim Hallauer (JHa), **Jan Hansen (Wisconsin)**, Judy Heiler (JHe), Chris Hockema, John Hockema (JHo), Ken Hoffman, Molly Hoffman, Steve LaValley, Bill Litkey, James Lind, Craig Lipski, Robert B. Janssen, Phyllis Johnson, Robbye Johnson (RJo), Phil Kelly, Steve Kittelson, Craig Mandel, Sylvia Marek, Jim Mattsson, E. Bruce McLean, **Doug McWhirter (Michigan)** (DMc), Diane Millard, Steve Millard, Kip Miller, Steve Minard (SMi), Jackie Nooker, Mark Otnes, Scott Oulette, Pat Parsons, Craig Paulk (CPa), Walter Pawloski, Shaun Putz, Bill Reardon, Jack Reinoehl, Alan Ryff, Russ Schipper, Roger Schroeder (RSc), Tom Schultz (TSc), David Slater, Becky Smith, Drew Smith, Patrick Smyth (PSm), Jeff Stephenson, Peder Svingen, Jane St. Onge (JSt), Bill Sweetman (BSw), Carol Sykes, Tom Sykes, Louis Taccolini, Daryl Tessen, Tom Tustinson, Keith Westphal, Dan Williams, Heather Wise, Thomas Wood, Jon Wuepper, Ben Yokel.



Kenneth J. Brock
1265 Red Bud
Chesterton, Indiana 46304
(kebrock@ucs.indiana.edu)

Following three years of mild winters some of us were finally beginning to believe in global warming. Indeed, Robert Cecil noted that Iowa birders had almost forgotten terms like “ground blizzard” or “two feet of snow.” This season, however, the Region enjoyed one of those “old-fashioned” Arctic winters with low temperatures and heavy snow. December was especially brutal. Temperatures in Iowa averaged 12.6 degrees below normal (second coldest December in 126 years), and the snowfall was very heavy. At Chicago’s Midway Airport, December had the highest snowfall of any month on record. Although January and February were more seasonable, they never approached the balmy months of recent years. In the St. Louis area, William Rowe noted that the Mississippi River remained icy until mid-February.

December’s gelid climate eliminated most open water and blanketed the countryside with a deep cover of snow. These conditions sent

most of the waterfowl south early in the month. In addition, the deep snow provided difficult foraging conditions for most ground feeders, many of which also moved southward. Despite this inhospitable environment, a fair number of semi-hardy passerines lingered in the Region. Indeed, it was an unusually good winter for sparrows. However, several correspondents noted that the hard winter resulted in fewer species reported in the Region. John Cassidy’s resounding “Viva El Niño!” captured the sentiments of many of the Region’s birders.

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

Loons Through Vultures

In Dec 6 Red-throated Loons appeared along the Indiana lakefront where they have become regular in early winter. Inland reports included singles in *Clinton*, OH 3 Dec (DOv, LGr), an imm. in *Barren*, KY 3–6 Dec (DR et al.), and another imm. in *Adair*, KY 14 Dec (BPB). The

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& 25 Jan (WR, CW, ph. m.ob.) and an ad. was at Carl. L. 18 Feb (DKa) Added to the mix was a Franklin's Gull at Rend L., IL 12 Feb (KAM). Peak counts of the abundant gull species included 3000 Bonaparte's at Crab Orchard N.W.R., IL 2 Dec (KAM, DKa, FBe), 50,000 Ring-billeds at Carl. L. 11 Feb (DKa), and 14,500 Herrings at Starved Rock S.P., IL 12 Jan (JHa). Multiple Thayer's, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous Gulls were reported in every state, and Iceland Gulls appeared in every state except Iowa and Kentucky. Inland Great Black-backed Gulls were identified in Illinois (4), Missouri (3), and Kentucky (2). One of the most interesting gulls of the season was a first-year bird seen several times at the Hammond Marina, IN (RHu, BGr), which showed the characters of a Great Black-backed x Glaucous hybrid. For the second consecutive year, overzealous Forster's Terns arrived in Kentucky in Feb. This year 9 were seen at Kentucky L. 25 Feb (HC).

Multiple Eurasian Collared-Doves were reported from every state except Ohio. The latter is the Region's only state without Collared-Dove records. The peak Monk Parakeet tally consisted of 61 in Burnham (Chicago's s. side) 11 Feb (WJM). Snowy Owls were widespread with one to 8 reported in every state. The southernmost records included one with a broken wing in Louisville, KY 11 Jan (EW) and another in Cedar, MO 3 Jan (Don Lacey). The "eared" owls were present in typical numbers this winter; peak counts included 6 Long-eareds in Appanoose, IA 2 Dec (RLC) and 18 Short-eareds at the Hawthorn Mine in Sullivan, IN 27 Jan (J & SH, CW). Northern Saw-whet Owls were reported in above-average numbers, with 8 in both Iowa and Illinois, and 3 each in Ohio and Indiana.

Woodpeckers Through Waxwings

A nice winter pocket of 12 Red-headed Woodpeckers was found in Rock Island, IL 26 Dec (KJM). Two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, seen in Winnebago, IL 23 Dec (Dwi) were a bit farther n. than normal. Kentucky had a monopoly on this winter's hummingbirds: 6 Rufous Hummingbirds were captured and banded; interestingly, all proved to be ad. females.

A very late Eastern Phoebe tarried at Mermet L., IL until 30 Dec (KAM, DKa), and 3 were seen at Cuiivre River S.P., MO 24 Dec (SS). It was a better-than-average winter for Northern Shrikes, with 45 birds scattered across the four n. states. An impressive American Crow tally of 70,000 birds was logged 24 Feb at a Cincinnati, OH roost (FR). In w. Iowa single Black-billed Magpies appeared in Pottawattami 7 Dec (†C. Klaphake) and in Plymouth 19–31 Dec (RR,

SAThe famous cartoonist Gary Larson might caption the following scenario "How bird records go awry." In mid-Feb, the following post appeared on the Indiana bird listserv, "I just received a scan of a photo taken this past summer in Marion (east-central Indiana). It was a Green-breasted Mango." This note was posted by one of Indiana's most experienced and respected birders. Following the muffled groan that emanated from lamenting birders across the state, research was initiated on this phenomenal report. It seems that a salesman, while visiting a client, commented about bird feeders in the client's front yard. During the ensuing discussion the excited client showed him a hummingbird picture that had been a gift from a customer at photo lab where she worked. The salesman, a fairly new birder, was unable to identify the bird, but could clearly see that it was not a Ruby-throated. A few days later the salesman showed the picture to an Indiana D.N.R. employee who made the identification. Then followed a frantic effort to identify the mystery photographer. In the meantime the picture was shared with the veteran Hoosier birder who made the initial listserv post. A vigorous exchange of messages on the state listserv soon brought clarity to the situation. An astute reader of the Internet exchanges ultimately noted that the lady with the original photograph worked in Kokomo. That very city was also the residence of Phil Kelly, who had traveled to North Carolina in autumn and photographed that state's famous Green-breasted Mango. Thus, this most bizarre tale ended with a hearty laugh by all; however, had it evolved in a slightly different way, the results might have proven quite novel.

SJD), where this species has been reported sporadically over the past two years. An overly enthusiastic Purple Martin appeared in Calloway, KY 26 Feb, and 3 birds were seen there the following day (HC). Following last fall's feeble Red-breasted Nuthatch flight, only small numbers were scattered across the Region. Despite the cold winter, 4 midwinter Brown Creepers were found in Carroll, IA 20 Jan (DT), and a singleton was in Kane, IL on the same day (UG). Other evidences of semi-hardy species ignoring the cold included a Sedge Wren in Ohio, KY 12 Jan (MM. BPB et al.) and 7 more on the Prairie S.P., MO along a

route that has yielded this species during the past two winters (MBR). A Marsh Wren was found in Columbia, MO 16 Dec (BGo), and another was heard in Muhlenberg, KY 2 Feb (BY).

Ohio's 4th **Townsend's Solitaire**, an unusually cooperative bird, was discovered at Holden Arboretum, Lake, OH 17 Jan (Ian Adams) and remained through 18 Feb (†BWh, LGd, ph. m.ob.). Another Solitaire was seen in Appanoose, IA 25 Jan (Bob & Peggy Seddon) Two Mountain Bluebirds were reported in cen Iowa (Dallas) 10 Dec (†Lannie Miller). It was a good season for Varied Thrushes, with 3 in Iowa, 2 in Indiana, and 2 in Ohio. Remarkably the Indiana birds, male and female, appeared at the same feeder in Allen. The female, which first appeared 31 Dec, was seen sporadically through 10 Jan was joined by a male that lingered until 27 Feb (†Haw, RHe, EP, m.ob.). As expected, the peak American Pipit counts came from the s. states, where some 20 birds were seen in Henry, KY 27 Dec (KP) and 6–8 at Reelfoot N.W.R., KY 28 Jan-Feb (BPB, HC et al.). A single Bohemian Waxwing graced the Region by appearing in O'Brian, IA 24 Feb (†LAS). Cedar Waxwing peaked at 1500 in O'Brien, IA 23 Feb (DKo), a total that almost doubled the Region's next highest tally.

Warblers Through Finches

A tardy Orange-crowned Warbler, seen in Lester Davis Memorial Forest, Barton, MO 8 Dec (MBR) headed the list of a half dozen lingering warblers. The list also included a male Black-throated Blue in Cuyahoga, OH 10 Dec (Paul Lozano), several Pine Warblers, and a Common Yellowthroat at L. Lemon, IN 3 Dec (Jiri Dadok, Caroline Begley).

It was a good winter for sparrows. The easternmost of 6 Spotted Towhees reported in Missouri was a female in St. Charles 30 Dec (WR). Chipping Sparrows were surprisingly plentiful this winter. The northernmost bird was in Rockford, IL 1–10 Dec (Dwi, et al.), and the largest count consisted of a flock of 7 in e Jefferson, KY 23 Dec (BPB, MM). An unusually high winter count of 20 Field Sparrows was logged at Mermet L., IL 30 Dec (KAM, DKa) Winter Vesper Sparrows are casual in n. reaches of the Region; consequently, a bird in Winnebago, IL 6 Jan (Dwi) is most noteworthy. Iowa's first winter-period **Lark Bunting**, a basic-plumaged male, frequented the Myers' feeder in Perry, IA 1–8 Jan (†RKM, †JLF, †JJD, †m.ob.). Savannah Sparrows were quite plentiful, with reports from every state except Kentucky. The peak count consisted of 30 at Mermet L., IL 30 Dec (KAM, DKa). Wintering Le Conte's Sparrows are becoming quite regu-

lar, this year, there were reports from every state except Iowa and Ohio. The peak counts consisted of a state record 23 in *Gibson*, IN 4 Feb (JMc, P & JK, EP), a ne. Missouri record 16 in *Nodaway*, no date given (DAE, KG), and 14 at Grassy Slough, *Johnson*, IL 8 Dec (FBe). Kentucky's first confirmed winter-period Henslow's Sparrow was banded at Peabody WM A., *Muhlenberg* 13 Jan (MM, BPB, et al.). Harris's Sparrows were unusually widespread, with reports from every state except Indiana. The peak count was 34 in *Nodaway*, no date given (DAE, KG), but 2 birds were also reported in Kentucky, and an imm. lingered in *Wayne*, OH from 7 Jan+ (†JMm, †BWh, m ob). Western forms of the Dark-eyed Junco included 3 Oregon types in Iowa and one in Kentucky, plus a well documented Pink-sided. The latter frequented the Roseanna Denton feeder in *Pulaski*, KY 1-9 Jan. Photos of the bird were examined by Ken Rosenberg at the Cornell Lab, who confirmed the subspecific identification. December snows pushed longspurs s., resulting in triple-digit peak counts in every state except Missouri.

Appropriate for the impending Christmas season was a festive male Rose-breasted Grosbeak that appeared in *Sangamon*, IL 18 Dec (†HDB). Casual during winter anywhere in the Region, a Dickcissel identified in Lexington, KY 21 Jan (LR) was notable. Birders rarely take time to count blackbirds, so the 125,150 Red-winged and 147,457 Com. Grackles tallied at Rend L., IL 23 Dec (KMa) were noteworthy. A Western Meadowlark was reported in Winnebago, IL 7 Jan (DWi), and some 4 birds were found in Kentucky, suggesting that winter Westerns may have been overlooked in the past. At least 3 Yellow-headed Blackbirds were reported in s. Illinois in Dec and Jan. A large flock of some 200 Rusty Blackbirds was reported in *Clinton*, IL 25 Feb (DKa). Three female Great-tailed Grackles in *St Louis*, MO 1 Jan (WR, TP) suggests that the Great-tailed population continues to expand eastward.

Red Crossbills provided the singular highlight of the winter finch season; all other species appeared in below-normal numbers. Red Crossbills appeared in all six states; the largest count by far was 30 in *McDonough*, IL 8-9 Dec (LLH); however, between 7 and 23 birds were reported in every other state. In contrast to last winter's major White-winged Crossbill invasion, only one bird appeared this year—in *Allen*, IN on 13 Jan (BWA). Com. Redpoll reports were confined to 23 birds in Iowa and 7 in Indiana. Pine Siskins were also quite scarce, and no Evening Grosbeaks whatsoever were reported. In Iowa, Eurasian Tree

Sparrows established a new location, moving northwesterly to w. *Johnson*, where 3 were seen 2-3 Feb (JLF, THK).

Corrigendum

The 104 Eastern Kingbirds reported in *Clay*, MO 13 Apr (NAB 54: 289) were actually seen 13 May.

Contributors cited: (Subregional editors in boldface) Many other individuals who could not be personally acknowledged also submitted notes to the various state reports. Alan Anderson, Susan Bagby (SBg), Frank Bennett (FBe), Torre Berger (TBe), Richard Bjorklund (RBj), Sigurd Bjorklund (SBj), H. David Bohlen (ABr), **Alan Bruner** (AB) (Indiana), Charles Burwick, Dennis Carter, John K. Cassidy, John Castrale (JCs), **Robert Cecil** (RCe) (Iowa), Hap Chambers, Ray L. Cummins, Tim Davis, James J. Dinsmore, Steven J. Dinsmore, David A. Easterla, Jan Eaton (JEa), Diane Elmore, Jackie Elmore (JEl), Vic Fazio Jim L. Fuller, Larry Gara (LGr), Louis Gardella (LGd), Urs Geiser, Bruce Glick (BGl), Bill Goodge (BGo), Kirby Goslee, Brendan Grube (BGr), Joseph W. Hammond,

Jim Hampson (JHa), Ray Hannikman (RHn), **Rob Harlan** (RHa) (Ohio), Jim Haw (Haw), Roger Hedge (RHe), Jim & Susan Hengeveld (J & SH), Larry L. Hood, Robert Hughes (RHu), **Brad Jacobs** (BJa) (Missouri), Dan Kassebaum (DKa), Kelly Kelly, Phil & Joanne Kelly (P & JK), Thomas H. Kent, Darwin Koenig (DKo), Charlene Malone, Walter J. Marcisz, **Kelly J. McKay** (KJM) (Illinois), Cynthia McKee CMC, Jim McCormac (JMm), Jeff McCoy (JMc), John McKee (JMk), Keith A. McMullen (KAM), Mark Monroe, Robert K. Myers, Doug Overacker (DOv), Mike Overton, **Brainard Palmer-Ball, Jr.** (BPB) (Kentucky), Tom Parmeter, John Pogacnik (JPg), Ed Powers, Kerry Prather, Mark Proescholdt, Marjory A. Rand, Russ Reisz, Frank Renfrow, Mike Retter (MRe), Mark B. Robbins, David Roemer, William Rowe, Leisa Royse, Lee A. Schoenewe, Scott Schuette, Jerry Smith (JSm), Douglas Stotz (DSt), Craig Taylor, Ed Thelen (ETh), Dennis Thompson, Steven Thomas, Bob Walton (BWA), Bill Whan (BWh), Don Whitehead (DWh), Eileen Wicker, Dan Williams Jr. (DWi), Geoff Williamson, Jeff Wilson, Chris Wood, and Ben Yandell.



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