

# Illinois & Indiana



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Most of the season's "real" winter temperatures occurred during the final two-thirds of January and the first third of February. Outside this interval, it was a relatively mild winter. Precipitation was near normal and storms were of moderate intensity. Mild conditions in December caused scores of birds to linger, a boon to the Christmas Bird Count totals. Regarding the Region's birds, Kelly McKay aptly summarized the winter of 2003–2004 as "one of the most diverse ever recorded." The season's bird list was indeed quite eclectic: in addition to the presence of virtually every expected species, birders found a plethora of lingering migrants, a nice mix of semi-hardy species, and a modest selection of rarities.

Among lingering migrants were Great Egret, Pectoral Sandpiper, Sedge Wren, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Indigo Bunting (8 of them!), and Dickcissel. The most surprising bird in this category, however, was a Say's Phoebe that may have wintered locally.

**Abbreviations:** Carl. L. (Carlyle L., Clinton, Fayette, & Bond, IL), C.A. (Conservation Area), I.B.S.P. (Illinois Beach S.P., on the lakefront 17 km s. of the Wisconsin border), Jax. P. (Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront), L. Cal. (L. Calumet), L. Chau. (Lake Chatauqua N.W.R., IL), L. Gibs. (Lake Gibson, sw. Indiana), Mill. B. (Miller Beach, IN, the southernmost point on L. Michigan).

### LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Red-throated Loons were reported only on the Indiana lakefront, where a peak count of 7 was logged at Mill. B. 6 Dec (MT, BJG). Single Pacific Loons were reported at Horseshoe L., Madison, IL 5 Dec (FHo, KAM, JE) and at L. Gibs. 22 Dec (ph. †JJM, LBo).

Horned Grebes were unusually plentiful in s. portions of the Region, with peak tallies of 198 at Rend L., IL 20 Dec (FB) and 105 at L. Gibs. 10 Jan (JH, SH, m. ob.). Reports of the less-common grebes improved a bit over last winter, with 3 Red-neckeds and 6 Eareds observed this season.

Sizeable American White Pelican counts included 188 in Madison, IL 11 Jan (EW) and 86 at L. Chau. 12 Dec (RGB, SBj). Good numbers of Great Blue Herons lingered in the Region; the peak count was 146 at L. Chau. 9 Jan (RGB, SBj). Remarkably, a Great Egret dallied in s. Illinois at Mermet L., where it was seen 31 Dec, 1–2 Jan, and 24 Jan (FB, KAM, CL). Following the pattern of recent years, Black-crowned Night-Herons wintered in n. reaches of the Region. This species was present all winter at L. Cal. (WJM, KW, JA) and 2 lingered at the Fort Wayne Zoo, IN until at least 20 Dec (*vide* EP). Peak Black Vulture counts of 60 birds were recorded in Johnson, IL 6 Dec (KAM, m. ob.) and at Patoka L., IN 23 Dec (JSC et al.). The only triple-digit Turkey Vulture report consisted of 118 in Clark, IL 28 Feb (EW).

### WATERFOWL

Overall, waterfowl numbers were slightly below average. Greater White-fronted Goose numbers followed this trend, with counts well below those of recent years; maximum tallies included 1420 at L. Chau. 27 Dec (RGB, SBj) and 931 at Union County C.A., IL 30 Dec (KAM, SJD). Snow Goose numbers followed suit, with the largest counts down 90 percent from last winter. In contrast, it was a good season for Ross's Geese, with a peak count of 53 at Union County C.A., IL 30 Dec (KAM, SJD), plus some 14 other reports. The largest Trumpeter Swan tallies included 13 in Fountain, IN 31 Dec (AWB) and 9 in Massac, IL 20 Dec (FB). Excellent winter Tundra Swan reports included 85 in Winnebago, IL 17 Dec (MK) and 80 in Elkhart, IN 12 Dec (DSt).

Puddle-duck numbers were generally modest this winter, as the season's only noteworthy report consisted of an early Blue-winged Teal at Mermet L., IL 28 Feb (KAM, TAM). Bay ducks were also below normal, but peak counts of 5000 Ring-necked Ducks at Mermet L., IL 2 Jan (KAM, CL) and 2932 Greater Scaup at I.B.S.P. 1 Jan (GAW) provided encouragement. It was a typical sea-duck winter, with most members of this group appearing in average numbers. An ad. male Harlequin Duck appeared off the Hammond Marina, IN 24 Jan (ph. GAW, BJG, JJM et al.), for the only report on L. Michigan. Inland Harlequins are casual to accidental; consequently the ad. female Harlequin Duck discovered at Butterworth Park, Rock Island, IL 29 Feb (AJF, KJM, m. ob.), was most noteworthy. As expected, scattered flocks of up to 5 scoters, of all

three species, were reported across the Region. Extremely low Long-tailed Duck numbers were reported in Illinois (KJM), but this species appeared in average numbers on L. Michigan. Tops among four Common Goldeneye counts that exceeded 2000 was a tally of 3000 on the Mississippi R., *Rock Island*, IL 9 Feb (JCh). For the 2nd consecutive year, a male **Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser** appeared at the Hammond Marina, IN 10 Jan (ph. JJM et al.). The best, among several fine Common Merganser tallies, was a count of 2548 on the Mississippi R., in *Whiteside* and *Carroll*, IL 18 Dec (KJM, RTS, m. ob.).

### OSPREY THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A very late Osprey observed in *Jasper*, IL 9 Dec appeared to have an injured foot (BS, LHR). Peak Bald Eagle counts included 1243 on the Mississippi R. in *Rock Island*, IL 10 Jan (KJM) and 55 in sw. Indiana 5 Jan (JSC). Northern Goshawks were decidedly scarce this winter, with only 2 in Illinois and one in Indiana. It was another fruitful season for vagrant Red-tailed Hawks: 2 Harlan's Hawks were in Illinois, with 2 more in Indiana, and there were 2 Krider's in Illinois. Rough-legged Hawks invaded this winter and were both abundant and widely distributed, especially in Feb. Peak Rough-legged tallies included 40 (28 light and 12 dark morphs) in *Steuben*, IN 21 Feb (JWi et al.), 33 (26 light and 7 dark) in *Sullivan*, IN 15 Feb (DRW), and 19 (15 light and 4 dark) at Goose Lake Prairie S.P., IL 1 Feb (EW). Golden Eagles were reported in typical numbers, with 5 in Indiana and 2 in Illinois. Compared to last winter's poor showing, Merlin numbers rebounded

strongly, with 9 in Illinois and 3 in Indiana.

The precarious Illinois Gray Partridge population is still holding on; a report came from the Rockford area 20 Dec (DTW), and 6 were in *Whiteside* 24 Dec (JB). The Region's Greater Prairie-Chicken counts included 21 in *Marion*, IL 27 Feb (JW, TE) and 15 in *Jasper*, IL 19 Dec (JW, m. ob.). In contrast, Wild Turkeys are flourishing, with 206 observed in *Winnebago*, IL 20 Dec (DTW), along with two additional reports that exceeded 100 birds. The winter's only rail was a Virginia at Beverly Shores, IN 20 Dec (JKC). An excellent winter tally of 115 Sandhill Cranes was logged at Chicago's Morton Arboretum 14 Dec (JC, EES). In Indiana, many Sandhills lingered well into Dec, as evidenced by the observation of southbound flocks totaling 5800 and 5635 over *Monroe*, IN 19 & 20 Dec, respectively (DRW, SBI et al.).

A number of shorebirds took advantage of the mild Dec temperatures and tarried in the Region. Tardy Least Sandpiper reports included 3 at L. Gibs. 10 Jan (GB, LBo et al.), 4 at Rend L., IL 20 Dec (FB, DMK, TAM), and 2 at L. Gibs. 22 Dec (JJM, LBo). The season's most remarkable shorebird report was of a mid-winter **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Mermet L., IL, where it was seen 19 & 24 Jan (FB). Dunlins also stayed late, with 40 at Rend L., IL 6 Dec (KAM m. ob.), 2 at Brookville Res., IN 8 Dec (JJM), and 8 at Mermet L., IL 31 Dec (FB). The shorebird of the season was the **Purple Sandpiper**: an ad. appeared on L. Michigan at Waukegon, IL 18 & 23 Dec (ph. TAM, KT), where it is very rare, and an inland bird was at L. Gibs. 10 Jan (GB, LBo, ph. JH, SH et al.), where this species is casual.

### GULLS THROUGH OWLS

Little Gulls were reported only at inland sites, with single ads. at Brookville Res., *Union*, IN 6-8 Dec (WHB, LBr, SD, ph. JJM) and at Mermet L., IL 27 Feb (FB). Peak counts of the common gull species included 1300 Bonaparte's at Rend L., IL 6 Dec (KAM m. ob.), 8000 Ring-billeds at L. Springfield, IL 11 Jan (Rjk), and 3200 Herrings at East Alton, IL 9 Feb (KAM). Among the season's most interesting gulls were 2 probable Glaucous Gull x Herring Gull hybrids, an ad. on the Whiting, IN lakefront 17 Jan+ (KJB, JKC) and a third-year bird at Starved Rock S.P. 31 Jan (MLR). The less-common large gulls were also well represented this winter, with high counts of 8 Thayer's at Starved Rock S.P., IL 31 Jan (DTW, TAM, m. ob.), 7 Iceland's at Starved Rock S.P. 31 Jan (DTW, TAM, MLR, m. ob.), 5 Lesser Black-backed in East Alton, IL 1 & 7 Feb (KAM, WCR), 7 Glaucous on the Whiting, IN lakefront 21 Feb (SRB, JKC, LSH et al.), and 20 Great Black-backed in the Hammond marina area, IN 24 Jan (JJM, BJG), the latter an all-time high count for the state.

The myriad Eurasian Collared-Dove reports included peak counts of 79 at Neoga, *Cumberland*, IL 21 Dec (JW) and 40 at Havana, IL 3 Jan (EJC, m. ob.). One of the White-winged Doves reported at Waltonville, IL last summer, remained through the winter. It was seen 6 & 27 Dec and 2 & 20 Jan (ph. TAM, DMK, KAM, FB, CL). On 3 Jan, 36 large nests and 81 Monk Parakeets were observed at the established Burnam, IL colony (WJM). The always hard-to-find Barn Owl was observed at Cypress Creek N.W.R., IL 6 Dec and 2 & 19 Jan (FB, KAM, DMK, TAM, CL). Long-eared Owls were



In recent winters one or two Pacific Loons have been reported almost annually in the Illinois & Indiana region. This basic-plumaged Pacific Loon (at right, with Common Loon) was at Lake Gibson in southwestern Indiana 22 December, one of two reported this season. Photograph by Jeffrey J. McCoy.

widely reported, with 20 in Indiana and 14 in Illinois. The only large accumulation consisted of 10 at Summit L., IN 22 Feb (SAP). Short-eared Owls were also quite plentiful, with peak counts of 57 at the Hawthorn Mine, Sullivan, IN 6 Dec (LSU), 31 at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL 19 Dec (JW, m. ob.), and 24 at the Ayrshire Mine, Warrick, IN (JJM). Northern Saw-whet Owl reports were near average, with 6 birds reported in Illinois and 5 in Indiana.

### HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH WAXWINGS

Of the banded Rufous Hummingbirds reported in the fall summary, one lingered in Richland, IL through 20 Dec (PW, LHR, BS) and one in Monroe, IN was last seen 8 Jan (CMY). Additionally, Cathy Hutcheson banded winter birds at Belleville, St. Clair, IL 24 Dec–3 Jan (KAM, CL) and in Carbondale, IL 28 Dec and 1 & 3 Jan (RSR, m. ob.). An Eastern Phoebe lingered in s. Illinois through most of Jan, where it was seen at Mermet L. 2 & 23 Jan (FB, KM, CL). Far more astonishing, however was the (re)appearance of a Say's Phoebe at Carl. L. 22 & 26 Feb (MaS, MiS, ph. DMK, FHo, KAM)—at the exact site at which one was reported last Oct, leading to speculation that it might have wintered. The bird was observed feeding on early midges (KAM). Northern Shrikes were plentiful this winter, with 14 in Illinois and 3 in Indiana. The report of 168,400 American Crows in Vermilion, IL 17 Dec (likely a high C.B.C. total) suggests that the population is rebounding from West Nile virus.

A fine late-winter Brown Creeper tally was logged 28 Feb, when 25 were found in the Milan Bottom, Rock Island, IL (KJM, AJF). Also extraordinary for the late winter was a Sedge Wren in Pulaski, IL 28 Feb (TAM, KAM). Tardy Marsh Wrens re-



Only one of two Little Gulls seen (both inland) in the Illinois & Indiana region, this adult at Brookville Reservoir in Union County, Indiana (at left, with Bonaparte's Gull) remained for three days, 6 through (here) 8 December 2003. Photograph by Jeffrey J. McCoy.

mained in La Salle, IL through 28 Dec (KW, JD, KJM) and Mermet L., IL until 31 Dec (FB). Above-normal numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets lingered into winter; the peak tally was 12 in Massac, IL 31 Dec (KJM, CBI). An ad. female Varied Thrush in Sangamon, IL 29–30 Dec & 17 Jan (ph. TAM, KB, HDB, m. ob.) provided the season's only report. Winter Gray Catbirds were widespread, with 5 in Illinois and 4 in Indiana; the northernmost reports included singles in Moline, IL 14 Dec (TMU, SF), Jax. P. 22 Dec (PRC), and Beverly Shores, IN 11 Jan

(EMH). Later American Pipit reports included 2 in Allen, IN 20 Dec (JG, †SSC), one in Steuben, IN 21 Dec (EP, CP), and one at Fort Sheridan, IL 27 Dec (ph. †GAW), but the most impressive tally was of 202 at L. Gibs. 14 Dec (JJM, DA, BJG, JH). Cedar Waxwings appeared only in modest numbers; the peak count consisted of only 435 in Winnebago, IL 3 Jan (DTW).

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

It was another remarkable year for winter warblers: nine species were reported within the Region. Among the more expected species were 3 Orange-crowns, scores of Yellow-rumps, 2 Pines, 4 Palms (including a

Yellow Palm at Patoka L., IN 13 Dec; ph. JJM), and 3 Common Yellowthroats. Less expected were an imm. male Northern Parula (Indiana's first winter record) in Monroe, IN 20 Dec–30 Jan (RJB, JH, ph. SH, DRW), a male Cape May Warbler in Montgomery, IN 5–27 Jan (AA, ph. CCM), Indiana's first winter Yellow-throated Warbler at the Ballard's suet feeder in Marion 3–19 Jan (ph. KFE, CA, TMY), and an Ovenbird in Owen, IN 3 Jan (RB, DH, TZ).

For Hoosier birders, the season's top attraction was Indiana's 2nd Green-tailed

Towhee. This exceptionally cooperative bird arrived at Gary Dorman's New Albany feeder 10 Dec and was seen there regularly through 5 Feb (ph. JKC, ph. JJM, †RLH, †m. ob.). Spotted Towhees were reported in Illinois at Chicago 16 & 19 Dec (GAW, MBC), in Du Page 20 Dec & 17–24 Jan (TAM, BF, KFi, KAM, CL), and in Jersey 14 Feb (CMI, LHn). As evidenced by a count of 500 in Winnebago, IL 25 Jan (DTW), American Tree Sparrows were unusually plentiful this winter. Although one or 2 Chipping Sparrows are reported most winters, this



A Say's Phoebe was found 22 and 26 February 2004 at Carlyle Lake Wildlife Management Area, dining on hatching midges. This bird was at the exact site at which one was discovered 31 October 2003, leading to speculation that the same individual might have overwintered. Photograph by Dan M. Kassebaum.

year's tally of 9 was exceptional. Unexpected winter sparrows included a Vesper in *Massac*, IL 31 Dec (KJM) and a Grasshopper in *Cook*, IL 22 Dec (ph. †GAW, JD). Harris's Sparrows were reported only at Horseshoe L., *Madison*, IL, where 3 were found 15 Feb (FHo). Peak Lapland Longspur tallies included 278 in *De Kalb*, IL 1 Feb (JC) and 200+ in *Fountain*, IN 31 Dec–10 Jan (AWB, PP). A fine peak Snow Bunting count of 500 birds was recorded in *LaGrange*, IN 13 Jan (Haw, FHd, SSc), and a good flight occurred in early Feb, as a wave of Snow Buntings pressed deeply into Indiana, providing numerous reports much farther s. than normal and a peak tally of 200 in *Monroe* 1 Feb (DRW). As occurs most years, a few Indigo Buntings lingered into winter; this year's crop included an impressive 7 in Illinois and one in *Wayne*, IN, which visited a feeder 8 Jan–19 Feb (ph. WHB). A tardy Dickcissel appeared in O'Fallon, IL 26 Dec (KAM).

Among the more interesting icterid reports were Feb Western Meadowlarks at three Illinois locations and a count of 30 Brewer's Blackbirds at Carl. L. 22 Feb (KAM). It was generally another lean season for the winter finches. The best showing was by Purple Finch, with numerous double-digit counts across the Region. Crossbills were reported only in Illinois, with 2 Reds in *Kane* 10 Jan (EES) and 2 White-wings in *Vermilion* 27 Dec (EJC, m. ob.). In late winter, small to modest Common Redpoll numbers were widespread across n. reaches of the Region. The maximum Illinois count consisted of a flock of 50 in *Winnebago* 8–29 Feb (DTW), and the largest Indiana tally was of 22 at Indiana Dunes S.P. 1 Mar (BJG). Four Redpolls pressed s. to East Alton, IL, where they were seen 2, 7–8, & 10 Jan (FH, KAM, ph. TAM et al.). Peak Pine Siskin counts included 120 in Rockford, IL 28 Dec (DTW), 91 at Chicago's Morton Arboretum 13 Dec (EW), and 25 in *Allen*, IN 19 Feb (RPR). Evening Grosbeaks have not been reported in the Region in six winters. The Eurasian



The season's only reported Varied Thrush in the Illinois & Indiana region was this female in Sangamon County, Illinois 29–30 December and 17 January (here 30 December). Photograph by Travis A. Mahan.

Tree Sparrow continues its steady march northward through Illinois: an impressive count of 174 was logged in *Mercer* 19 Dec (KJM, m. ob.), and 169 were in nearby *McDonough* and *Fulton* 29 Dec (LLH, m. ob.). The northernmost report came from *Cordova*, IL, where 2 were found 23 Dec (KJM).

**Addendum:** An ad. Little Gull was observed at Brookville Res., IN 4–7 Jan 2003 (WHB, DGo et al.). This species is casual away from L. Michigan.

**Corrigendum:** The observer list for the Rufous Hummingbird on 24–28 Jul at Springfield, IL (*N.A.B.* 57: 592) should read (BL, ph. HDB, TAM et al.).



Part of a modest redpoll invasion, this Common Redpoll in East Alton, Illinois 2 through (here) 10 January 2004 was among the Region's southernmost birds. Photograph by Travis A. Mahan.

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