

Illinois & Indiana



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Overall, the winter of 2004–2005 was mild and wet, the seventh wettest on record in Illinois. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the winter averaged 3.4° F above normal across Illinois and 2.4° F above in the Chicago area. The coldest period (compared to seasonal norms) occurred during the third week of December, when temperatures plunged 10° F below normal. Mid-January also experienced a significant cold snap. February temperatures were quite mild.

This winter was similar to last year's, with fine bird diversity, lots of lingering migrants, and several rarities. It was a good winter for gulls, with excellent numbers of the regular species, plus a Mew Gull and multiple Black-

legged Kittiwakes. Present in unusually high numbers this winter were Tundra Swans, Northern Saw-whet Owls, Northern Shrikes, and Varied Thrushes. Noteworthy among the lingering migrants were American Bittern, Fish Crow, Lincoln's Sparrows, and Dickcissels. In addition, it proved to be an above-average season for the fickle winter finches.

Abbreviations: Carl. L. (Carlyle L. in Clinton, Fayette, and Bond, IL); I.B.S.P. (Illinois Beach S.P., on the lakefront 16 km s. of the Wisconsin border); Jax. P. (Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront); L. Cal. (Lake Calumet on Chicago's s. side), Chau. (Chautauqua N.W.R., IL); L. Gibs. (L. Gibson, sw. Indiana).

LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Except for 2 on Carl. L. 11 Dec (DMK) and single imms. at Summit L., IN 8–15 Jan (Ron Kolde, DGo, SAP) and at L. Lemon, IN 21 Jan (DGo), Red-throated Loons were restricted to the Indiana lakefront, where 6 were counted. Two Pacific Loons were re-

ported without details at Carl. L. 12 Dec (JU, JE) and at Morse Res., IN 22–23 Dec (JCo et al.). Following last fall's dearth of Common Loons on L. Michigan, a record winter flight was noted at Dunes S.P., IN 13 Dec, when 529 southbound migrants were noted (DGo, KJB). The Region's only Red-necked Grebe was reported at Summit L., IN 15 Jan (SAP). Single Western Grebes were observed on the Indiana lakefront at West Beach 5 Dec (JIM) and at Dunes S.P. 18 Dec (†AA).

Along the Mississippi R., American White Pelicans peaked at 200 in Monroe, IL 12 Jan (JPZ). Most unexpected was the discovery of an American Bittern at Carl. L. 14 & 26 Dec (DMK, RSR); only a handful of winter records exist for the Region. A tardy Great Egret lingered in Will, IL until 11 Dec (EWW) to provide an Illinois winter record for the 2nd consecutive year. An injured Green Heron was discovered in the Palos area of Cook, IL 19 Dec and was found dead 21 Dec (WSS, †WJM). Although wintering Black-crowned Night-Herons are regular in the Chicago area, an ad. that attempted to winter in Fort Wayne, IN, was unexpected; it was last seen 17 Jan (Haw, ph. EP). Black Vultures were widespread and appeared in good numbers; the peak tally consisted of 100 in Johnson, IL 2 Jan (KAM, CL).

In general, geese rebounded from last winter's depressed numbers. Peak counts included 2665 Greater White-fronteds at Chau. 11 Feb (RGB, SBj) and 200,000 Snows at Carl. L. 9 Jan (DMK). In Indiana, however, Snow Geese remained scarce. Ross's Geese were also relatively plentiful, with 28 in Illinois and 4 in Indiana. Wintering Mute Swans peaked on Wolf L., IL with 116 on 31 Jan (CAM). The most impressive swan report consisted of a whopping 856 Tundras on the Mississippi R., *Whiteside* and *Carroll*, IL 16 Dec (KJM, KR, m.ob.). This total is surely one of the largest ever recorded in the Region.

Dabblers appeared in typical numbers; the most unusual records consisted of early Blue-winged Teal reports—12 at Mermet L., IL 26 Feb (KAM) and 2 at Carl. L. on the same day (DMK). Winner of the odd-duck award was an ad. male "Brewer's Duck," (Gadwall × Mallard hybrid) at L. Cal. 19 & 26 Feb (†WJM). Bay ducks were slightly above normal; peak tallies included 4000 Canvasbacks in Hancock, IL 26 Feb (AD), 6000 Ring-necked Ducks in Calhoun, IL 18 Dec (WCR), and 1540 Greater Scaup at I.B.S.P. 8 Jan (DFS). It was an above-average winter for sea ducks. Female or imm. Harlequin Ducks were reported at one Indiana and two Chicago lakefront locations, and an ad. male was reportedly photographed at Jax. P. 15 Jan (GAW). Scoter reports were clearly up this winter, with peak tallies of 16 Surfs at I.B.S.P. 4 Dec (AFS), 18 White-wingeds (all males) at I.B.S.P. 1 Jan (GAW),

and 6 Blacks at I.B.S.P. 4 Dec (AFS). One to 3 of each scoter species were also reported at inland sites. A count of 655 Long-tailed Ducks at Winthrop Harbor 19 Feb (EES) constitutes one of the Region's better counts in recent years. The male Hooded Merganser × goldeneye hybrid returned to the Hammond, IN marina for the 4th consecutive year (ph. JKC et al.). Ruddy Duck numbers were up somewhat this winter, peaking at 700 at Chau. 19 Feb (Rjk).

HAWKS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

High Bald Eagle concentrations on the Mississippi R. yielded counts of 1694 in *White-side* and *Rock Island*, IL 7–8 Jan and 1458 in *Hancock*, *Henderson*, and *Mercer*, IL 9–10 Jan (KJM). The Indiana Department of Natural Resources mid-winter survey produced 187 Bald Eagles 6–7 Jan, well above average (JSC). It was a good winter for harriers, with peak counts of 58 in sw. Indiana 4 Dec (LWS) and 52 in the Arklands Reclamation Area, *Perry*, IL 12 Feb (TAM). Northern Goshawks were frightfully scarce this winter: only 2 were reported in the Region. Red-tailed Hawks were reported in typical numbers, but a wintering Harlan's Hawk appeared at Horseshoe L., *Madison*, IL (FHo), and 2 were in *Harrison*, IN (Skip Stocksdale). A total of 12 Golden Eagles across the Region was above normal. Fifteen Merlins were reported (about average) Regionwide, with the highlight an ad. male *richardsonii* in *Randolph*, IL 5 Feb (JE). Impressive counts of gallinaceous species included 106 Greater Prairie-Chickens at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL 21 Dec (JW m.ob.) and 226 Wild Turkeys near Rockford, IL 18 Dec (DTW, m.ob.).

An exceptional tally of 350 Sandhill Cranes logged in *Des Plaines*, IL 21 Dec (AA) attests to the winter abundance of this species n. of the *Jasper-Pulaski*, IN staging area. The Region's only Virginia Rail reports came from *Beverly Shores*, IN, where one was reported 4 Jan (DGo) and 2 were detected 5 Feb (JJM). A straggling Sanderling, recorded at *Waukegan* 11 Dec (AFS), was unexpected. Now a rare but regular winter species in the Region, Least Sandpiper was reported at six locations; the peak count consisted of 28 in *Jasper*, IL 17 Dec (BS). Two Purple Sandpipers at *Waukegan*, IL 10 Dec (ph., †GAW) were exceptional, and 3 very late Dunlin were seen in *Jasper*, IL 17 Dec (BS).

JAEGERS THROUGH OWLS

An apparent Parasitic Jaeger worked the outer breakwall at the Port of Indiana throughout the day on 11 Dec (BJG, JKC, JJM, MT, KJB et al.). Likely the same bird, also identified as a



Winter-period Purple Sandpipers are casual on Lake Michigan, so these two at *Waukegan* 10 December 2004 were quite a find. Photograph by Geoffrey A. Williamson.

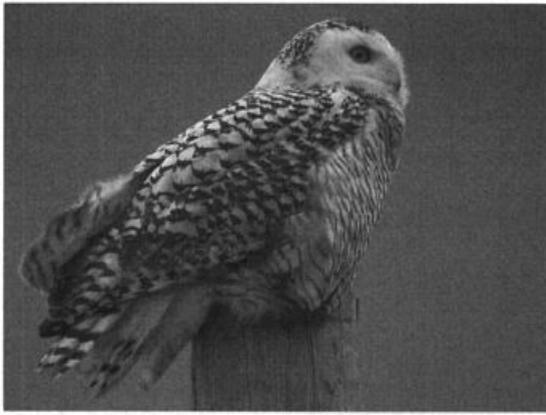
juv. Parasitic, was at Miller Beach (7 km farther w.) 13 Dec (JJM). This constitutes the first winter record of a Parasitic Jaeger on the Indiana lakefront in more than 60 years. Casual throughout the Region in winter, a Laughing Gull at *Salamonie Res.*, IN 16 Dec (†Haw) provided a first winter record for ne. Indiana. Peak tallies of the more common gulls included 8000 Bonaparte's at Carl. L. 11 Dec (DMK), 50,000 Ring-billeds at Carl. L. 14 Dec (DMK), and 6900 Herrings at I.B.S.P. 8 Jan (DFS). The season's rarest gull was an ad. Mew Gull at Carl. L. 16 Jan (DMK, ph. TAM, CT, JE, Cml et al.). Also noteworthy was a second-winter California Gull at Carl. L. 12 Dec (ph. DMK). An organized "Gull Frolic" at Winthrop Harbor, Chicago on 19 Feb yielded impressive



Casual anywhere in the Region, and especially rare away from Lake Michigan, this adult Mew Gull at *Carlyle Lake*, Illinois 16 January 2005 was the Region's rarest gull of the winter. Photograph by Travis A. Mahan.

counts of several of the less-common species: 12 Thayer's, 5 Icelands, and 6 Lesser Black-backed (GAW et al.). Interestingly, one first-year Iceland observed during the "Frolic" had a bicolored bill (ph. RHu), a character sometimes associated with—but apparently not diagnostic of—the nominate form. It was also an exceptional winter for Glaucous Gull, with a state record 13 counted along the *Lake*, IN lakefront 15 Jan (JKC, SRB, JJM, RJP, DD). A record count of Great Black-backed Gull was also logged along the *Hammond-Whiting*, IN lakefront 23 Jan, when 25 were recorded (JKC, JJM). Remarkably, some 8 juv. Black-legged Kittiwakes were reported in Dec along the Indiana lakefront, including 3 on 11 Dec (JJM). Two birds lingered at the Port of Indiana through 1 Jan (RLH, LAC, TH) to provide the state's first multiple-bird total for Jan; one lingered at that site through 9 Jan (JJM, BJG). An ad. Black-legged Kittiwake visited *Eagle Creek Park*, IN 26 Feb (†DOC, †KWy). Without details, another ad. was reported at *Lock & Dam 14*, *Rock Island*, IL 29 Dec (SF).

The *Carbondale*, IL *Inca Dove* reported in the fall summary remained through 13 Dec (JL). Some of the 82 Monk Parakeets reported in *Burnham*, *Cook*, IL 7 Feb (DFS) have apparently spilled over into nearby *Hammond*, IN, where 10 birds, along with 2 nests, were reported in mid-Jan (CAM). Some 6 Snowy Owls, 3 in each state, were reported this winter. Interestingly, only half of these appeared on the L. Michigan lakefront,



Only a half-dozen Snowy Owls appeared in the Illinois & Indiana Region this winter. This dark individual, photographed 5 December 5 2004 at Rotary Park in Sangamon County, was one of the more southerly of these wanderers.

Photograph by Travis A. Mahan.

which has been the traditional location for this species. The southernmost birds included an imm. female at Springfield, *Sangamon*, IL 5 Dec (ph. TAM, CS, RJk) and another in *Huntington*, IN 31 Dec–22 Feb (Joyce Gottschalk, Haw, m.ob.). The “eared” owls were reported in typical numbers, with maximum counts of 8 Long-eareds at Summit L., IN 4 Dec (SAP) and 14 Short-eareds in *Huntington*, IN 2 Feb (Joe Steinmetz, m.ob.) and 14 also at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL 19 Jan (JW, TE). Northern Saw-whet Owls were unusually plentiful and vocal. Peak tallies included 9 at Carl. L. 20 Feb (DMK, BS), 7 at Willow Slough W.M.A. 1 Jan (EMH), plus 6 more in a another section of Willow Slough 1 Jan (JJM).

WOODPECKERS THROUGH WAXWINGS

An exceptional winter count of 163 Red-headed Woodpeckers was logged in *Jackson*, IL 1 Jan (KJM, SJ). The season's only Rufous Hummingbirds were reported in *Indiana*, where 4 were banded (fide DGo). Once again, Eastern Phoebes dallied in the Region. Mid-winter birds included 2 in *Monroe*, IN 30 Dec (LWS), one in *Massac*, IL 31 Dec (KAM, DMK), and another in *Marion*, IN 8 Jan–5 Feb (JCo). Additionally, 5 overzealous migrants were recorded in s. *Indiana* during the last half of Feb. A maximum count of 7 Loggerhead Shrikes was recorded at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL 19 Jan (JW, TE). *Indiana* Loggerheads have been quite scarce in recent years; consequently, the singles reported in *Orange* 19 Dec (JSC) and in *Jackson* 27 Feb (DL) are noteworthy. It was an exceptional winter for Northern Shrike, with some 21 reported in the Region. The highest count consisted of 3 at Kingsbury W.M.A., IN 29 Jan (JJM), and the southernmost birds reached *Sullivan*, IN 1 Jan (ph. LWS) and *Shelby*, IL 31 Dec (DFS).

A mid-winter Fish Crow in *Rock Island*, IL 2 Jan (KJM, JSa) was unexpected. Early returning Tree Swallows appeared at Horse-

shoe L., *Madison*, IL 19 Feb (FHo) and at Carl. L. 26 Feb (DMK). Red-breasted Nuthatches were more abundant than normal across n. portions of the Region. Winter Marsh Wrens were reported at Eagle Creek Park, IN 26 Dec (BL, RFB, LPv, ph. JSu), in *Kankakee*, IL 2 Jan (DFS), and in *McHenry*, IL 15 Jan (DFS). K. J. McKay commented that Hermit Thrushes were “noticeably less abundant” in Illinois. Nine were reported at Rend L., IL 18 Dec (KAM, CL) and 3 at Kingsbury W.M.A. 29 Jan (JJM). It proved to be a fine winter for Varied Thrushes: a female was at Calumet Park, IL 22–26 Dec

(CAM, WJM, DFS, m.ob.), a male was at Eagle Creek Park, IN 12 Jan (Dawn VanDemen, Frank Rouse, Angela Ngigi, fide DGo), and another male was at Kingsbury W.M.A. 28 Jan–12 Feb (ph. BHu, JJM, JKC, SRB,



Always rare in winter, Loggerhead Shrikes were slightly more numerous in southern Illinois numbers this winter. This bird was photographed 12 February 2005 at Pyramid State Park, Perry County, Illinois. Photograph by Travis A. Mahan.

m.ob.). Also attesting to the mild winter were reports of 7 Gray Catbirds in Dec (3 in Illinois, 4 in *Indiana*). Brown Thrasher, normally a casual species in the n. reaches of the Region, was in *Cook*, IL all season (JA), with others in *Allen*, IN 7 Jan (Casey Ryan, fide Haw) and at Ogden Dunes, IN 9 Jan (JJM). American Pipit numbers were up this winter, with peak counts of 88 at *Urbana*, IL (GL),

64 at Rend L., IL (KAM, CL), and 40 in *Lawrence*, IN (LWS), all on 18 Dec. Noteworthy among several Jan reports of pipits was a single bird on Whihala Beach, *Lake*, IN 8 Jan (JKC, SRB, JJM et al.), which provided a first winter record for the *Indiana* lakefront. Cedar Waxwing concentrations were decidedly scarce this winter; only three reports exceeded 100 birds. The largest of these consisted of 125 waxwings on the *Purdue North Central* campus 1 Dec (SRB).

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

By recent standards, the selection of warblers that appeared in the Region this winter was modest. Tardy Orange-crowned Warblers were reported in *Cook*, IL 8 Dec (JA) and at Rend L., IL 18 Dec (DMK). Perhaps the season's most remarkable warbler was a *Cape May* Warbler that spent the last half of winter at a feeder outside the School of Public and Environmental Affairs building at *Indiana University/Bloomington*; it was discovered by Vicky Meretsky about 15 Jan and was

still present 22 Mar (RBr, ph. JH). Some 50 Yellow-rumped Warblers were logged in *Du Page*, IL 3 Jan (UG), which constitutes an excellent winter count for ne. Illinois. Other warbler reports included 4 Pines at Rend L., IL 18 Dec (DMK), a Pine at Carl. L. 14 Dec (TAM), and an ad. female Common Yellowthroat in *Chicago* 9 & 19 Dec (†AA).

The season's only Spotted Towhee, a female, was found at the Green Wing Environmental Lab, *Lee*, IL 17 Dec (SBH). Peak tallies of the expected *Spizellas* included 545 *American Trees* in *Stephenson* IL 29 Jan (DFS) and 149 *Fields* in *Massac*, IL 31 Dec (KAM, DMK). Once again, it proved to be a fine winter for Chipping Sparrows, with 5 in Illinois and 4 in *Indiana*. Always scarce in winter, single Vesper Sparrows were reported in *Perry*, IL 25 Dec (KJM) and at *Mermet L.*, IL 31 Dec (KJM). *Le Conte's* Sparrows were restricted to s. Illinois where singles were reported in

Jasper 16 Dec (BS) and at Rend L. 24 Jan (KAM). Quite rare in winter, single *Lincoln's* Sparrows appeared in *Carroll*, IL 16 Dec (KJM, KR), in *Allen*, IN 18 Dec (†BW et al.) and in *Alexander*, IL 29 Dec (KJM). For the first time in five years, *Harris's* Sparrow went unreported in the Region. *Lapland* Longspur numbers were typical, with a peak count of 800 at Carl. L. 9 Jan (DMK) and seven other



Wildly out of character for a Marsh Wren, this bird at Eagle Creek Park, Indiana 26 December 2004 was photographed as it captured and dined on minnows. Photograph by John Summer.

triple-digit reports. Compared to last winter's massive incursion into s. reaches of the Region, this year's Snow Bunting flight was considerably smaller; the peak tally consisted of "a flock of hundreds" in Allen, IN 28 Dec (CP, EP). An imm. female Dickcissel remained in Union, IL 30 Dec (DFS), and another female was in Jersey, IL 22 Jan (WCR).

Red-winged Blackbirds numbered about 44,400 at Rend L., IL 18 Dec (KAM, CL) and about 40,000 at Carl. L. 5-6 Feb (DMK). Meadowlark maxima of 64 Easterns in Perry, IL 25 Dec (KJM) and 10 Westerns at Carl. L. 6 Feb (DMK) were above average. Twenty-five Brewer's Blackbird in Perry, IL 27 Feb (JE) and 20 at Carl. L. 29 Feb (DMK) were likely migrating. A Great-tailed Grackle was identified in Perry, IL 25 Dec (KJM, documentation sent to the state committee), one of a few that have recently slipped across the Mississippi R. into Illinois.

Following last fall's unexpected winter finch incursion, above-normal winter numbers were recorded across the Region. Peak tallies included a female or imm. male Pine Grosbeak in Hammond, IN 16 Dec (Joy Bower); 40 Purple Finches that wintered in Sand Ridge S.F., IL (RGB, SBj), plus 45 Red Crossbills there 9 Jan (RJ) and 5 White-winged Crossbills there 14 Dec (EES); 13 Common Redpolls in the Indiana Dunes 11 Jan (SRB) and 13 in the Chicago Botanical Gardens 30 Jan (MM); 81 Pine Siskins in Winnebago, IL 2 Jan (DTW); and an Evening Grosbeak in Lowden-Miller S.F. 12 Feb (DFS)—the latter being Region's first report in seven years. Eurasian Tree Sparrow num-

bers decreased this winter, especially in cen. Illinois (*vide* KMJ).

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