

point we would recalculate the models with the next five years worth of data.

Acknowledgements:

First and foremost, we would like to thank our many volunteers throughout the last five years. Though now too numerous to name everyone, this count is only possible because of the impressive dedica-

tion, patience, and perseverance that they have shown. Along with a dose of good humor and abundant chocolate, these are necessary ingredients for any hawk watcher. We would also like to thank the staff at Illinois Beach State Park for being so accommodating, and the staff at North Point Marina for their assistance in 2003.

Literature Cited:

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Lark Bunting in Kane County

by Scott Cohrs

The 2004 year had been a banner one for birding in Kane County. Over the course of the year, I had been involved in a friendly county Big Year competition with Jon Duerr and Eric Secker. As a result, many rare and unusual birds had been found in the county during the first 10 months of the year. I was hoping for a few more in the closing months.

Aurora West Forest Preserve had been a productive spot throughout the year. The preceding months at the preserve had yielded some of the tougher summer residents, including breeding Clay-colored Sparrows and Bell's Vireo. I was hoping that one of my nemesis birds, the Northern Shrike, would show up with the approaching winter weather.

On 13 November 2004, I decided to check the preserve in the afternoon. It was a mild day, and I wanted to enjoy the weather while it lasted. As I was getting ready to walk back to the car, I came across a mixed flock of sparrows. There were many White-crowns present, as well as a few juncos and American Tree Sparrows. While I was working through the flock, a sparrow-sized bird darted out of the grass and landed at the top of a shrub about 15 feet away. I was immediately drawn to the bird as it flashed large white wing patches in flight. The bird was cooperative and posed atop the bush for about two minutes during which

time, I observed several diagnostic field marks. A large white panel was still visible in the coverts, though not as obvious as it was in flight. The bird also had a large black, conical bill. The feathers at the base of the bill were black. The breast and flanks of the bird were white with brown streaks. The back of the bird was brown. I remember thinking to myself that the bird superficially resembled a House Finch with white wing coverts.

Having seen Lark Buntings before in Colorado, I felt this bird was a likely candidate. When I returned home I consulted several field guides and my notes and was confident in the identification of the bird as a Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*). One bird pictured in Kauffman (2000) was especially helpful. Though I was unsure of the age at the time, subsequent viewings and consultation with others determined the bird to be a first-year male.

I made a few calls and posted the sighting on IBET (Illinois Birders Exchanging Thoughts, an on-line listserve) later that evening. On Sunday morning, 14 November, several birders relocated the bird in the far north end of the preserve. As word spread that the bird was still present, many more birders saw the bunting on Sunday and Monday. The bird proved to be elusive over the next couple weeks with no sight-



This Lark Bunting was photographed at Montrose Harbor in the Magic Hedge area, Chicago, 3 September 1992 by Greg Neise and originally published in Meadowlark 2:78.

ings reported until Jon Duerr rediscovered it on 8 December. The bird continued to be observed sporadically, often with the original sparrow flock, for the next few weeks. To the best of my knowledge, the last observation of the Lark Bunting was 29 December (IBET post, Darrell Shambaugh).

This Lark Bunting was my first for the state and the 249th Kane County bird of 2004. Ironically, bird number 250 was the original target, a Northern Shrike at Aurora West Forest Preserve just one week later. Given the events of the previous week, I didn't mind the wait.

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