

every spring bird count, and the species was also counted on each CBC between 1976 and 1985, except 1980. Since that time, however, the species has apparently suffered the decline that all the authors predicted.

To get an overview of the luck other birders have had with *Perdix*, I surveyed *Meadowlark* from Vol. 1, #1 to the most recent issue, tabulating every seasonal report of the species, including both spring and CBC results. Gray Partridge still call northwest Illinois their home, but fewer of them appear to be living here. No recent reports have been received from a county south of LaSalle or Kendall. When I first started birding in the mid-1970s, Kane County was the place where Chicagoland birders went to look for Gray Partridge, but, over the past ten years, the only report I was able to locate was a late summer report of a female with 5 young in August 1999 (*Meadowlark* 9:30).

On CBCs, Gray Partridge have been reported only 3 times since 1991, with the last report being from the Van Patten CBC (Lee/Whiteside counties), with a total of 15 in 1995/96. That same year, another 24 were reported, but from the Iowa side of counts along the Mississippi River. That year ended a string of 3 years when the species was recorded on the Van Patten count. The count also found 2 in 1993-94 and 7 in 1994-95.

The last Rockford (Winnebago County) CBC report of Gray Partridge was 2 birds in 1994-95. In that same year, the Illini CBC (LaSalle County) tallied 15, tied for highest with Van Patten for the past decade. Historical CBC data from the Rockford count show that the most encounters took place in the 1960s, with a high of 24 in 1966, before the major reintroduction of 1970, and Rockford recorded the species 8 times from 1960 to 1969, while finding them only 5 times in the 1970s.

Gray Partridge were reported more frequently in spring, but in very low numbers. The high spring count for the species since 1990 was 25 birds in 7 counties, with 14 in Lee in 1992. Also in 1992, a nest with 13 eggs was found in Lee County on May 30 (*Meadowlark* 2:28). The last report was in 2000, when only 2 were reported for the entire state, both in DeKalb. The year 1999 had 2, both in Whiteside, while 1998 held 7, in 3 counties, the high being Lee, with 4. The same number of individuals was found in 1997, also in 3 counties, with 4 in Stephenson. The only other spring count in which over 10 birds were found in the state was in 1996, when 15 birds were located in 5 counties, with honors going to DeKalb with 6.

In a posting to IBET (Illinois Birders Exchanging Thought list serve) in January 1997, Ron Flemal reported that DeKalb County was still a good spot to search for the species, but patience and caution were necessary. Flemal suggested that the best way to find the birds was to get permission to walk grassy fields. Alternatively, he recommended driving slowly down rural roads that have

grassy ditches or fence lines where the birds might be hiding or feeding, with early morning or evening hours being the best. He said searching in winter, when the fields are bare, improves the chances. A cover of snow also makes the birds more visible. Flemal suggested driving roads bounded by IL 38 on the north, Waterman Road on the west, US 30 on the south, and the Kane-DeKalb line on the east, beginning at Afton Forest Preserve, on Crego Road, 1.5 miles south of Perry Road, and to spiral outward from there. He also recommended the fields below and to the southwest of the dam in Shabbona Lake State Park. In 1996, Flemal encountered Gray Partridge 7 times. On the downside, he confirmed the DeKalb CBC had not recorded partridge recently.

If birders want to maximize their chances to see this species, a trip to the grasslands of eastern Montana and Wyoming, or western North and South Dakota may be warranted. Alternately, they seemed to be running around in plain view along the roadway and in the backyard of homes near the World Center for Birds of Prey outside of Boise, Idaho when I visited there in 1997. If finding the partridge in Illinois is your goal, the best strategy may be to drive around DeKalb County in the winter, after a heavy snow, or join the Van Patten CBC. Patient, diligent walking of hedgerows along farm fields may also increase the chances of finding the species, since Gray Partridge don't always come out to the road for easy viewing. Given the paucity of reports to the seasonal compilers, either this species is not being seen very often, observers are not sending in their records, or observers need to search more on foot and not just from their vehicles. The lack of reports on the CBC and spring counts is probably telling the real story.

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