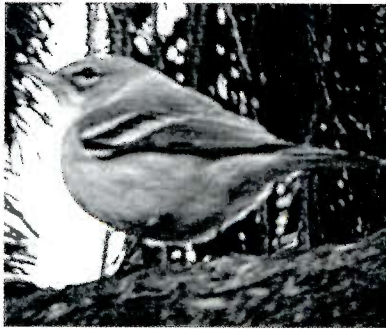


Rarities and unusual birds

Lisle Arboretum's Hermit Warbler was in a class all its own as an ultra vagrant, present for some time and discovered there by Eric Secker 8 Dec 2002. See Secker's article in this issue on the discovery of a new state species. Kudos to the parties that relocated this bird on county day. Collinsville's Great-tailed Grackle was also a CBC first and an extremely rare wintering record. Other unusual lingering birds or rarities included a Pacific Loon at Rend Lake. Pere Marquette (1) and Peoria (1) noted the only Great Egrets. Twenty-seven Ross's Geese (in eight circles) were noteworthy (though, perhaps, less unusual than in the past). All three scoter species were recorded: 1 Surf at Newton, 1 White-winged at Mermet Lake and 3 at Waukegan, and 3 Blacks at Rend Lake. Evanston tallied the only Long-tailed Ducks—22. Van Petten (1) and Muscatine (1) tallied the only Northern Goshawks. Carlyle Lake tallied the only Golden Eagle. Chicago Urban's pair of Merlins in a cemetery was note-worthy; another Merlin was at Rockford. Eleven Peregrine Falcons were in 6 circles. As usual, Newton had the only Greater Prairie-Chickens (22). The only Virginia Rail was noted at Cypress Creek. Thirty-four (34) Sandhill Cranes (in three circles) were noted; the singleton at Carlyle Lake was noteworthy. Two (2) Greater Yellowlegs and 10 Least Sandpipers were at Pere Marquette; another Greater Yellow-legs was noted at Cypress Creek, and 1 Least Sandpiper was at Horseshoe Lake. The only Dunlin was at Carlyle Lake. Three (3) American Woodcocks were noted at Crab Orchard NWR (1), Cypress Creek (1) and Mermet Lake (1). The Glaucous Gull at Carlyle Lake was noteworthy, and Calumet City-Sandridge recorded four. Four (4) Great Black-backed Gulls were recorded at Calumet City-Sandridge (3) and Waukegan (1). The rarest gull was the immature Black-legged Kittiwake recorded at Carlyle Lake. A Barn Owl was noteworthy at Rockford, and another was



Pine Warbler; Washington Park, Springfield, 19 December 2002, Sangamon County. Photo by H. David Bohlen.

at Cypress Creek at a known location. Van Petten, Chicago Urban and Middle Fork tallied the only Northern Saw-whet Owls. Pileated Woodpeckers seem to be moving up the Illinois and Rock River valleys with 4 at Starved Rock and 6 at Rockford both high counts for their circles; normally this is a rare woodpecker in northern Illinois outside of the Mississippi River Valley. Ten (10) Eastern Phoebes were tallied in eight circles. Barrington, Chicago Urban and Lisle Arboretum had the northernmost birds. Loggerhead Shrikes were down slightly with 46 being tallied (in 15 circles). Only 12 Northern Shrikes were noted (in 9 circles). Imagine finding Barn Swallows (2) on a CBC! Union County, again, tied an all-time high, and the observers dutifully documented the find with excellent details! Only 40 Red-breasted Nuthatches were tallied (in 21 circles). Pere Marquette recorded 2 House Wrens; another was at Davenport; yet, another at Union County. Five (5) Marsh Wrens were tallied with the northernmost birds being at Bushnell and Lisle Arboretum. Four (4) Gray Catbirds were reported at Baldwin Lake (1), Joliet (1), Kishwaukee (1), and Thorn Creek (1). Eleven (11) American Pipits (in 5 circles) were all in southern Illinois except for the single at Clinton IA (1); Baldwin Lake (2), Cypress Creek (5), Rend Lake (1), and Warbluff Valley (2). Five unusual warbler species were noted: Warbluff Valley had the only Nashville Warbler; Lisle Arboretum the afore-

mentioned ultra-rare Hermit Warbler, Springfield tallied its first Pine Warbler (see photo) and Warbluff Valley noted 2; Bloomington had the only Palm Warbler, and solitary Common Yellowthroats were reported at Cypress Creek, Meredosia and Mermet Lake. A well-described Chipping Sparrow was present at Meredosia. Singleton Vesper Sparrows were at Horseshoe Lake and Meredosia. Thirty-one (31) Le Conte's Sparrows (in 6 circles) were noted this year with Cypress Creek having the highest tally of 25. Single Harris's Sparrows were noted at Bushnell, Middle Fork and Western Mercer. Always unexpected were the single Indigo Buntings at Horseshoe Lake and Rend Lake. Starved Rock tallied the only Yellow-headed Blackbird; it was along the Illinois River. The only Brewer's Blackbird noted was at Horseshoe Lake.

Low counts

Conspicuous by their absence were the winter finches. No crossbills, no redpolls, no grosbeaks! A paltry 44 Pine Siskins (in 7 circles) was about it. Even the Purple Finch (71 in 17 circles) numbers were extremely low. Other low counts were noted for American Coot (2,264 in 33 circles); clearly the early cold fronts pushed most of these birds out of the state. Killdeer, too, were on the move with only 166 (in 27 circles) statewide. Numbers of Ring-necked Pheasants remain low (291 in 37 circles), reflecting habitat problems and changing land uses. Kankakee mentioned a high count of 39 pheasants and Rockford's 54 birds were perhaps exceptions to the low counts. As for focusing on birds possibly affected by West Nile Virus and looking at the CBC data, American Crow numbers (113,088 this year vs. 173,428 last year) showed a 35 percent decrease. Blue Jay numbers (7,909 this year vs. 9,803 last year) showed a 19 percent decrease. Black-capped Chickadee numbers (7,443 this year vs. 8,738 last year) showed a 15 percent decrease. There are other variables that may have caused lower numbers such as