

winter for at least one record of this species, after very few winter records of the species in the previous 25 years.

Populations of Northern Bobwhite and Ring-necked Pheasant continue to decline throughout the state while Wild Turkey has become the common gallinaceous species. Only small numbers of Greater Prairie-Chickens were tallied at the Prairie Ridge State Natural Area after last spring's disastrous hailstorm during the nesting season. However beginning in the spring of 2014, a three-year translocation project bringing 300 prairie-chickens from Kansas populations of the species, with an even sex-number of 100 birds will bring new birds to Illinois each year. This will hopefully bring about growing numbers to the species which has slipped to between 60-70 birds.

Overall, a variety of waterbird species were found this winter including a number of Red-throated Loons which have begun wintering in small numbers on Lake Michigan in the last few years. A Western Grebe and several winter-season records for Red-necked Grebe were especially noteworthy for the season. Large numbers of Pied-billed Grebes remained well into the winter season, mostly in southern Illinois, as did Horned Grebes at a few locations. Small, localized flocks of American White Pelicans are beginning to take root in several areas, and large flocks are beginning to regularly arrive by the end of the winter season in some areas, forming a new, but increasingly regular phenology of this once rare migrant in Illinois.

Diurnal Raptors to Terns

It is worth noting that over the past several years, the number of wintering Bald Eagles recorded in Illinois has been substantially reduced as compared with numbers in the recent past. Almost as if in response to their removal from the Illinois Threatened Species list recently, Red-shouldered Hawks seem to have become much more frequently encountered than in previous years. One or more Prairie Falcons have wintered in East-Central Illinois in each of the last two seasons. It would be interesting to know if these involve some of the same individuals returning to winter here. The incidence of wintering Merlins continues to grow, especially in central and northern Illinois. Both the incidence in utilizing urban/suburban wintering and breeding habitat reflects similar increases/changes in other areas of this species range (Warkentin et al. 2005). Many of the birds in Illinois also choose conifer-laden cemeteries as their favored roosting and hunting locations.

As the numbers of this winter's American Coot encounters demonstrate, this species, which was once considered an uncommon wintering species, especially in northern Illinois (Bohlen 1989), have been on the increase in Illinois, as an overwintering bird for several years, likely due to global climate change. This is also likely the case for Sandhill Cranes, for which it is now not uncommon to see numbers of this species coming into, leaving or even on the ground during any month of the winter season in their core northeastern Illinois range.

A total of eight shorebird species lingered within the state this season, with American Avocets likely the most uncommon.

The Forster's Tern also seems to be forming the regular habitat of becoming a late straggler on downstate reservoirs into the early portion of the winter season.

Pigeons to Kinglets

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue a steady increase in low numbers throughout Illinois, though they continue to avoid most of the urban/suburban areas of the Greater Chicagoland area in northeastern Illinois. This is likely due to their very

noticeable preference for towns with grain elevators that are lacking there, with spilled grain likely the reason that they can make it possible to make it through an Illinois winter. Such elevators/silos can be found in many/most towns outside the greater Chicago area. A moderate flight of seven Snowy Owls reached south into Central Illinois this winter. Three Rufous Hummingbirds were observed in Illinois this winter, all three of which were captured and banded by Vern Kleen. Though only found in very small numbers, this species has become a regular part of Illinois' winter avifauna.

There were good wintering numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers in southern Illinois, with fair numbers north into central and even northern Illinois, indicating an average to better-than-average acorn crop that must have been present after this past summer. There were also larger-than-average wintering populations of both Northern Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker as well. More than usual Pileated Woodpecker detections seem to presage a possible increase of the species' current very low population density in the greater Chicagoland area.

It was an average to somewhat above average wintering season for Northern Shrikes in Illinois, with even a few detected as far south as central Illinois and a likely record far southerly occurrence, that was well seen and documented near the southern tip of the state.

A single Northern Rough-winged Swallow lingered record late into the winter again (and was photographed), at the Kankakee Metro Sewage Plant for the second winter in a row, likely the same individual.

One of the first winter records of Bewick's Wren since the mid-1980s was detected by possibly Illinois's most experienced birder/ornithologist familiar with the species, for a first winter record for that county. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were detected in above-average numbers north of their normal far-southern Illinois wintering range in Illinois, while it was a down year in the wintering Golden-crowned Kinglet population outside of far southern Illinois.

Thrushes to Cardinals

A Mountain Bluebird wintered for the second consecutive winter after few, if any other actual overwintering records for this species having been previously found in Illinois. While virtually regular in Illinois as a rare wintering species, a distinctly heard (usually silent), calling Varied Thrush was well described, while another male bird was especially easy to find and view, and was seen and photographed the entire winter by dozens of happy Illinois birders.

Considering Bohlen (1989) having stated for American Pipit that "there are few if any true winter records" just 25 years ago, this species also seems to be wintering/lingering much farther north than their historic wintering range shows. The statewide distribution and numbers of birds detected in Illinois this winter, already have many Illinois birders considering a December or early January encounter with this species a rather routine occurrence, when formerly such encounters would have been a rather shocking and very exciting experience not so long ago.

After only one previously documented winter record for the winter-season in Illinois (despite what many published range maps show), yet another individual Smith's Longspur was very well documented with an excellent photograph, for the third winter record in the last five years. All but one record has come from east central Illinois or the prairie chicken refuges in the southeastern portion of the state.