

sparrows, and blackbirds. Groups showing population increases and decreases in about equal numbers were: geese, upland gamebirds, "waterbirds," shorebirds, owls, woodpeckers, and "permanent residents." A few species groups showed increases: swans and diving ducks, gulls, thrushes, and finches. Most diurnal raptors and "semi-hardy" species were recorded in fairly typical numbers.

## Waterfowl to Cranes

Most waterfowl species were reported in greater abundance this winter, although dabbling duck numbers were reduced overall, and there was a conspicuous absence of dabbling duck concentrations at traditional southern and central wintering sites. Similarly, diving ducks showed no major concentrations within the state. Unusual species of waterfowl were confined to Lake Michigan, including a **Brant** lingering through 14 December (see the fall 2008 summary), a female **Barrow's Goldeneye** in February, and three to five **Harlequin Ducks**, one of which lingered for nearly two months. There were no reports of Blue-winged Teal.

Upland gamebird populations were rather weak. Gray Partridge went unreported again this season.

Loons and grebes were found in normal to low numbers, with no unusual species reported. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant showed modest increases over last winter, but no large concentrations. An overwintering concentration of 15 Black-crowned Night-Herons in Madison County was noteworthy, as was the overwintering Great Egret, but the only other reports of herons involved Great Blue Herons in comparatively low numbers.

Diurnal raptors showed little change in population compared to the previous winter, with the exception of Black Vulture and Bald Eagle, both of which occurred in notably poor numbers. It was not a flight year for Northern Goshawk, with only two singles reported. Two **Prairie Falcons** were recorded, with one photographed in central Illinois, and it was a good year for Golden Eagles, with five birds noted in several areas of the state.

One of the four Virginia Rails found this season lingered into January in Lake County—surprisingly far north in the wake of a cold, snowy December. One location produced two calling Virginia Rails and a Sora! It was an exceedingly poor season for American Coots statewide. Modest numbers of Sandhill Cranes continued into early December and began returning in the last third of February; other records involved four individuals in southern Illinois in January.

## Shorebirds to Woodpeckers

Shorebird diversity for the season was high, with eight species noted. Unusual shorebirds for winter included an early December Baird's Sandpiper and a late February Lesser Yellowlegs in northeastern Illinois, as well as a Spotted Sandpiper overwintering at Rend Lake.

Winter 2008-2009 was excellent for gulls, with numbers overall reversing the trend of recent winter seasons. Only Bonaparte's Gull showed declines compared to last winter. A season total of five Laughing Gulls provided a record high for winter, and Ring-billed Gull tied its previous winter high

count of 80,000 birds at one site. A Franklin's Gull put in a rare winter appearance in mid-February. Reports of several extralimital gulls remain under review, including a **Western Gull** (previously confirmed in Illinois only from a specimen taken in 1927), a **Slaty-backed Gull**, and two **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. There were also documentations of two forms of gulls not previously confirmed for Illinois ("**Vega Gull**" and "**Caspian Gull**"), both of which are currently treated as subspecies of Herring Gull but considered good species by some authorities. The former was reported from two sites in southern Illinois.

The rapid expansion in population and distribution of Eurasian Collared-Dove seems to have slowed, and Monk Parakeet numbers are also showing a declining trend.

Owl populations were more-or-less stable, with the exception that none of the concentrations of Short-eared Owls found over the past several winters were reported. A good number of Snowy Owls appeared this winter, including four that were noted in a traditional La Salle County location, as well as one which was remarkably far south, in Clinton County.

Woodpeckers showed little significant change in populations over the previous winter, other than the unfortunate continued decline of Red-headed Woodpeckers.

## Flycatchers to Warblers

Eastern Phoebes were recorded in fairly good numbers, especially on Christmas Bird Counts. Loggerhead Shrike had its second worst winter of the past decade. It was an above-average flight year for Northern Shrike, including one that appeared as far south as Clinton County. A **Yellow-throated Vireo** at Sand Ridge State Forest provided a first winter-season record for Illinois.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were fairly widely distributed in modest numbers. A tally of 110 Brown Creepers at Rockford tied the state Christmas Bird Count record first set there in 1995. Wren numbers and diversity were about normal but for some reduction in Carolina Wren populations. A new record winter high count of six Marsh Wrens was established at a traditional southern Illinois winter location for the species, the birds likely responding to background wren calls on a recording of rail calls. Golden-crowned Kinglet numbers were on the low side of average.

Data on thrushes included single reports of **Townsend's Solitaire** and **Varied Thrush** in northeastern Illinois, a healthy distribution of Hermit Thrushes, and notably strong numbers of American Robins statewide. Mimids were all less plentiful this winter. Cedar Waxwings were widely encountered in routine numbers.

Warbler diversity was amazingly high, at seven species--the most reported in the winter summaries in over a decade. The most remarkable report was of a **Cape May Warbler in February**, coming to a suet feeder. Two Orange-crowned Warblers evidently overwintered at Urbana, at separate urban cemeteries two miles apart. Data on the other warbler species (other than Yellow-rumped Warbler) suggest notably late fall migrants.