

this winter at traditional central and southern concentration sites, numbers were still considerably reduced as compared to populations in the fairly recent past.

Once again, four species of upland gamebirds were recorded in Illinois during the 2011-2012 winter season. Northern Bobwhite and Ring-necked Pheasant numbers continued to decline statewide. The Gray Partridge, once again, failed to be encountered this winter, suggesting that this bird has been extirpated from Illinois.

During this winter, observers identified three loon, four grebe, three heron, and both vulture species within the state. The majority of these "waterbird" species occurred in greater abundance, with the exception of the American White Pelican and Black Vulture which were less numerous, and the Great Blue Heron which was reported in numbers similar to last winter.

## Diurnal Raptors to Gulls

During the 2011-2012 winter season, 13 species of diurnal raptors were recorded throughout the state. Most raptor species were reported in numbers very similar to last winter, though it is worth noting, that the wintering Bald Eagle population within Illinois has been considerably lower over the past several years. There were no exceptional concentrations of raptors encountered this winter.

Once again, two species of rail were calling in a small marsh in southern Illinois and this family should be looked for in all parts of Illinois in the winter, including far northern Illinois. American Coots and Sandhill Cranes were considerably more abundant and widespread this year statewide. Southbound cranes were noted in large numbers in several Chicagoland and even downstate areas in mid-December but straggling flocks continued into early January. However, large flocks of returning "spring" migrants poured through the Chicagoland area in mid February, with good numbers of cranes present in Illinois throughout the entire winter season!

This winter Illinois hosted eight shorebird species. Of these, Killdeer were substantially more numerous and widespread, while the Wilson's Snipe decreased in overall abundance and distribution. Once again, the Lake Michigan shoreline hosted a Purple Sandpiper. The American Woodcock was almost entirely restricted to returning early spring migrants in February, in numbers similar to the previous winter. Like a number of other species responding to the warming effects of global climate change in our area, birds of this family are lingering longer (especially in southern Illinois) and returning earlier, all within what is considered the "winter" season. Overall, 13 species of gulls were reported this season statewide. Noteworthy concentrations and a diversity of wintering gulls were found at Carlyle Lake.

## Pigeons to Kinglets

Monk Parakeets continue to exhibit a declining population trend in Illinois, with few reports from the Chicagoland area.

Eight owl species were recorded in Illinois this winter (all in one day by one group of birders! See article this issue). The entire Midwest region experienced a major invasion, including record numbers here in Illinois of Snowy Owls (See Dave Johnson's article in this issue). Among the rest of the wintering owl community, Great Horned, Long-eared, and Northern Saw-whet Owls were more abundant, while Short-eared Owls were less plentiful. Two Rufous Hummingbirds were once again well-

documented this winter, with the help of noted hummingbird bander Vern Kleen.

Of the usual seven woodpecker species found in Illinois, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, was present in similar numbers to the previous winter, while all of the other woodpeckers were reported in greater abundance this year. As has become a regular occurrence in winter, a number of Eastern Phoebe were scattered throughout southern Illinois. There were good numbers of both shrike species this winter, though all but one Loggerhead were located mostly in southeastern Illinois.

Nearly all of the small, common, winter and year-around resident species (i.e. chickadees, Tufted Titmice, nuthatches, Brown Creepers, kinglets and wrens) were more abundant statewide in 2011-2012. Only the Red-breasted Nuthatch was less plentiful as it was a "non-invasion" winter for that species. Nevertheless, there were no exceptional concentrations of any of the above species observed. However, once again there were five species of wren detected in Illinois this winter, including House Wrens detected at four locations.

## Thrushes to Buntings

Four species of thrushes and three species of mimids were identified throughout the state. The American Robin was considerably less numerous statewide. Remarkably, one female Mountain Bluebird spent most of the winter and was observed by many birders. There were no exceptional concentrations of American Pipits or Cedar Waxwings this winter, although American Pipits have become a regular component of at least the early winter birding community in Illinois just within the last decade or so.

An amazing seven species of warblers were reported in Illinois this winter including nine Orange-crowns at seven locations (!), with Yellow-rumped Warblers more abundant and widely distributed. Three of the remaining species were all noteworthy in terms of their winter occurrence in Illinois, as Common Yellowthroat and Pine Warbler are regular winter residents in small numbers, at least in far southern Illinois. See the article this issue on the very cooperative Black-throated Blue Warbler which spent many days in early winter in Chicago feeding at Yellow-bellied Sapsucker sap wells.

A Scarlet Tanager was well documented with photos, and was noted coming to a feeder for black oil sunflower seeds, for Illinois's first winter record of this species. Illinois produced 16 species of sparrows during the 2011-2012 winter season. While fewer numbers of American Tree, Chipping, and Savannah Sparrows were reported, all other sparrows were present in greater numbers. Although the number of Chipping Sparrows decreased this year, the species appears to be establishing itself as a regular wintering bird within the state. LeConte's Sparrows are also now a regular wintering species, at least locally, in many southern Illinois and some central Illinois fields, especially in fields with a large amount of foxtail (*Setaria* sp.) grasses. Lapland Longspur and Northern Cardinal numbers increased this season, while Snow Buntings and Dark-eyed Juncos declined.

## Blackbirds to Weaver Finches

Of the eight species of blackbirds observed in Illinois in winter 2011-2012, the majority of the species were more abundant this winter. The exception was the Eastern Meadowlark and Brewer's Blackbird which were less numerous. Once again, icterid numbers at traditional southern wintering locations were reported in lower abundance although several notable