

Sparrows to Weaver Finches

Highlights among sparrows included a record number of Chipping Sparrow reports and near-record numbers of Lapland Longspurs. The second Illinois winter record for Smith's Longspur was documented and photographed near the location of Illinois's first accepted Illinois winter record. Snow Buntings were also found in high numbers, and were very widespread even making it to several areas in the far southern reaches of the state. A few Lincoln's Sparrows are found lingering most years into December, but one on 31 January was exceptional. Most other sparrows were in average to low numbers. Scarcer sparrows included two lingering Spotted Towhees at opposite ends of the state, healthy numbers of Le Conte's Sparrows, and two overwintering Harris's Sparrows.

A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak on 27 Feb added to the handful of previous post-December records of this species in Illinois. Dickcissel remains rather rare and irregular in winter, so this season's total of seven Dickcissels provides a noteworthy seasonal high count.

Blackbird populations were generally weak, with particularly poor numbers for Rusty and Brewer's Blackbirds. Yellow-headed Blackbird, which remains unusual in winter, was located at two southern sites.

It was an exceptionally good flight year for winter finches. White-winged Crossbills were found in all-time record numbers and were reported in several areas in central Illinois. There were record flock totals from several northeastern Illinois locations. These were part of a massive irruption of the species into the east and other Midwestern states. Common Redpolls were also remarkably widespread in near-record numbers, and documentations of five **Hoary Redpolls**, also a record number of reports for Illinois, are pending review or have been accepted. Pine Siskin numbers, while not encountered in exceptionally large flock sizes in most locations, were none-the-less strong and especially widespread throughout the state, also part of a huge irruption of the species extending to the Gulf Coast states. Purple Finches were also encountered in above average numbers and locations. Even a single well-observed male Pine Grosbeak was documented in northeast Illinois. Despite the invasion, no Evening Grosbeaks were reported.

Acknowledgments

The foundation of this summary is the detailed information on winter bird populations as submitted directly to the compiler by field observers throughout the state. Maximum counts are provided, where available, from each of the three regions of Illinois (north, central, and south) as described by Bohlen's (1978) *An Annotated Check-list of Illinois Birds*. Additional data reflecting the progress of the season are noted, when available, for species and areas of special interest.

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