
SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Warm Winter Attracts Rare Species To Evanston/Wilmette Lakefront

The winter of 1991/92 was one of the warmest on record for northeastern Illinois as reported by the *Chicago Tribune*. The unusual warmth may have accounted for some unusual sightings in this area last winter season.

A late Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) was attracted to my bread-throwing at Wilmette's Gillson Park 20 December 1991. Also discovered was a wintering immature white phase Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*) that fed on the exposed grass in the park and nearby golf course. A Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) never before recorded in winter in this area was located near the Evanston Arts Center pier 4 January 1992.

A flock of more than one-hundred Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*) would be an unusual winter find in this area, but large numbers were regularly recorded last season. More than eight-hundred were seen along Evanston's lakefront on 5 January 1992, the largest Illinois winter concentration reported in twenty-five years.

Most unusual was the pair of Surf Scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*) present near Gillson Park from 25 December 1991 and seen at various places through 14 January 1992 as far south as the Evanston/Chicago boundary. Also, two White-winged Scoters (*Melanitta fusca*) were seen flying north from Evanston's Northwestern Landfill on 2 January 1992. A single Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) was found on 7 January 1992 along the Evanston/Chicago border.

- Eric Walters, 720 Reba Place, Evanston, IL 60202.

Merlin Winters Near Morton Arboretum

The dawn of 15 December 1991 was foggy at Hidden Lake Forest Preserve when I noticed a small falcon perched on a dead snag overhanging

a nearby river. The bird flew directly over me where I could see dark underwings, a dark streaked chest, and a dark tail with thin pale bands. I easily detected the blue-gray back indicating this was an adult male Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).

The bird, probably hunting the river area, flew into a nearby residential subdivision known for its bird feeders. Later that day, it returned to its perch in the same dead tree.

On 19 February, 1992, an adult male Merlin was seen again approximately one mile west of the preserve on the northwest boundary of the Morton Arboretum. With only six winter records published for the Merlin in northeastern Illinois, both sightings probably represent the same bird.

- Eric Walters, 720 Reba Place, Evanston, IL 60202.

Winter Franklin's Gull Visits Rock Island

On 12 January 1992, while leading a field trip of Quad-City Audubon Society members, I located an alternate (breeding) plumaged adult Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*) on the frozen harbor of Sunset Park in Rock Island. The harbor is part of the Mississippi back waters.

The bird associated with approximately 400 Ring-billed and 300 Herring Gulls as well as two Iceland and one Great Black-backed Gull. Although weather conditions were poor with light rain and overcast skies, we easily identified this bird. I and other observers including Ann Barker and Leroy Sowl noticed the bird's black head, partial white eye-ring, and medium gray mantle.

Black wing tips were separated from the mantle by a white band. We also noticed the wide white trailing wing edge as well as the bird's red legs and bill. The bird was significantly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls standing with it on the ice.

Finding an alternate plumaged Franklin's Gull in January is rare, but I have seen a similarly-plum-