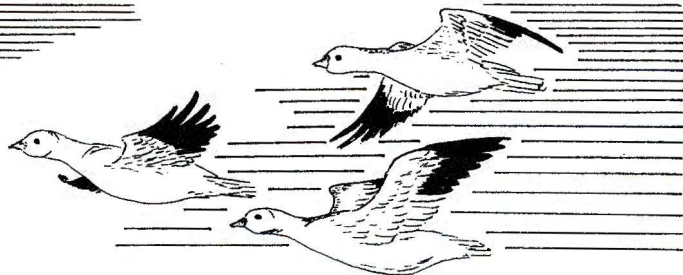


Field Notes



D. KANIA

Drawing of *Snow Geese* by Denis Kania.

The 1999-2000 Winter Season

by Kelly J. McKay

Due to one of the mildest winters on record, observers reported a remarkable total of 181 species in Illinois during the 1999-2000 winter, possibly the largest number of avian species identified during any Illinois winter season. In addition, Illinois experienced one of, if not the largest, Northern Shrike invasions.

During most of the season, the entire state experienced above normal temperatures. Brief periods of seasonal cold occurred in December and January; the rest of the winter was one of the warmest in Illinois history. Consequently, most of the rivers and lakes here had greatly reduced ice cover nearly all winter. For example, the Mississippi River maintained significant ice cover only during the middle of January.

Generally, precipitation seemed to be somewhat normal. For the most part, precipitation occurred as rain in the southern half of the state and snow in the northern reaches. However, due to the mild temperatures, snow cover resulting from winter storms rarely persisted. Illinois experienced two or three winter storms that produced 6 or more inches of snow. The major winter storm occurred 18 February 2000. This storm dropped 10-12 inches of snow across northern Illinois. However, at or near-record high temperatures following the storm eliminated the snow cover within a few days.

Several species of fall migrants lingered well into the early winter, while many spring migrants returned earlier than usual. Most of the typical wintering community was present along with several uncommon and accidental species. As a result, observers reported a remarkable total of 181 species during the 1999-2000 winter. This was possibly the largest number of avian species identified during an Illinois winter season.

This community included **1 new state record, Scott's Oriole**, (see separate article in this issue for details) and 9 extraordinary species, which required review by the Illinois

Ornithological Records Committee (IORC) before they could be accepted (Pacific Loon, Pomarine Jaeger, California Gull, Western Gull, Barn Owl, Rufous Hummingbird, Bohemian Waxwing, **Great-tailed Grackle**, and **Hoary Redpoll**). Additionally, many other species requiring IORC documentation were identified within Illinois during the 1999-2000 winter. Some of the more interesting species included: Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Harlequin Duck, Surf, White-winged, and Black Scoters, Osprey, Swainson's Hawk, Greater Prairie-Chicken, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted and Least Sandpipers, Dunlin, Franklin's and Little Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwake, Caspian Tern, Sedge Wren, American Pipit, Nashville Warbler, American Redstart, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Smith's Longspur, Indigo Bunting, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Also, two very interesting exotics (Hooded Crow and European Goldfinch) were encountered in the Chicago area.

The winter of 1999-2000 produced an incredibly diverse avian community within Illinois. The waterbird group was well represented within this community. Three species of loons and 4 grebes were identified, including the Pacific Loon at Lake Shelbyville and two Red-throated Loons (Jackson Park and Rend Lake). A relatively large number of Common Loons, Pied-billed Grebes, and Horned Grebes were scattered across Illinois, while three Red-necked and two Eared Grebes were encountered. Impressive numbers of American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants were detected throughout Illinois, especially in central and southern locations. Three species of herons were identified, including a large number of wintering Great Blue Herons and three Great Egrets. Black-crowned Night-Herons were observed at Horseshoe Lake in the south and Jackson Park in the north. Both vulture species were observed, however most of the Turkey Vultures were early spring migrants and only three Black Vultures were reported.