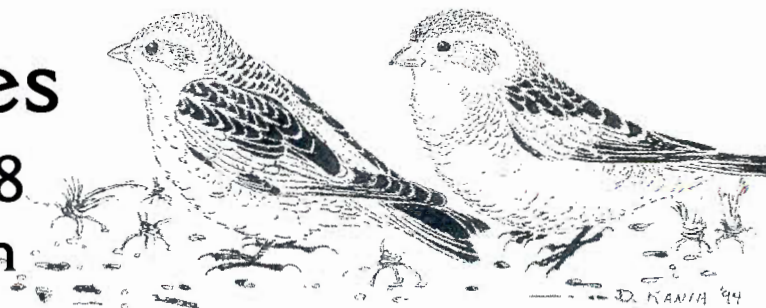


Field Notes

The 2007-2008 Winter Season

by Kelly J. McKay



Field Notes drawing of Snow Buntings by Denis Kania.

The winter of 2007-2008 showed extreme temperature fluctuations and near-record precipitation. An impressive total of 23 substantial winter storms swept across all or a portion of Illinois during the season, variably bringing rain, ice, sleet, snow, and/or hail.

The season began in earnest on 1 December with a wintery mix of rain, freezing rain, sleet, and snow over the northern third of the state, and with rain and freezing rain over the southern two thirds. A couple days later, 1-3 inches of snow fell across the northern half of Illinois while the southern half received yet more rain. A heavier storm hit the state on 6 December and dropped 3-6 inches of snow across the north, a mix of light snow and rain in the central region, and rain across the south. A very slow-moving winter storm crawled across Illinois over four days (8-11 December), producing moderate amounts of rain and freezing rain statewide. Then, on 15 December, another storm dropped 2-8 inches of snow across the northern third of the state, and rain and freezing rain elsewhere. On 20 December there was light to moderate rain all across Illinois. The steady progression of storms continued on 22-23 December with a very powerful storm driven by 20-30 mph winds. This resulted in severe wind chills and freezing rain and light snow over the north and rain and freezing rain through the central and southern regions. Another strong, storm pounded the state on 27-28 December, dropping light to moderate rain over the entire state, changing over to heavy snow (5-10 inches) in the northern region. December went out like a lion with winds gusting from 30-50 mph statewide on 31 December, dropping yet 4-8 more inches of snow across the northern tier and 1-2 inches of snow across the central portion.

Temperatures in January fluctuated wildly and frequently. A fairly unusual storm ravaged Illinois on 7-8 January, with several severe thunderstorms producing moderate amounts of rainfall statewide, in addition to widespread occurrences of hail and tornadoes. Light to moderate rain occurred on 10 January. Following a week of calm weather, another storm on 17 January left 1-2 inches of snow through the north and a mix of snow and heavy ice across the central portion of the state, coupled with high winds and extreme wind chills. On 21 January, another potent storm with severe wind-chills hit, dropping 3-6 inches of snow across the north and 1-3 inches of snow throughout the southern two

thirds of Illinois. After a week of calm weather, most of the state suffered extreme wind-chills (but only light snowfall) on 29 January. The last day of the month produced 4-8 inches of snow in the northern third, 8-12 inches of snow over the central third, and half an inch of rain across the southern third.

February temperatures averaged below normal, but continued to fluctuate greatly. Winds at 30-40 mph battered Illinois on 10 February, resulting in wind chills of -30 to -40 degrees F. Two closely spaced storms moved across the state on 3-4 and 5-6 February. The first dropped 3-6 inches of snow in the north, light snow and freezing rain in the central, and moderate to heavy rain (1-3 inches) in the southern portions of the state. The second storm began with light to heavy rain statewide, but plummeting temperatures led to 8-16 inches of snow in the north, 2-6 inches of snow across the central belt, and light to moderate rain in the south. After a week of calm weather, there was a steady procession of storms. On 12 February, 1-4 inches of snow fell across the northern two-thirds of the state, while the south received light amounts of freezing rain. Moderate to heavy rain and, in the north, light snow moved across Illinois on 17 February. Two days later, the north received another 1-2 inches of snow, and severe wind chills occurred statewide. On 21 February, light snow fell across the northern half of Illinois, along with light freezing rain through the southern half. Yet another storm on 25-26 February, left 3-6 inches of snow in the northern half and lighter amounts of snow and freezing rain in the southern half of the state. The final storm of this notably stormy winter occurred on 28 February, and produced another 1-3 inches of snow across the northern half of Illinois.

The 2007-2008 season showed high avian diversity, with 185 species reported. This number includes a good variety of lingering fall migrants and species of scarce to accidental occurrence in winter in Illinois. Early spring migrants were little reported.

Most species groups declined in numbers compared to the preceding winter. Notable exceptions were shorebirds and finches. A few groups showed a mix of declines and increases (e.g., diurnal raptors, mimids, sparrows, and blackbirds). Upland gamebirds occurred in fairly typical numbers.