

Waterfowl to Raptors

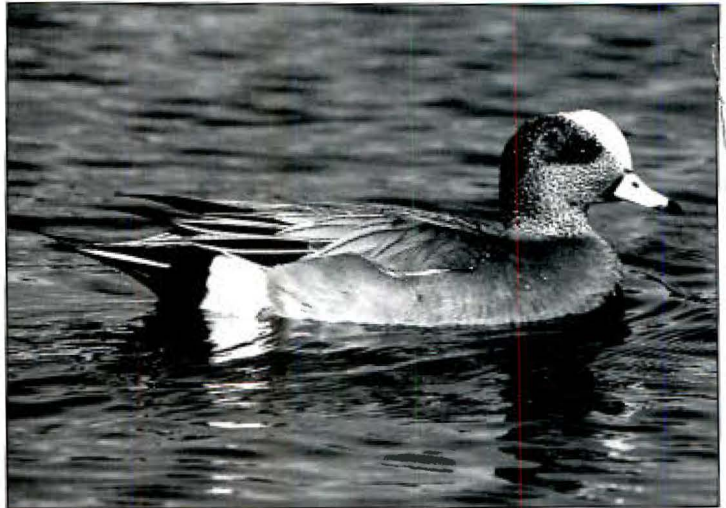
Waterfowl diversity was good, with 4 species of geese, 3 swans, 9 "puddle ducks," and 16 species of "diving ducks." No statewide aerial waterfowl survey data were reported this winter. Nevertheless, large concentrations of Canada and Snow Geese were located at their normal southern and central wintering locales, along with a small number of Ross's Geese. The Greater White-fronted Goose continues to winter throughout Illinois in increasing numbers. Mute and Tundra Swan flocks, as well as scattered individuals, were located primarily in the north, while only five Trumpeter Swans were reported within the state. For the most part, duck species occurred in relatively large numbers throughout the winter. The lack of statewide aerial waterfowl survey data certainly influenced the total number of birds reported. The greatest concentrations tended to occur in central and southern locations. However, "puddlers" seemed to be more abundant in the north while common "divers" like the Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser were less abundant, particularly in the north.

The diurnal raptor diversity encountered (14 species) was good. Raptor highlights include the Osprey in the Quad Cities and the Swainson's Hawk, present in Jersey County all December. The mild winter resulted in fewer Bald Eagles wintering in the state. Nevertheless, 460 were reported in the northwest corner of the state on 12 and 13 January. The Illinois River seemed to maintain a somewhat larger population this winter. Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, and Rough-legged Hawks were all present in good numbers and were widespread throughout the state during this past winter. Especially noteworthy were the 44 and 30 Northern Harriers at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area on December 21 and February 16, respectively. A group of 14 Harriers was also observed at Hoffman Estates in the middle of January. This past winter was again very poor for Northern Goshawks, with only three being reported. A small population, consisting of several Peregrine Falcons, appear to be permanent residents in the Chicago area. As in the past, Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels were probably substantially under-reported across Illinois.

Four species of upland gamebirds were reported this past winter. Their "spotty" distribution was probably related to the availability of quality habitat. However, the overall abundance seemed to be considerably reduced. The Ring-necked Pheasant was not reported from southern Illinois at all and Northern Bobwhite numbers were very low throughout the state. Most notable among the gamebirds were the 86 and 67 Greater Prairie-Chickens reported at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area on 21 and 17 December respectively. Once again, no one reported Gray Partridge in Illinois. The number of American Coots reported was less this past winter, however that was undoubtedly due to the lack of aerial waterfowl survey data. The number of Sandhill Cranes encountered during the early winter period, especially in northeast Illinois along Lake Michigan, continues to increase. More than 410 and 200 were observed on 18 and 20 December.

Shorebirds

Eight species of shorebirds were recorded. A large number of Killdeer were found statewide, while good numbers of



American Widgeon. Washington Park, Sangamon County. 6 January 2000. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.

Common Snipe and early returning spring migrant American Woodcocks were found in central and southern locations. Shorebird notables included 30 Least Sandpipers at Horseshoe Lake and 22 in Calhoun County, along with 6 Greater Yellowlegs at Rend Lake. Additionally, 3 Dunlin, 2 Lesser Yellowlegs, and 2 Spotted Sandpipers were reported within the state. A total of 13 species of gulls were identified during this past winter. Gull highlights included a first winter California Gull at Carlyle Lake and one or two adults in Chicago, a second winter Western Gull at Springfield, an adult Franklin's Gull on the Mississippi River in Hancock County and another in Madison County, and an adult Little Gull at Lake Shelbyville. This gull community included a relatively large number of several "typical" wintering species such as the Bonaparte's Gull, Thayer's Gull, Iceland Gull, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls, Glaucous Gull, as well as 3 Black-legged Kittiwakes. The two dominant wintering species (Ring-billed and Herring Gulls) occurred in fairly normal abundance. Once again, a larger than usual number of Ring-billed Gulls remained farther north. Also, a single immature dark morph Pomarine Jaeger was discovered at Rend Lake from late January through early February, while Newton Lake hosted a single Caspian Tern early in December.

During the 1999-2000 winter, 3 species of doves, 8 owls, the 7 normal woodpecker species, and both shrike species were reported. Once again I suspect the more common species (Mourning and Rock Doves, Eastern Screech, Great Horned, and Barred Owls, and Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers), which all seemed to occur in relatively low numbers, were often overlooked and simply not reported. Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were present in fairly normal, scarce numbers. Notable numbers of Short-eared Owls occurred at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area throughout the winter (30- 50), while Carlyle Lake maintained 8-20 of these owls for most of the season. As with last year, it was a poor winter for invading northern owls. Although more Northern Saw-whet Owls were reported this winter, they were still very scarce and widespread mostly in the central and southern portions of the state. Only two Snowy Owls were encountered. Only 2 Barn Owls were reported (one in the Quad Cities and one in Union County).