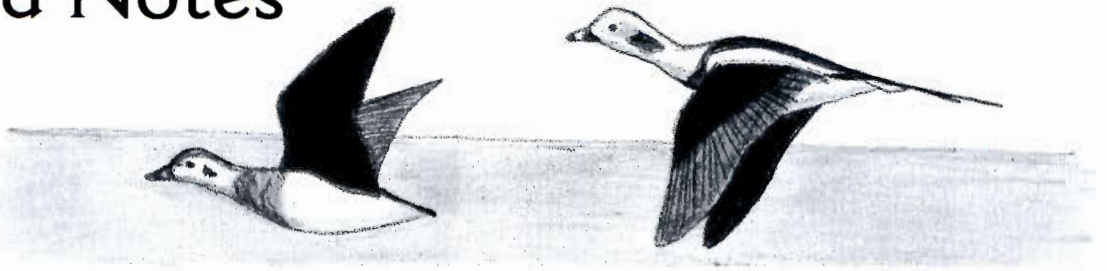


# Field Notes



## The 2004/2005 Winter Season

*Pair of Long-tailed Ducks drawing by Michael L. P. Retter.*

*by Kelly J. McKay*

The winter season of 2004-2005 was characterized by temperatures, which fluctuated throughout the season and ranged from well-above to well-below normal. Overall, Illinois experienced several minor and a couple more substantial winter storms, which produced a variety of precipitation events depending on the temperature regime at the time (i.e. rain, ice, or snow). Nevertheless, 179 species were encountered. This just exceeded the results from the previous winter (178 species).

Temperatures during December fluctuated substantially, with considerably mild conditions prevailing during the first third and last 5 days of the month. The middle half of the month maintained near normal to well-below normal temperatures. Additionally, this colder period was characterized by strong winds of 20 to 50 mph over many of these days, which created extremely severe wind chills. Precipitation during the first 2/3 of the month was relatively minor. A major winter storm moved across the southern half of Illinois, producing 3-18 inches of snow on 22 December.

In January, temperatures were normal to slightly higher than normal during the first and last third of the month. In contrast, the middle third of January experienced below normal temperatures. A major winter storm on 4-5 January dropped 1-2 inches of rain across the southern half of the state, along with substantial ice and 4-10 inches of snow across the northern half. Another ice storm occurred across the northern third of Illinois on 11 January, while the central third of the state experienced rainfall. Another storm produced 2-8 inches of snow across the northern half of Illinois.

During February, temperatures were seasonal to very mild. Several precipitation events occurred, including another storm dropping 1-3 inches of snow throughout the northern third of Illinois.

The avian community reported in Illinois during the winter of 2004-2005 was one of the most diverse ever recorded. Virtually all of the expected wintering species, along with many lingering migrants, were encountered. By late February, some relatively minor migration movements had begun.

Although overall diversity was high, the abundance of various species groups ranged from less abundant to more numerous than usual. Overall, raptors, shorebirds, and gulls all decreased in numbers, while the upland gamebirds and doves exhibited increasing abundance. Noteworthy declines in numbers were recorded among the woodpeckers and most of the permanent residents (i.e. corvids, chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, nuthatches, Northern Cardinal, House and Eurasian Tree Sparrows). Among the semi-hardy species, most wrens and kinglets increased while most thrushes declined. Virtually all blackbirds were reported in greater abundance in 2004-2005, possibly due to some limited early spring migration. Similar to last winter, there seemed to be a slightly less significant invasion of winter finches into Illinois. For the first time in several years, the Evening Grosbeak was recorded within the state, albeit only two individuals. (However, see CBC report this issue.) The 179 species encountered within Illinois during the 2004-2005 winter were reported by 105 observers.

The avian community this winter included seven extraordinary species (Purple Sandpiper, Mew Gull, California Gull, Inca Dove [first-state record], Varied Thrush, Lark Bunting, and Great-tailed Grackle), which required review by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC). Many additional species meriting documentation in the winter season were also observed within the state. Among these, some of the more interesting species included Harlequin Duck, American Bittern, Green Heron, Sanderling, Least Sand-piper, Dunlin, Barn Owl, Fish Crow, Tree Swallow, Gray Catbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, and Dickcissel. The Trumpeter Swan and Ringed Turtle-Dove were the only two exotic and/or released species.

*(Editor's Note: As of early 2005, the Trumpeter Swan has become "countable," with status changed by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee from extirpated to regular on the Illinois checklist.)*