

Waterfowl to Herons

The vast majority of waterfowl species were less abundant this winter. Populations among geese were lower overall, particularly for Greater White-fronted and Canada Geese. Snow Geese were slightly more numerous overall, but there was a noticeable reduction in numbers at traditional southern and central concentration sites. Mute and Tundra Swan populations were also somewhat down, while Trumpeter Swans occurred in numbers similar to last winter.

Dabbling ducks declined in abundance. None of the dabbling duck species occurred in noteworthy concentrations. Similarly, diving ducks were less numerous, with no major concentrations reported other than 15,000 Common Mergansers in La Salle County in January. Two **Harlequin Ducks** at Chicago were the most unusual waterfowl species reported.

Upland gamebirds showed little change in numbers over last year. Ring-necked Pheasant was slightly more common, but continues to show low numbers statewide. A **Gray Partridge** in Rock Island County provided one of the few recent records of this species, now virtually extirpated in Illinois.

Three species of loons lingered into December, and several grebe species included a noteworthy concentration of **175 Horned Grebes** in late January.

Numbers of American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants were low this season, and Great Blue Heron populations were reduced over last year. A concentration of **20 Black-crowned Night-Herons** in Madison County was notable.

Vultures to Jaegers

Black and Turkey Vulture appeared in fairly typical numbers this season. Noteworthy counts among other diurnal raptors included more than **1,000 Bald Eagles** along the upper Mississippi River, **17 Cooper's Hawks** at Rockford, and **123 Red-tailed Hawks** in north-central Illinois. Notable sightings included a Northern Goshawk in southern Illinois, single Golden Eagles at five sites in the northern half of the state, with wintering records for Merlin continuing to increase, including a strong winter showing of Merlins statewide. Most noteworthy were two species of falcons at mid-winter in southern Illinois, including a **Gyr Falcon** and three single **Prairie Falcons** in central and southern Illinois. Another Gyr Falcon reported from Madison County is pending IORC review.

A rare winter **Virginia Rail** was noteworthy. American Coot numbers were the lowest in a decade, and Sandhill Crane numbers were also weak. Whooping Cranes from the Wisconsin re-introduction project were located in Monroe and Kane Counties; this population is currently treated as unestablished and records are appended to the main species accounts.

An impressive total of **9 species of shorebirds** was recorded in Illinois during the 2007-2008 season. The only notable shorebird concentration this winter was **120**

Killdeer at Carlyle Lake on 15 December. Records of unusual winter-season species were confined to December, including **Least** and **Pectoral Sandpipers** and two single **Red Phalaropes** in northern and southern Illinois; **Dunlin** in the central and southern regions of the state; and singles of both **Ruddy Turnstone** and **Purple Sandpiper** along Lake Michigan.

Also impressive was a total of **14 species of gulls** reported this winter, although populations for most species were flat to low. The most notable gull concentration was **7,500 Bonaparte's Gulls** at Rend Lake. Now a very rare species in Illinois, a **Little Gull** was found in Springfield. Ring-billed and Herring Gulls both seem to be continuing a trend of decreasing numbers. Similarly, all of the scarcer gulls of regular occurrence (Thayer's, Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, Glaucous, and Great Black-backed) were reported in lower numbers than normal. Since most Kittiwake records in Illinois are of immatures on the larger lakes, an **adult Black-legged Kittiwake** in Winnebago County was noteworthy. Carlyle Lake hosted the most extraordinary gulls of the season, including **Mew**, **Slaty-backed**, and **Glaucous-winged Gulls**, the latter present nearly all winter. Two additional records from Carlyle Lake remain under IORC review (**Western** and **Slaty-backed Gulls**).

Pigeons to Kinglets

Records of pigeons and doves were fairly routine although the rapidly expanding Eurasian Collared-Doves showed some impressive concentrations. There was no evidence of expansion in the Monk Parakeet population.

Owl populations were about normal for most species this season, but with some increase for Long-eared Owl and good distribution for Northern Saw-whet Owl. Five Snowy Owls were reported. Woodpecker numbers showed decreases overall, and in particular Red-headed Woodpecker continues to experience declines, although a tally of 23 Pileated Woodpeckers was above-average.

Two **Rufous Hummingbirds** were captured and banded by a licensed hummingbird bander within a half mile of each other in December and January in southern Illinois, the latter said to have been present since October.

Eastern Phoebe were found in typical scarcity, and were restricted almost entirely to the southern region. Loggerhead Shrikes were reported in fairly normal numbers, but were more widespread through the central and southern sections of the state. Northern Shrikes staged a massive and widespread incursion across the northern half of the state, as well as in many central Illinois locations; one was documented in southern Illinois in Lawrence County and another was found on the Missouri side of the Union Co CBC in far southern Illinois. Look for a future Meadowlark article on the record number of this species found in the state this season.

American Crow numbers were low, save for the large, traditional Danville roost. Horned Larks showed major concentrations at Carlyle Lake and McDonough County but somewhat reduced numbers over most of the state. A