

SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS - Winter Season 1996/1997

Clark's Nutcracker in Western Illinois

A Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) was seen living, and later found dead, in Hancock County, western Illinois. It was first seen at the farm home of Britten and Martha Gray (9 miles east of Carthage Illinois, in section 22 of Hancock Township, Hancock County) on 27 December 1996 when Martha Gray rescued it from the jaws of a domestic cat. After the rescue, it hid under a parked truck, and then flew to a tree where it sat for about an hour. The area near the home includes some large white pine (*Pinus strobus*) plantations, swamp forest, upland forest, permanent pasture, and grain fields.

The bird was not seen again until it was found dead

and solidly frozen on 13 January 1997 at the same location on the lawn about 4 meters from the house, with no obvious injuries. The frozen bird was delivered to Ed and Evelyn Franks on 14 January 1997. It was later taken to the Department of Biological Sciences Bird Collection at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Curator Thomas Dunstan in turn sent it to the Illinois State Museum in Springfield as a more appropriate depository (specimen number 660433).

H. David Bohlen prepared the bird and confirmed that it was a female, with a mostly ossified skull. The specimen was in good condition, not noticeably dehydrated or



Clark's Nutcracker drawing by Brian K. Willis.