

Goshawk occurred in the central region, and 3 Golden Eagles were reported this season. The most unusual raptor was an Osprey in Jasper County.

Sandhill Cranes were somewhat more numerous this winter, although largely confined to the northeast. Seven species of shorebirds were identified this past winter. Typical species such as Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe occurred in normal abundance, while American Woodcock was restricted primarily to the southern portion of the state. Four unusual shorebird species were detected in Illinois, including Least Sandpiper, a January Pectoral Sandpiper and Dunlin. Undoubtedly, the best shorebird of the winter was an adult Purple Sandpiper at Waukegan.

Fewer species of gulls were detected in Illinois this past winter, and numbers of semi-hardy gulls were lower overall. Notable counts were made for Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, and Thayer's Gull. Iceland, Lesser Black-backed and Glaucous Gulls were present in relatively normal abundance. Iceland Gull was almost exclusively restricted to northern Illinois, and Great Black-backed Gulls were far less abundant this winter. An adult Little Gull was a good find at Mermet Lake.

PIGEONS TO KINGLETS... Numbers of Eurasian Collared-Dove continue to grow, and several large flocks of the more common Mourning Dove were reported. A White-winged Dove was documented at Jefferson County.

Owls were generally found in typical to slightly less than normal numbers, except for two major roosts of Long-eared Owls at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge. Thousands of pellets were collected there and are being analyzed. The most noteworthy owl report was of 1-2 Barn Owls in Putnam County; this species is still virtually accidental outside extreme southern Illinois. No Snowy Owls were reported this winter.

A remarkable 4 Rufous Hummingbirds were reported, three in southern Illinois. Woodpecker numbers were fairly typical, except for the Red-headed Woodpecker, which was far less abundant in the south. A Say's Phoebe found at Carlyle Lake in late February had likely overwintered in the area. Loggerhead Shrike was detected in fairly typical numbers, while Northern Shrike staged yet another strong movement into the state, mainly in the northern quarter, especially northeastern Illinois. Although somewhat smaller than the winter 1999/2000 invasion, a minimum of 85 Northern Shrikes were reported on Illinois CBCs, this report, and unpublished records on IBET (Illinois Birds Exchanging Thoughts) list serve.

In general, common permanent residents such as corvids, chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch were reported in greater abundance. However, I suspect these species continue to be under-reported statewide. Greater snow cover allowed for higher counts of open-country birds such as Horned Lark and Snow Bunting. A Fish Crow was reported in Madison County. Two Tree Swallows and a lone Barn Swallow were the only swallows reported. The Red-breasted Nuthatch was considerably more numerous.

Other than a few noticeable concentrations of Carolina Wrens in central and southern locales, both Carolina and Winter Wrens were overall less abundant. Lone Sedge and Marsh Wrens were good finds. The Golden-crowned Kinglet was far less numerous across the state, while the Ruby-crowned was somewhat more abundant.

THRUSHES TO NEOTROPICAL GROSBEAKS... Overall, thrushes (especially Hermit) appeared to be more numerous, especially in the northern and central regions, while mimids were fairly typical in abundance. The exception was the relatively impressive number of 6 Gray Catbirds reported statewide. A single Varied Thrush was found in Sangamon County. One large flock of American Pipit was noteworthy, while Cedar Waxwings were found in greater numbers, particularly in the north and central sections of the state.

A good diversity of 6 warbler species was reported this season. The Yellow-rumped Warbler was much more numerous, with substantial concentrations being encountered around the state. Other warblers included 2 Orange-crowned, 1 male Cape May, 2 Pine, and 2 Palm Warblers, and a single female Common Yellowthroat.

Eighteen species of sparrows (towhees through Snow Bunting) were recorded this winter. Both towhees were in good numbers, including 3 Spotted Towhees statewide and notable concentrations of Eastern Towhees. A single Vesper Sparrow was noted, and a Grasshopper Sparrow was a surprise and very rare winter record. Other sparrow highlights include 3 Le Conte's, 3 Lincoln's, and 3 Harris's Sparrows. Dark-eyed Juncos occurred in fairly typical numbers, while the Lapland Longspur was slightly less abundant than usual in most areas. Increased snow cover yielded larger numbers of Snow Buntings, especially in the north.

The Northern Cardinal was reported in larger numbers this winter, particularly in northern and central portions of the state. Remarkable tallies of 4 and 5 Indigo Buntings were made on two southern Illinois CBCs, and a single Dickcissel was another good find.

BLACKBIRDS TO WEAVER FINCHES... Blackbirds seemed to be less abundant this winter, probably due to the more severe winter weather and increased snow cover statewide. Only 4 Western Meadowlarks were reported statewide, while a couple large counts of Eastern Meadowlarks were made. Brewer's Blackbird was found at only two southern locations.

House Finch and American Goldfinch were relatively abundant. Additionally, Illinois experienced a modest invasion of winter finches this year, primarily across the northern portion of the state. Noteworthy counts were tallied for Purple Finch, Common Redpoll and Pine Siskin. Crossbills remained extremely rare, with only one report for each species. Once again, the Evening Grosbeak was not reported in Illinois. House and Eurasian Tree Sparrows both occurred in greater numbers during the 2003-2004 winter. The Eurasian Tree Sparrow appears to be expanding relatively quickly northward along the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

Acknowledgments

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