

Swans occurred mainly in the central and southern areas of the state. Among the ducks, larger numbers of "puddlers" remained further north, while "diver" numbers seemed to be slightly lower, particularly in the north among species like the Common Goldeneye and the Common Merganser.

A good diversity (14 species) of diurnal raptors was encountered within the state. Overall, the relative abundance for most of these species was typical. Fewer than expected American Kestrels were reported and Northern Goshawks were very scarce in Illinois. Despite the mild winter Bald Eagles appeared to be fairly abundant, as demonstrated by the remarkable total of 1,049 tallied over two days (15-16 January) in northwest Illinois. An especially impressive 53 Northern Harriers was reported at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area. Several observations of both dark and light morph Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks were made throughout the season. Four upland gamebird species were identified. The distribution of these birds was very spotty and undoubtedly related to the availability of quality habitat. Speculation on the decline of Gray Partridge statewide was supported by the fact that this species was not reported. Sandhill Cranes continue to occur in increasing numbers during the early and late winter periods, especially in northeastern Illinois along Lake Michigan.

During the 1998-99 winter, 6 species of shorebirds were identified. Killdeer occurred throughout the state and in fairly abundant numbers, while more Common Snipe than usual remained in the northern section. Groups of early returning American Woodcock began arriving in the south in early February. However, it was the reports of very late migrant Least Sandpipers and an early migrant Lesser Yellowlegs which highlighted the shorebirds, especially the 52 Least observed at Rend Lake on 19 Dec. A good diversity of wintering gulls (11 species) was reported including several of the "typical" unusual species. The distribution and abundance of species like the Bonaparte's, Thayer's, Iceland, Glaucous, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls was fairly normal. However, overall numbers of the two dominant species (Ring-billed and Herring Gulls) seemed to be lower. Additionally, a larger number of Ring-billeds remained further north this winter.

Three species of doves, 8 owls, the 7 expected woodpecker species, and both shrikes were all recorded this winter in the state. Mourning and Rock Dove numbers appeared low as did the overall numbers for the 3 common owls (Eastern Screech, Great Horned, and Barred). However, I suspect that this was largely due to the fact that these species are often overlooked and therefore under-reported. The number of Long-eared and Short-eared Owls was somewhat normal (fairly scarce except for the noteworthy 26 Short-eareds at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area), while Barn Owls remained extremely rare. This was a poor year for invading northern owls with only one Snowy and four Northern Saw-whet Owls observed. Woodpecker numbers appeared fairly normal. I suspect that the common species (Red-bellied, Downy, and Hairy) were all under-reported, while the distribution of Red-headed, Northern Flickers, and Pileateds seemed to be governed by the availability of habitat and/or food resources. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers appeared to be slightly more

abundant this winter. Both shrikes were present in typically low numbers, with Loggerheads occurring in the south and Northern in the north.

Overall, it seems that the majority of the permanent residents (corvids, Tufted Titmouse, chickadees, nuthatches, Northern Cardinal, European Starling, and House Sparrow) were all greatly under-reported across the state. This was a poor winter for Red-breasted Nuthatches. A total of 3 wren species, 4 thrushes, 3 mimids, and 4 species of warblers were identified. An extremely large number of late migrant and wintering American Robins were observed throughout the state, along with relatively good numbers of Carolina and Winter Wrens, Hermit Thrushes, and even a few Marsh Wrens. In contrast, fewer Eastern Bluebirds were encountered. A small number of Northern Mockingbirds, Brown Thrashers, and Gray Catbirds were scattered across Illinois. In addition to the 3 more unusual warbler species, the Yellow-rumped occurred in fairly decent numbers throughout the state. A good diversity of sparrows was also observed (13 species). Many of the sparrows appeared to occur in normal or slightly lower numbers than usual (American Tree, Field, Song, Swamp, White-throated, and White-crowned Sparrows). By comparison, species such as the Savannah, Le Conte's, and Fox Sparrows occurred in relatively larger numbers. Decent populations of Dark-eyed Juncos were encountered, however this species was undoubtedly under-reported. Despite the lack of snow cover during much of the season, Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings were found in fairly good numbers. Seven species each of blackbirds and finches were identified during the course of the 1998/1999 winter. Substantial populations of Red-winged and Rusty Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds wintered at scattered sites throughout the state. Large numbers of the various blackbirds began returning to Illinois in early February. Once again, this past winter season failed to produce an invasion of winter finches. Most of the species were present only in very low numbers, and Evening Grosbeak was not reported at all. The Eurasian Tree Sparrow continues to increase in number and the distribution is expanding, especially to the north along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers.

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