

to cause many breeding Virginia and Sora rails to desert many of their Chicagoland breeding marshes due to the severe drought, a Black Rail was located once again this summer. Dried-up marshes apparently sent a wandering Virginia Rail to a suburban Chicago area driveway in mid-June, a bizarre location for a summertime rail in Illinois, but likely a bird making an early and rather desperate dispersal movement in search of a water-filled marsh.

A couple of other species showed unusually large, late, seasonal movements of birds into the Greater Chicagoland area, likely from especially drought-stricken, downstate locations. Large numbers of Dickcissels moved into this area well past their mostly, early-May migratory period, with June birds noted at some of the Chicago lakefront parks... definitely migrating or wandering birds in search of better nesting habitat. Many of the maximum counts noted by birders in several Chicagoland areas were the most that they could remember seeing.

Carolina Wrens, another scarce Chicagoland breeding species, started showing up there from about mid-June into July, including at a few lakefront locations, definitely representing migrating/wandering birds. Southern Illinois, where these wrens are most common, was particularly hard-hit with the drought, which undoubtedly had a drastic, negative effect on their prey species, to the point that nothing short of moving to a better area was the only possibility of having a successful breeding season. Carolina Wrens are known to not occur in areas with less than 20 inches of rain per year. By the end of June this summer, the statewide average amount of rainfall was less than 13 inches, and southern Illinois made up some of the lower amounts of that average. As an average Illinois rainfall total for a year is around 48 inches, you can see that southern Illinois was nearing or likely close to heading for that magic number of 20 inches (or less), as large sections of southern Illinois were more than 20 inches below normal precipitation by the end of June. Drought conditions involving lower than normal precipitation along with above normal temperatures are known to be detrimental to the synchronous timing of insect-plant relationships, usually with a negative result for the insects, a large part of both a Dickcissel's, and especially a Carolina Wren's summer diet needed for feeding newborn young.

### **Do you watch birds in the summer?**

Many birders do not watch birds as much in summer as they do in the migratory periods when birdlife becomes much more diverse. This is well-demonstrated by noting the number of posts that are made to the statewide birding listserves, which in summer drops to less than half the number of posts that had been made during the migratory periods. And after reading comments like "no matter where I've been going locally I'm just seeing the same birds over and over again," I find myself wondering if some birders are more interested in the numbers game of listing. Many birders just don't seem to appreciate the many fascinating things one can observe and learn about birds while they involve themselves with the amazing process of building a nest, laying eggs, and raising their young. Personally, I get just as much satisfaction by watching a Yellow-breasted Chat flying with a trailing piece of grass for its nest (2-3 times the length of the bird) or a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher adding lichens to the outside of its nest, as I would by maxing out the number of species I see that day by rushing around from place to place to add a few more species to my day list total. And I learn a lot more about the birds I

am watching and hearing to boot! In this report you will find out that a wild female Mallard not only will nest in the city, but actually searches out the U of I swimming pool (where she or other Mallards have brought their young before) to give her young their first swimming lesson. More amazing was the female Hooded Merganser found incubating on her nest in a Wood Duck nesting box, that she had obviously started laying eggs in, in late February. If you need more excitement, you might think of spending a little more than a minute or two watching a bird in the breeding season, and like me, you might see Illinois's only known nesting female Swainson's Hawk fly out to have dinner air-dropped to her by her mate, and then proceed back to the nest to feed the young. Or if you were like Dan and Barbara Williams, they watched a Black Tern long enough to see it settle on a rarely detected nest at Glacial Park, one of only three or so places left in Illinois where one can observe such a sight. Did you know that Black Terns build their nests, incubate their eggs and feed their growing young on nests floating on vegetation in a wetland? Wes Serafin watched as a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher disassembled an already finished nest and moved it to another location. And what could be more exciting than finding a species at its nest in a part of the state where they just recently started spending the summer, like the Blue Grosbeak that was found attending a nest with young, by Dave Gruver this summer in the Lake Calumet area.

### **The everchanging face of Illinois summer birdlife**

One of the noticeable (and predicted) consequences of global climate change in the past decade or two in Illinois has been the evolutionarily rapid advance of bird species ranges, mostly spreading northward. Again this summer, species once never found in Illinois like the Black-bellied Whistling and Mottled Ducks were recorded, the fifth summer in a row for the whistling-duck. Like Black-necked Stilts (another recent breeding-colonizer of Illinois), it is only a matter of time before a pair of whistling-ducks is found nesting and they become a regular part of the Illinois breeding avifauna. The stilts were only a rare, occasional vagrant until birds displaying breeding characteristics showed up in 1992, with nests found the following year. With the Great Flood of 1993 up and down the Mississippi River floodplain, large numbers of these birds were almost certainly flooded out of their breeding areas, and it is likely no coincidence that breeding (or at least summering) Black-necked Stilts have been found in Illinois ever since. Though for the first several years breeding stilts were only found in far southern Illinois, the species has quickly moved northward as a breeding species in the state, to the point where breeding pairs can now be found practically anywhere in the state.

Similarly (though it is doubtful that they will nest anytime soon in Illinois), this year marked the fourth summer since 2004 (and second out of the last three) that a Greater White-fronted Goose has been located in the state in summer, paralleling their (and other tundra-nesting geese) dramatic increase in wintering numbers and range in Illinois of the last ten years. Previously, there had never been a reliable June/July record for this species in Illinois and until the fall of 1989, no records before early to mid-October. Since then there have been nine years when fall birds arrived in August or September, leading up to the recent June/July records. There have been regular summer records since 1996 of small numbers of Snow Goose in Illinois, mostly in areas where very large numbers congregate during winter