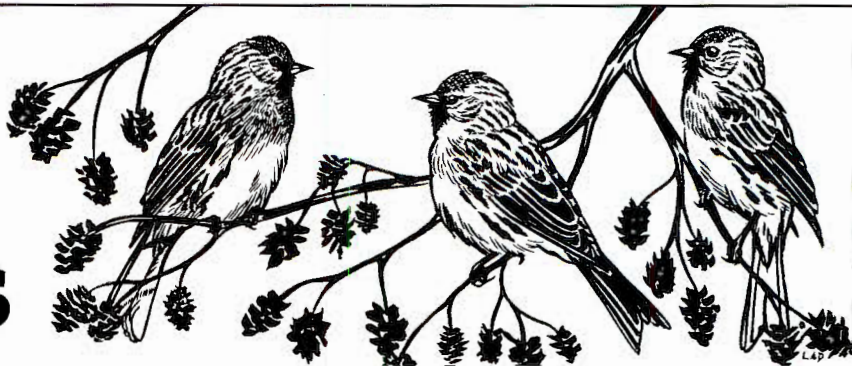


Field Notes



Common Redpolls by Leslie A. DeCoursey.

The 1996-97 Winter Season

By Robert Danley

The 1996-97 winter season was great for vagrants and rarities. A first-state record was established for Band-tailed Pigeon, and first-time winter records were documented for Clark's Nutcracker, Neotropic Cormorant, and Brewer's Sparrow. For the first time in 83 years, a Boreal Owl was recorded in the state, and two Clay-colored Sparrows were recorded for the second time in winter. Other outstanding finds include Eurasian Wigeon, Pomarine Jaeger, Glaucous-winged Gull, Townsend's Solitaire, Varied Thrush, and Spotted Towhee.

Bird family trends varied. Waterbird highlights include late departing loons, only two species of grebes, late pelicans and cormorants, only three Trumpeter Swans, increasingly larger (huge?) spring stagings for western geese with many Canada Geese wintering north of their traditional southern Illinois areas, good numbers of Oldsquaws away from Lake Michigan, all three scoter species, and very large concentrations of Buffleheads. All the expected birds of prey were found in variable numbers.

Bald Eagles were found in record numbers. Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks were in scattered small groups, roughly not exceeding the low single digits. Accipiters had a very good season. Many were spotted near feeders. A handful of lucky observers found immature Goshawks. Red-tailed Hawks were in poor numbers most everywhere, although various morphs were reported. Numbers were about normal for Merlin and Peregrine Falcon, but somewhat below for American Kestrel.

Gamebirds were scarce except for Wild Turkey. The 10 species of gulls recorded were normal, but the sheer numbers at times were spectacular, especially at Mel Price

Lock & Dam (Mississippi River at Alton). In fact, this site may be wresting away from Lake Calumet the title for most outstanding place for watching gulls.

Snowy Owls invaded the Chicago area. Multiple sightings were recorded on many dates. A single bird made it as far south as Carlyle Lake. One of the nation's most sought after species, the Boreal Owl, made a brief appearance in a Rockford backyard. Wouldn't you like that on your yard list? The other owl species were almost as scarce as the Boreal with concentrations in the low single digits.

Sapsuckers were widespread in low densities. Some observers commented that passerines were more scarce than normal, especially at feeders. Red-breasted Nuthatch highlighted this trend. Robins and other berry-dependent species were uncommon. Most sparrow populations seemed lower, particularly White-crowned Sparrow. Bucking the trend were Dark-eyed Junco (2 "Oregon" type found), Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting, all widespread in good numbers.

The other expected group of visitors, winter finches, were just about totally absent. Only 2 reports of Pine Siskin and 1 of Evening Grosbeak were recorded.

Exciting late departing species include two Eastern Phoebe, two House Wrens, Marsh Wren, American Pipit, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Indigo Bunting.

The weather during the winter season included warm periods along with seasonably cold temperatures. No extremes were recorded, and there was no prolonged fall

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