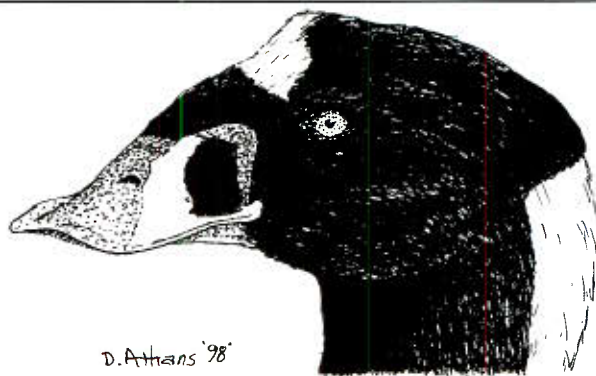


Field Notes



Surf Scoter drawing by David Athans.

The 1997/98 Winter Season

By Robert Danley

The 1997/98 winter season was outstanding for late-departing fall migrants, and included a scattering of rarities. Even with the mild winter, typical cold weather species were present, though not in large numbers. Because of this, the period produced perhaps the widest range of species detected in Illinois for a winter season. Deserving special mention are Western Grebe, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, Osprey, breeding-plumaged Franklin's Gull, **California Gull**, inland **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **Eurasian Collared-Dove**, Sedge Wren, **Varied Thrush**, eight species of warblers, and good concentrations of winter finches.

Trends for most bird families were mixed. Waterbird highlights included four species of grebes; late pelicans, cormorants, and Great Egrets; again large spring stagings for "western" geese; many Canada Geese wintering north of their traditional southern Illinois areas; and all three scoter species. All the birds of prey were found in average and above numbers. Bald Eagles were found in usual numbers. Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks were found in good concentrations given proper habitat. Accipiters had a very good season; observers spotted many near feeders, while a handful of lucky observers found Northern Goshawks. Various morphs were reported for Red-tailed Hawks. Kestrel and gamebird numbers were low. Observers recorded 11 species of gulls, though numbers of individuals were fewer than usual. Owls were unspectacular, except for the concentration of Short-eared Owls at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area. Sapsuckers were scarce. The Pileated Woodpecker continues to be increasingly present in the northern half of the state.

Observers also counted excellent numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches early in the season. Several wrens lingered late. Scattered warbler rarities colored the state for several lucky birders. Sparrow diversity was excellent. Dark-eyed Juncos, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings put in normal appearances even without the usual snow cover. A good variety of

winter finches was seen, though Evening Grosbeak bucked the trend; this was the second winter in a row with low numbers for this species.

The weather could be described with two phrases; El Nino and clouds. Fortunately our state escaped the devastating high winds and rainfall suffered by coastal states. Most of Illinois just suffered from prolonged cloudiness and balmy temperatures. Meteorologists said the past January (1998) was the cloudiest in Chicago history.

The last similar strong El Nino effect was in 1982/83. Interestingly, observers recorded a similar slate of species then, closely matching what was found this year, including many late warblers.

Winter was restricted to a period from 10 to 14 January 1998, bringing the coldest temperatures of the season: lows of 0-8 degrees F and highs near 20 degrees F. December finished 4 degrees above normal and received only 75% of normal precipitation. After a mid-January cold snap, temperatures rebounded to 6 or more degrees above normal with below normal amounts of rainfall.

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