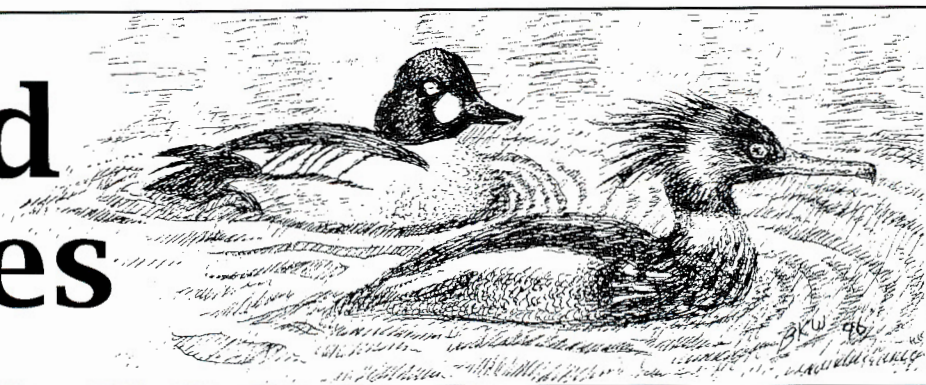


Field Notes



Common Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser drawing by Brian K. Willis.

The 1995/1996 WINTER SEASON

By Robert Danley

The 1995/1996 winter season was highlighted by lingering western strays, some of which stayed for a significant part of the period. These include 2 Townsend's Solitaires, a Varied Thrush, Bohemian Waxwings, a Spotted Towhee, a Harris' Sparrow, and Pine Grosbeaks. Thirty-two species of waterfowl were detected including Harlequin Duck. Exceptionally large numbers of White-fronted, Snow, and Ross' Geese were reported in the early spring movements. Most dabblers and divers were found in lower than usual numbers.

All hawk species were found in good to normal numbers statewide with a February sighting of a Gyrfalcon being the best report. The wintering Bald Eagle population continues its steady climb. Red-tailed Hawks also seemed abundant at certain locales.

Gulls disappeared from the Chicago lakefront most of the winter. They appeared to have shifted southward. An exceptional example of birding coverage of gulls and gull hotspots was the sighting of what was likely the same Black-legged Kittiwake at three locations. Initially seen along Lake Michigan, then at Clinton Lake, the bird wintered for the balance of the period on the Mississippi River at Alton. Another rarity was Mew Gull. Lesser Black-backed Gulls are the most likely dark-backed species

to be found in the state. Owl species totals were near normal, although Snowy Owls were scarce again.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were widespread, but in small numbers. Winter Wrens were scarce. Northern Shrikes staged another big invasion year, larger than last year's. Wintering sparrows could be found if habitat was available. Good numbers of Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings were found following cold, snowy fronts. As usual, finches were a mixed bag. No species put in a large irruptive presence, but the numbers were just high enough to keep observers interested.

The weather forced some boreal/arctic species southward. Few observers will forget the historic cold of late January/early February. Yet the month of February finished 4 degrees above normal. This illustrates the roller coaster temperatures of the entire period, extreme cold followed by above-average warmth. In southern Illinois, the lake at Crab Orchard NWR froze at least four times. In recent years it has been only once or twice, if at all. The short duration cold snaps started in November and appeared to drive many marginal wintering species out of the state. December and January finished 1 to 2 degrees below normal. January had 10 to 60% above-normal precipitation, which was mostly snow.

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