

MEADOWLARK

A Journal of Illinois Birds

Volume 9, Number 4 – 2000

ISSN 1065-2043

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Letter from the editor

As Eric Walters and Josh Engels, the authors of Illinois' Next New Bird (page 121 in this issue) were completing the final draft of their article, scads of birders were up at Illinois Beach State Park in northeastern Illinois observing a new state bird — the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. A team of experts offered suggestions to Eric and Josh on the next most logical bird species to be added to Illinois' checklist, and, of course, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker wasn't on anyone's list.

So while we all had fun speculating, the woodpecker's visit once again proved nature has patterns, but just when you think you understand the pattern, the story changes. Paul Sweet and Al Stokie changed the story when they discovered the Red-cockaded Woodpecker during a shore-bird survey at Illinois Beach State Park. The woodpecker is federally endangered, lives farther south than Illinois and is non-migratory, except for short-distance movements. So, of course, we never would conceive of a bird from the wild like that making it to Illinois. Yet it did.

Perhaps that is one reason why birding is so fascinating — because you never know what to expect. The people of Illinois who saw thousands of Passenger Pigeons coursing the skies in the early 1900s never expected the bird to go extinct. But it did.

For me, a lesson learned from the story of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker is that we, as birders and conservationists, must remain vigilant. We might miss a rare bird, or we might miss the disappearance of one.



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Articles

- | | |
|--|------------|
| Illinois' Next New Bird | 122 |
| – Eric Walters and Josh Engel | |
| Hoary Redpoll (<i>Carduelis hornemannii</i>) Visits Evanston/Skokie | 127 |
| – Eric Walters | |
| The Illinois 2000 Statewide Spring Bird Count | 129 |
| – Vernon M. Kleen | |

Departments

- | | |
|--|------------|
| Bird Conservation Network | 136 |
| – Judy Pollock | |
| Seasonal Highlights – Spring Migration 2000 | 137 |
| – Eurasian Wigeon, Black Rail,
Arctic Tern, Painted Bunting | |
| Field Notes: | 141 |
| The 2000 Spring Migration | |
| – Paul R. Clyne | |
| Index to Meadowlark | 159 |
| Volume 8, Nos. 1-4 | |
| – Renee Baade | |

About Our Cover:

Why is the cover art, created by Denis Kania, depicting a species never seen before in Illinois? To find out, see our lead article beginning on page 122.

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