

along the Illinois River. Now filled to capacity, Thompson Lake and other nearby wetlands at the Emiquon Preserve are attracting many rare marsh-nesting species as well as a large array of uncommon to rare migrants, some of which may someday stay to nest.

Wild Turkey is quickly becoming the most likely gallinaceous species to be found throughout the state. Gray Partridge is probably near extirpation from Illinois, and the previous few harsh winter weather seasons have decimated numbers of the once common Northern Bobwhite and Ring-necked Pheasant from much of the state, birds which continue to suffer from ever-fewer acres of necessary habitat needed to survive. Although many would put the blame on supposed increasing numbers of coyotes, the real problem has and always will be the loss of habitat caused by man, which have lowered these birds numbers all along.

There were increased sightings of the usual (basic-plumaged) non-breeding, Common Loons, though increased numbers of breeding Pied-billed Grebes were a direct result of significantly more numerous areas to breed in due to the recharging of many wetlands from heavy rainfall.

The newly located nesting locations for both Anhinga, American White Pelican and Caspian Terns were once again in use, and numbers may even be increasing, as the use of a second nearby nesting island for the pelicans and higher numbers of Anhingas and Caspian Terns at the nesting sites indicates. Although the large amount of rain and floodwaters likely improved feeding opportunities for the heron family, and possibly enticed new rookeries to form, numbers of reports were pretty much normal. Probably the most unusual vagrant record of the season, the Wood Stork that showed up in early June in Lake County not only set a northernmost occurrence record for the state but was also one of the earliest Wood Storks to arrive in Illinois during the summer/fall season by almost two months. This bird follows on the equally unusual occurrence of 3 encounters (at three locations) this past spring, by the stork's related and closely allied species, the White Ibis (all in adult plumage) in southern and even central Illinois. Only three other adult-plumaged White Ibis have been found in Illinois, and encounters of all four ibis species seem to slowly be increasing especially during their more usual, post-breeding dispersal and arrival period into Illinois.

The new, disjunct population of Mississippi Kites breeding in Rockford continue to return to breed in their residential, urban neighborhood. Both Osprey and Bald Eagle nests continue to appear in new areas around the state. Nesting was not confirmed for Northern Harrier or Sharp-shinned Hawk this year but Cooper's Hawk has likely returned to historic breeding population levels for this species throughout the former breeding range in Illinois. Few pairs of breeding Swainson's Hawks were located again this year, leading one to wonder how much longer they will remain an Illinois breeding species.

Rails through Woodpeckers

Two endangered Black Rails were located this summer, singing at both a central and northern Illinois location in June and July indicating probable breeding. One responded several times to recorded playbacks of the song, while the other was at the same location as one reported in 2010. King Rails were only located at two, longtime breeding areas in Illinois. Sora and Virginia Rails were located in typical numbers in their northern Illinois strongholds, though a Sora summering in a yard in the middle of the "corn and soybean desert" was quite unusual. One summering Purple Gallinule was located while Common Gallinule breeding locations/numbers were up. Sandhill Crane breeding numbers and locations continue to increase throughout the northern half of Illinois, with rumors of other, more southern nesting locations outside this species normal range reaching this author, though details were lacking. The Vermilion County pair returned to attempt nesting again, though were once again unsuccessful, likely due to predation of the young.

Nesting shorebirds bred in typical numbers, though new locations for breeding Black-necked Stilt seem to be located in new areas in Illinois each year. Recharged wetlands in several areas may have enticed a few Wilson's Snipe to stay and nest in new areas in the northern half of the state. Seven species of gull (two nesting species) and five species of tern were found in their usual northeastern Illinois breeding locations, though almost all of the nesting species only do so at one or a few locations. Though the Caspian Tern breeding colony atop a building in Chicago appeared to grow, no breeding colonies for Forster's Terns, which formerly bred, have been located for several years now, and only a few small breeding colonies of Black Terns remain in Lake and McHenry counties. The lone Common Tern nesting population continues to suffer from the negative effects of weather, predation and possibly chemical contamination, despite valiant attempts by biologists and volunteers to keep the nesting colony active.

The non-native Eurasian Collared-Dove population continues to grow in Illinois, and the species can likely be found in every county in the state. Black-billed Cuckoo numbers remained at their low ebb, while the slight increase of Yellow-billed Cuckoos over the past couple of years may be more a function of more birds stopping to take advantage of this year's periodic cicada emergence in the southern half of the state. Caprimulgid species continue to be reported in much lower than historic numbers, though smaller towns with older buildings which retain their pebble-topped, breeding roofs, still hold on to a few to several breeding pairs of Common Nighthawks. Vern Kleen's extensive banding efforts with Ruby-throated Hummingbirds continue to show the true abundance of these birds in a way that single-observer sightings cannot. However, I will continue to give maximum counts of hummingbirds found by observers in their daily observations, despite their disparity with Kleen's banding numbers. The Pileated Woodpecker appears to slowly be making inroads into new breeding areas in northeastern Illinois.