



American Coot numbers likely vary on Illinois spring bird counts depending on weather conditions. Photo taken at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, Wisconsin, 28 June 2009 by John Longhenry.

Steadily rising temperatures have been causing some birds that depend on access to food or shelter along their migratory routes to begin their migration either too early or too late and to alter the amount of time it takes them to migrate. Species arriving too early may be at higher risk of severe temperature changes, whereas species that arrive too late may lose prime breeding ground and mates to earlier arrivals. In the case of the American Coot, we have seen great fluctuation from year to year, possibly due to them migrating at different times due to temperature variability (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Population trend of American Coot over the last 39 years. At first glance these data are obviously highly variable. However, with the SBC data we can start to try and understand what factors are associated with these changes. In the case of coots it is possible the spring weather conditions both in Illinois and farther north may conspire to slow the migration of coots in certain years and accelerate their migration in others.

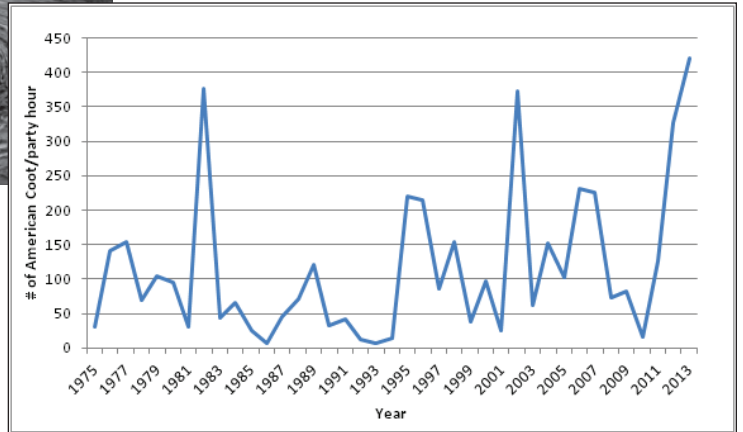
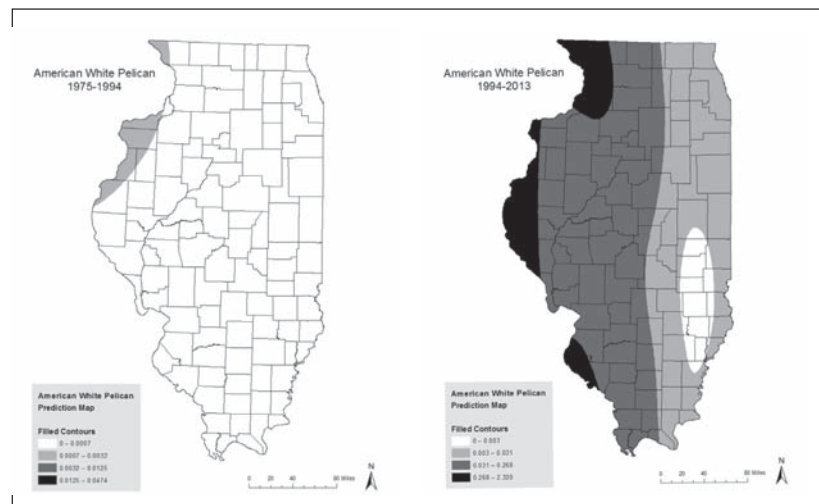


Figure 2:

These maps illustrate how American White Pelicans have made an impressive increase in Illinois, expanding eastward.



American White Pelicans. Nygren Wetlands, Winnebago County. Photo by John Longhenry.

American White Pelican broke the number of county records and total numbers during the Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count in 2013.

Spring Bird Count data allow us to see not only population trends, but also shifts in species range through time. The American White Pelican is a good example. While this species has historically been affected by pesticide use and degradation of habitat, it has seen steady population increases within the last couple of decades. It has also been slowly expanding its migration range eastward. Figure 2 shows this expansion using SBC data based on party-hour effort.