

Several other observers arrived that afternoon and evening. Unfortunately, one person got out of the car. That was more disturbance than the owl could take. It flew off a distance into the corn stubble. I returned the next morning to look for the owl, only to find no trace of it. Several other birders were also looking for it. All area roads were searched to no avail.

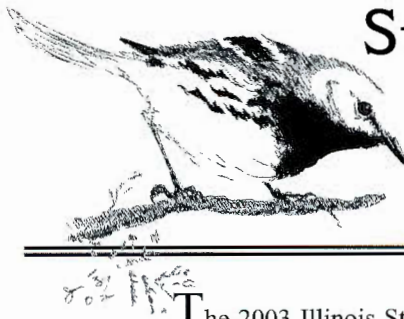
When I put out word about this bird, I instructed all observers to please stay in their cars and under no conditions, get out for a better look. One person violated this rule, and that was enough to frighten the owl away. To our knowledge, it never returned to the roadside burrow and it was only seen on the Champaign County side of county line road.

After the bird was gone, Steve Bailey and I observed three to four pellets at the entrance to the burrow, indicating the bird had been present at least a few days. Owls usually disgorge one pellet per day (S. Bailey pers. comm.)

The normal range of Burrowing Owl is from the great plains to the west coast, and Florida. There had been no severe storms that would have blown it so far away from its usual breeding areas. However, this species has a tendency to overshoot its normal range, especially in spring, while migrating northeast from Mexico and the southwestern United States (pers. comm. S. Bailey). Ridgway does not mention Burrowing Owl in his "Natural History of the Birds of Illinois." Bohlen, in "Birds of Illinois", published in 1989 by Indiana University Press, describes this owl as a rare vagrant and lists 15 records in our state. Since Bohlen's book was published, there have been no records of this species in Illinois. Therefore, this particular owl will be number 16.

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The 2003 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count



by Vernon M. Kleen

The 2003 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count was held 10 May, the latest possible date for it to occur (since the count date is the Saturday that falls on or between 4 and 10 May). During the count's 32-year history, it has now occurred 10 May five times; in 2003, it happened to be, coincidentally, on the same day as the International Migratory Bird Day count. The number of species tallied (268) was one fewer than the highest number tallied on an Illinois spring bird count.

Count day for a few central Illinois birders was challenging. Consider these comments: "...heavy rain with thunder and lightning between 6:30 and 8:30 a.m. plus two tornados..." (Al Dierkes, Adams County), "...a line of thunderstorms moved through the area from about 7:30 to 10:30 a.m...." Vicki Hedrick, Macoupin County), "...hit and miss between wind and tornado...." (Karen Forcum, Shelby County), and "...flooding rains, winds between 70 and 80 mph, and creeks out over the road making it impossible to get to many birding places...." (Mary Ann Hoeffliger, Effingham County). Yet, in other parts of the state, the day was more favorable. Consider these comments: "...our best day ever...." (Mike Ward, Brown County), "...we had a great day and tallied 175 species, most within one mile of the Mississippi..." (Jeff Baughman, Carroll County), "...the all-time highest Spring Bird Count total ever..." (Darrell Shambaugh, De Kalb County), "...more than the usual numbers of birds..." (Charlene Anchor, Piatt County), "...warbler heaven in our yard...." (Karen Forcum, Shelby County), "...never had so many Indigo Buntings and Scarlet Tanagers...." (Arlene Brei, Boone County), and "...large numbers of cuckoos calling overhead during the pre-dawn hours..." (Vernon Kleen, Union County). Overall, this year's count day, on a statewide scale, was a great day—in fact, the second best for total species.

As referenced above, the weather created a real challenge in some parts of the state; the most severe storms moved through a band of counties in the northern part of AREA 2 (Figure 1) from Adams and Calhoun counties in the west to Effingham County in the east. Although the intrepid birders in those affected counties were inconvenienced, in some instances

Fifty-eight of the Illinois counties that conducted the Statewide Spring Bird Count reported Black-throated Green Warbler. Drawing by James T. Ziebol.

up to three hours (and 5 inches of rain) during the best morning hours, most found by day's end that their birding results were much better than anticipated. Across the state, count morning temperatures ranged from the upper 40s and lower 50s in the north to the lower 60s in the south; by mid-afternoon they had reached the mid-to-upper 70s in the north and upper 70s to lower 80s in the south. Predawn skies were clear, at least in the south; however, by dawn they were cloudy and overcast throughout the state and remained that way all morning. By early afternoon the cloudiness had changed to