

Field Notes

The 2007 breeding season

by Steven D. Bailey



Drawing of Prairie Warbler by Michael Retter.

With this 2007 Breeding Season Report, Vernon Kleen ends his long run of editorship of the summer breeding season reports for Meadowlark, which began with Vol. 1, No. 1. Vern began the process of well-organized and edited reports for all four seasons of the year in 1974, when he and the Illinois Department of Conservation first made available to the birding public mimeographed, paper reports, mainly to those who supplied their valuable sightings. These later continued in the seven-year run of *Illinois Birds and Birding*, an Illinois Audubon Society publication. Vern was also the editor for all four seasonal reports for much of this time. Afterward he continued as the breeding season editor for *The Illinois Ornithological Society's Meadowlark*. With Vern's help, not a single season was missed during the transitions between the various publishers of these reports! Vern's more than 35 years of leadership and participation in this important process of documenting Illinois's rich ornithological history will surely be missed.

I will not change much in the way in which the breeding season report will be imparted. However, I will likely be using observers sightings to document how several species ranges are gradually (a few quickly!) changing by using the "Others" section to include records from areas of the state not often reported from or included in the report in the past. For a few other species whose ranges do not include all of Illinois (or at least formerly did not), I will also list some records from near the edges of their ranges in Illinois.

Some species have somewhat subtle or unusual aspects to their breeding ranges in the state that would be interesting to tease out or discover, although several fall within relatively little-birded parts of the state. Species like Northern Parula have small areas of the state (mainly in northeastern Illinois) where they do not breed. Possibly a not well-known distribution anomaly involves the southernmost area of the common House Wren's state distribution. This species is very rare or non-existent in far southern Illinois, except for within towns and within major river valleys. Where does this unusual distribution end in southern Illinois? The range of this species' in Illinois has increased markedly southward. Other northern Illinois breeding species increasing their range farther southward might include Veery, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Savanna and Vesper Sparrows, and Bobolink (?). Illinois is also seeing increased breeding records of Red-breasted Nuthatch,

Clay-colored Sparrow, and Pine Siskin farther south than historically reported.

Also of interest would be records of previously more southerly species beginning to breed farther north. This would include such disparate species including Fish Crow, Northern Mockingbird, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Great-tailed Grackle, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

Rarely reported species—which are possibly more common as breeders than records indicate—include Sharp-shinned and Broad-winged Hawks, Black Rail, Yellow Rail, Brown Creeper, Pine Warbler, and Black-and-white Warbler. This phenomenon may partly be due to their more secretive habits or the fact that they breed in areas that are not often birded. Species like the Brown Creeper are much more common and widely distributed than records often indicate.

A few species, many (but not all) already on the state-threatened or state-endangered list, are quickly disappearing from Illinois as breeding birds. Reports and comments on uncommon-to-rare species would be much appreciated to document their continued declines. Birds on this list include all summering/breeding terns, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Common Moorhen, all nightjars, Red-headed Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Cerulean Warbler, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Many of these species could easily become extirpated (or nearly so) from Illinois within the next one to two decades. Even species such as both cuckoos, Wood Thrush, and Bobolink could soon become state-threatened or endangered in the near future, as populations become more and more localized.

For those who care to send in a few details about the nests that they may find, I will regularly include details about nest contents and/or locations, not only for the historical record but also hopefully for the interest of subscribers who find such details interesting. Although the breeding season may not produce sightings of great rarities, it is arguably the most important season for the regular breeding species, and their nesting activities can often be quite interesting.

Occasionally I will also include both June and July maximum counts so as to impart the highest totals of both adult pairs and family groups or flocks, especially in those groups which regularly wander in mid to late summer (i.e. herons,