

of state-endangered BARN OWLS breeding across a wide swath of southern Illinois as far north as St. Clair, Clinton and Marion Counties. This highly nocturnal and secretive species is likely much more common than thought or records indicate. In fact, a box placed up for this species as far north as Iroquois County was soon found and used for breeding by a pair of these owls. Only very small numbers of Common Nighthawks were found outside of small downstate towns, where the pea gravel-covered, flat-roof tops where they need to place their nests still exist. Are the relatively new, rubberized rooftops replacing pea-gravel covered roofs, and nest predation by gulls (in northeast Illinois), becoming the death knell for this species in Illinois and elsewhere?

Passerines – questions and answers

Many Least Flycatchers were noted between mid-June to early July, but without any breeding evidence or even evidence that they were present after found. Are these birds simply late migrants or wandering? Although a couple of Alder Flycatchers were once again located in two far northern Illinois counties, there was no confirmation of breeding. Will this species' breeding status ever be confirmed with certainty? With this year's nesting attempt, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers seem to slowly be increasing as an annual breeding species after first nesting in Illinois in 2000. Loggerhead Shrike breeding numbers continue to rapidly slip downhill, even in southern portions of the state where they were once common. They are now rarely found over a large portion of the state, thus their change in status to state endangered from threatened a couple years ago by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. However, now is the time to study the causes of this decline in Illinois and other parts of their Midwestern range before they are soon just a fond memory. Habitat does not seem to be the sole problem, as much of their preferred habitat in southern Illinois still remains, but they become rarer there with each passing year. Could something as simple as the single-wire electrified "fencing", replacing wood and barbed-wire fencing, being used to keep cattle in pastures be killing the few remaining birds? These wires are known to kill hummingbirds at red insulators along such fencing. Although maximum counts for American Crow and Blue Jay remain lower than the pre-West Nile Virus outbreak counts, early fall comparisons of their numbers, with earlier tallies, may be more indicative of the continued depressed (or declining?) numbers for these two species. Although many birders would not be interested in keeping track of daily tallies of these species as opposed to warblers or other more uncommon species, if such tallies were made and reported, a clearer picture of the lasting effect of West Nile Virus might materialize. I have tried to give a representation of maximum counts for most of the swallow species, either under that heading or under "Other". There is often a great disparity in these counts, with July tallies being much higher than June counts, as these birds begin staging for or

showing up in migratory aggregations in favored areas. For instance, a count of 50 to 150 Bank Swallows at a favored breeding riverbank is fairly impressive, but pales in comparison to the 8,000 birds reported by Dan Kassebaum at a site in late July this summer. These are obviously birds preparing for or in migration. Since for me, the importance of this report lies in the breeding birds, I will continue to give high counts such as Kassebaum's, but also include the much lower counts, especially if the date or other information imply that the reported birds were at or near a nesting site. Only a small portion of Illinois's breeding population of Sedge Wrens settle on their breeding territories in May and early June like most of Illinois's breeding avifauna that arrive in spring migration. Only the prime wet sedge meadow/wet prairie habitat in the state will have breeding Sedge Wrens nesting in it in May and June, with the bulk of Illinois's breeding Sedge Wren population arriving beginning in July. It would be interesting to discover where this later-arriving population is coming from...from the north after failed nests or initial broods are raised in the more northern areas, or is there another explanation? Likely only birds equipped with a radio transmitter will give up their secret. As noted under the species account, typical breeding numbers of species like Worm-eating Warbler (as well as species like Acadian Flycatcher and Kentucky Warbler) go very under-recorded in far southern Illinois due to poor coverage of their habitat compared to other easily-covered habitats. I annually record 30-50 or more of each of the above three species on the spring bird count in that area each year, virtually all of which are singing birds on nesting territories at that time. Prairie Warbler seems to be extending its breeding range a considerable distance northward with several territorial males (and a fledgling) detected at several locations this year, joining the small, breeding population found in Putnam County in 2008. This species joins Yellow-throated Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Summer Tanager, and Orchard Oriole in making a recent, marked range extension or large increase in breeding population northward. It is interesting that other common, "southern" resident species and short-distance migrants like Northern Mockingbird, White-eyed Vireo, and Carolina Wren do not show as noticeable a range extension or increase in population farther north as several of the above, neotropical, long-distance migrant "southern specialty" species in Illinois.

As to other rare breeding species that were found nesting this season, congratulations go out to those who were watching closely enough to find nesting evidence for Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, SWAINSON'S WARBLER, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird. Thanks also go to those folks who report some of their tallies for the many species that otherwise there would be little to report on, if at all – by reporting the birds they have counted on the USGS Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes that they run each year. For those who may not be aware, there are more than 100 of these BBS routes run