

Vultures sitting on the ground. This was about 10:30 a.m. on a partly sunny day, following two consecutive days of strong westerly winds.

At a distance of approximately fifty feet I noticed what I thought was a crow sitting in a recently planted corn field with a piece of white trash or a milk container in front of it. When I viewed the bird with my binoculars, it flew up to a grassy ditch adjacent to Paulson Road where a dead raccoon was releasing a foul odor into the air.

I immediately recognized this bird as a Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*). I watched the magpie for at least six minutes through my binoculars observing the following field notes: crow-sized with a black bill, face, head, eyes, back and breast and boldly contrasting white wing patches and belly. Most conspicuous was the long black tail with a slight green iridescence. The bird exhibited no scruffiness.

The magpie then flew up and landed on a barbed wire fence in front of my car about twenty feet away from me. Several seconds later, the magpie flew off to the north. I then raced to get my husband Matt, who had gone birding at nearby Rock Cut State Park, but we could never relocate the bird.

I felt like I was in the "twilight zone" after trying to find the four Golden Eagles which were supposed to be in the field yet turned out to be vultures and then finding a bird which is not within its normal range in Illinois.

Three days after our sighting a Black-billed Magpie was also reported just to the north of us near Madison, Wisconsin.

- Jan Vincent, 4463 Paulson Rd., Caledonia, IL 61011.

Editor's note: Documentation of this record is on file with IORC. American Birds, 46:427 also reported a Black-billed Magpie sighting in Wisconsin in April 1992.

Spring Record for Sprague's Pipit in Southern Illinois

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) is expected to occur in small numbers throughout the state each year. Yet it is so difficult to find that bird observers only hope to stumble across it someday.

We had encountered a few of these pipits in Texas but never in Illinois. On 18 April 1992 we were searching for birds in a large alfalfa field in an expansive, open, relatively flat agricultural basin of the Cache River bottoms 1 and 1/2 miles southeast of Perks, IL, in Pulaski County. We counted 129 Savannah Sparrows that day.

Earlier in spring, and in previous years, this field had also catered to three Smith's Longspurs, many Bobolinks, Upland Sandpipers, and flocks of as many as

340 American Pipits. Due to the unusual concentrations of common birds and occurrences of rarities, the field had earned the name "magic alfalfa field" among local birders.

Because we had heard and seen Sprague's Pipit before, and because it is one of those species you study and prepare for, we immediately recognized our great find when a small bird flushed fifteen meters ahead of us, flew over us uttering a squeaking "squeent" call note, and then landed seventy meters away in a heavily-grazed cow pasture.

We studied the bird with binoculars for several minutes as it foraged among the clumps of pasture grass. It was quite adept at eluding us, however, so we retrieved a scope to get better looks at the field marks.

We viewed the bird with the scope from as close as twelve meters and noted the following field marks: overall sandy color with a darkly streaked back; small



Black-billed Magpie in Winnebago County, 17 May 1992. Drawing by Denis Kania.