



*Drawing of Swainson's Thrush by Brian K. Willis.*

# Field Notes

## The 2000 Spring Migration

by Paul R. Clyne

The spring 2000 migration was atypical, with a peculiar imbalance of bleak failures and record-breaking successes. For birders who measure the worth of a spring's migration by its warblers, this was an impoverished season over much of the state. Turning to less-targeted migrants, however, the spring was a clear success. The scarcer species of sparrows, for example, were very well represented at many sites, and shorebirds were nothing short of spectacular—at times outdoing even their best fall performances!

The season set more than its due share of record migration dates and all-time high counts. Excluding exotics and species under review by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC), a total of 296 species were reported this season, and migration data of one sort or another were reported for all but 23 of these. Among the 273 migrants, 14 set or tied record early Illinois arrival dates (and another ten provided second earliest records), nine set record late spring dates, and 12 attained record all-time high counts for the state. Against the backdrop of 100+ years of Illinois ornithology, these are impressive totals for a single spring.

Most of the significantly early migrants arrived in March, reflecting the mildness of the preceding winter across the nation and record warmth beginning the last week of February. At Chicago's Jackson Park, for example, species diversity recorded amid the first major warm front (through 8 Mar) was over two weeks ahead of average, and by the end of the month 30% of the migrants there had set record early dates for the site, and another 30% put in their second or third earliest appearances in 20 years.

Highlights among the early spring arrivals include Greater Yellowlegs at Springfield and Tree Swallows in northern Illinois by 3 Mar, Smith's Longspur on 4 Mar, Solitary and Least Sandpipers on 18 Mar, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at Springfield on 22 Mar, Little Gull at Mermet Lake on 25 Mar, and Caspian Tern at Chicago on 31 Mar.

The flurry of early activity subsided by April, and the

middle third of migration was mundane to poor statewide. Among the few highlights were significant early dates for Chuck-will's- Widow and Western Kingbird, and a remarkable tally of 720 Brewer's Blackbirds on 1 Apr. The northern tier of Illinois was a bit colder and wetter than normal in April, while the rest of the state suffered from drought. The drought was severe in Sangamon County, adversely affecting marsh and grassland species, but providing good mudflats for shorebirds.

Neotropical songbirds did not arrive in force until the first of May, and their numbers and diversity dwindled rapidly after 20 May. Among the warblers, only Tennessee showed notably strong migrations statewide. Kentucky Warbler and Northern Parula were in good numbers in southern Illinois, but not elsewhere. Doug Stotz noted his "best spring ever" in northeastern Illinois in terms of season totals for Cape May, Blackpoll, Tennessee, and Wilson's Warblers. Among the worst showings statewide were Orange-crowned, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and Blackburnian Warblers. Warbler diversity was terrible at some sites; e.g., one experienced observer in north-central Illinois enumerated no less than fourteen expected warbler species that were missed entirely, despite daily birding in May!

Fortunately, there's more to spring than warblers. Shorebirds as a group enjoyed perhaps their best spring migration in living memory, with numerous noteworthy early records and remarkable high counts. Of special note was the flight of 18 May at Lake Michigan, when warm fronts out of both the Southeast and Southwest converged into a dome of Canadian air centered over the Chicago area. This same front collision also yielded a more localized fallout of passerines. See the individual shorebird accounts for the record dates and big numbers.

Sparrows also had strong passages, especially in the northern half of the state. Observers contributed noteworthy