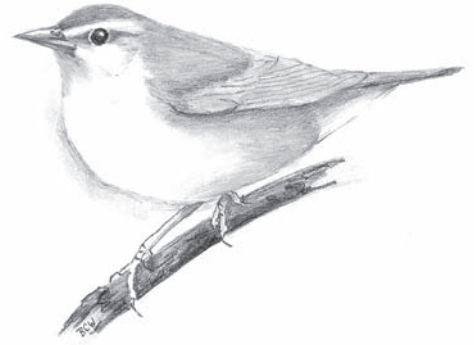


# Field Notes:

## The 2013 Spring Migration

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*Swainson's Warbler drawing by Barbara Williams.*



In contrast to the hot and dry spring of 2012, this season was the opposite with generally cooler and wetter conditions prevailing. March 2013 was 5.5°F cooler than the norm and ranked in the bottom 11% temperature-wise. April was somewhat cooler than average, and May was a little warmer than average, with the season average ranking at just about the bottom quartile historically. Though March was relatively dry, April and May were particularly soggy with close to double the usual rainfall during April and 150% the norm in May. The elevated rainfall amounts during the latter part of the season made Spring 2013 rank as the fifth wettest March-to-May period among the 119 on record.

As a consequence of the excessive rain, the large river systems saw major flooding, leading to an increase in habitat for ducks, herons, egrets, and shorebirds. Indeed, Richard Bjorklund felt that numbers from his regular waterfowl surveys in the Illinois River valley were biased by the record flooding. Migrant landbirds, however, were more scattered and especially the insectivores were scarce owing to the cooler conditions. In the southern part of the state, birders witnessed several influxes of migrants during the first and middle thirds of April, but conditions did not favor migration in northern tier. There, a stagnant weather pattern influenced by cool Canadian air discouraged the northbound movement of birds. Finally at the end of April and into early May, good southerly winds stimulated a movement of migrants into all portions of the state. However, some observers felt that with colder temperatures in March and early April holding back migration, backlogged migrants may have made longer flights toward the breeding grounds once favorable conditions arrived, so that there was an apparent bypassing of the normal migratory stopover sites. Eric Walters commented that this was a very poor spring migration in term of the later insectivorous migrants, with warblers in particular in short supply in Lake County throughout the whole month of May.

Below are some of the more significant aspects and records of the season.

Two sightings of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks involving seven birds marked the fifth out of the last six spring seasons in which this rare duck has appeared in Illinois. The nearly 11,600 Greater-white Fronted Geese at Chautauqua in early March set a new record spring high count for the species. Numbers of Ross's Geese were also strong, with three tallies of 29 or greater. A new high count for Tundra Swans was also set, with this year maximum count of 156 besting the previous high of 153 during the 2012 migration.

This spring's sighting of a Eurasian Wigeon makes it six out of the last 10 spring seasons that a member of this species has passed through Illinois. This year's Cinnamon Teal continues the pattern of a presence of this species in Illinois in spring; 80% of the last 20 spring seasons have witnessed one or more in the state. Puddle duck and bay duck numbers were generally at average or below average levels, but a new record high count of Northern Pintails was set with 14,484 at Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge on 1 March and the 9,939 Ring-necked Ducks there 29 March was three times the typical seasonal maximum. White-winged Scoters were in quite good supply, with many seen on Lake Michigan and nearby, with sightings also distributed around the interior of the central and northern tiers.

Red-throated Loons had a good flight with 14 seen. The tallies of five at Illinois Beach State Park and four at Waukegan represent the second and third highest all-time spring counts. Common Loons were plentiful as well. Dave Johnson and Karen Lund banded 30 lakes across Lake and McHenry Counties 6 Apr and counted 676 Common Loons, a spring record. The grebe flight was also impressive, with a peak tally of 95 Horned Grebes plus sightings of three Red-necked Grebes, nine Eared Grebes, and one Western Grebe. The 45 Horned Grebes noted by Eric Walters at Illinois Beach State Park 9 May was an exceptional tally for the late date.

For the sixth straight spring, a Neotropic Cormorant was reported in the state. This species is now either occurring more regularly or is being picked out more frequently by observers. It was a banner spring for White-faced Ibis with 22 reported, which is the most for any spring season on record. This species was previously considered a rare vagrant, but in the last 12 years an average of eight individuals is reported each spring. Both White Ibis and Glossy Ibis were reported this season as well, along with two additional Glossy/White-faced birds.

Mississippi Kites kept up their increased presence in the central and northern tiers of the state, with five kites reported there in addition to those that are now nesting in Rockford. Also notable were significant numbers of Swainson's Hawks. At least 20 individuals were reported, with the majority of these seen during the 19-30 April timeframe.

Both Yellow Rail and Black Rail were reported: one individual of each species. The evidence was conclusive for the Black Rail: it was a window-strike casualty in Chicago with the specimen now housed in the Field Museum of Natural History.