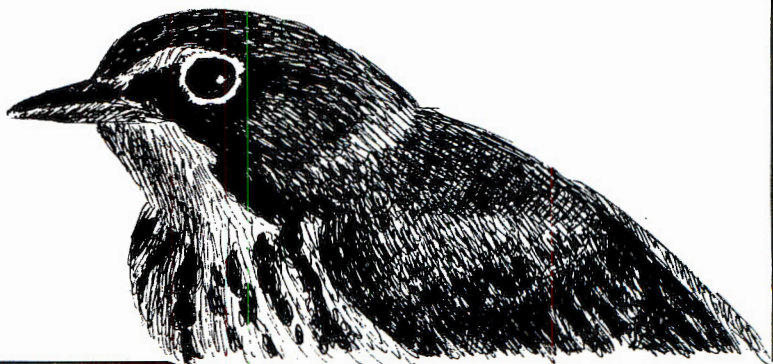


Field Notes



Field Notes drawing of Canada Warbler by Brian K. Willis.

Spring Migration 1996

By Myrna Deaton

Overall, it was a phenomenal spring migration, with much of the activity concentrated in the beginning and end of the season. April and early May were dominated by cool, rainy weather, that held back the migrants. Still, first arrival dates were about normal, or slightly ahead of normal in northern Illinois, but the early migrants were not singing or easily visible in the cold and rain.

The first half of March was 7-9 degrees colder than normal statewide. The cold along with the drought in the western U.S. and even colder conditions to the north perhaps combined to bring one of the most impressive waterfowl concentrations in years. Record numbers of **American White Pelicans** and **White-fronted Geese** were reported, with Snow Geese outnumbering Canada in Southern and Central Illinois. Rarities included **Cinnamon Teal**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, and 3 **Barrow's Goldeneye**.

Cool, rainy weather in the first two weeks of April suppressed early spring migration in southern Illinois and diminished any large waves of birds there until late April and early May. Early, middle, and late arriving species occurred all at the same time with many species arriving almost simultaneously statewide during late April. The most watched bird of the spring was a cooperative **Swainson's Warbler** at Jackson Park in Chicago on 27-29 April. Three of the most exciting birds of the season were found during the first week in May: Illinois' second record of **Lazuli Bunting**, and a closely observed **Hermit X Townsend's Warbler**.

Several observers reported that the last three weeks of May in central and northern Illinois provided some of the finest birding they have experienced in the state. A strong movement on 9-10 May into the state hit the stalled cold front over northern Illinois during the late morning of 10 May. This caused one of the more impressive fallouts in recent memory on that day. The extreme shift of weather (16 degree windchill on the 10th and below freezing nighttime temperatures on the 11th) resulted in cold and starving migrants

forced to the ground seeking insects as well as the birds concentrating in large numbers at various places. It was as if the nighttime migrants all dropped out of the sky and couldn't move on due to the weather. Perhaps the numbers of migrants were no greater than normal, but all were visible, if not vocal, and so busy feeding that they were oblivious to approach. The numbers of birds killed by hypothermia, starvation, along roadsides by cars or drowned after being forced down by fog is hard to estimate, but nevertheless it was unfortunately significant. Record numbers of dead birds were picked up along Lake Michigan by Field Museum staff. This situation continued through 17 May. The week of fallouts produced several interesting rarities, including **Western Tanager** and **Black-headed Grosbeak**. Thrushes appeared in significantly large numbers. Later arriving migrants, especially flycatchers, were conspicuous and vocal and reported in record numbers. Several species, notably Clay-colored, Lark and Harris' sparrows had a good showing statewide.

Many of the most exciting finds of the spring occurred during the last week of May and into early June. Northeastern IL had two **Scissor-tailed Flycatchers**, **Western Kingbird**, and a **Neotropic Cormorant** while Northcentral Illinois had a **Green-tailed Towhee**. Record numbers of **Glossy** and **White-faced ibis** visited Lake Chautauqua and St. Clair County. Most of the surprisingly numerous **Tricolored Herons** seen during the spring were scattered statewide.

Shorebird migration was notable in several locations. It began fairly early with excellent numbers of Willet, Avocet, Dunlin, both godwits, snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, and Piping Plover. A Ruff, several Black-necked Stilts, and a Whimbrel in Southern Illinois added interest. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** made a very rare spring appearance this year.

In addition to lots of rarities and impressive migrant fallout numbers, interest was stirred by various late lingering birds. Paul Clyne in Jackson Park called it the spring that

Meadowlark