



Field Notes: The 2009 Spring Migration

by Travis A. Mahan

Field notes drawing of Solitary Sandpiper by Peter Olson.

A total of 320 species were observed during the 2009 spring season spanning from February through June, including two non-established exotics. This year brought with it a number of exciting finds of species that are currently on the Illinois Review List: **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** in Pulaski Co. (2 on 6 May), Pope Co. (2 on 26 May), and Madison Co. (31 May-9 June); two **Barrow's Goldeneyes** in Cook Co. (a female on 14-26 Feb and a male on 8 March); **Brown Pelicans** in Madison Co. (11 May-July), Kane Co. (2 June), McHenry Co. (2-4 June), and Cook Co. (6 June); at least six **Anhingas** in Pulaski Co. (23 May); adult **Little Gulls** in Sangamon Co. (23 April) and Madison Co. (11-12 May); a **White-winged Dove** in Cook Co. (2 May); two **Common Ravens** in LaSalle Co. (3 March); **Bewick's Wrens** in Champaign Co. (14-15 March) and Adams Co. (21-26 May); a **Swainson's Warbler** in Cook Co. (10 May); a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** in Stephenson Co. (16-23 April); a **Western Tanager** in Cook Co. (1 May); a **Black-headed Grosbeak** in Winnebago Co. (23 May); and **Hoary Redpolls** in Cook Co. (through 3 March) and McLean Co. (through 5 March).

A Red-winged Blackbird observed on the second day of February marked the beginning of spring migration for the 2009 season, and by the end of the month, nearly 50 species were noted as spring arrivals. Almost half of this early movement was attributable to waterfowl, and among these was the aforementioned Barrow's Goldeneye – the most unusual migrant of the month. A strong push of migrants occurred with an intense low pressure system that crossed the state during the period of 9-13 February. This system brought unseasonably warm temperatures that exceeded averages by more than 20 degrees, heavy rain, and gusty south winds in excess of 50 mph in some areas. The last half of the month was marked with a series of warm fronts, yielding extended periods of southern winds that pushed nearly 80 percent of the month's migrants northward. During this period, record early Vesper Sparrows were noted in Franklin Co. (24 February) and Kankakee Co. (27 February).

March began with a stretch of atypically cold weather with below-freezing temperatures predominating all but the southern stretches of the state. Perhaps resulting from a combination of cold temperatures and migratory activity, record high counts of Common Redpolls were noted at feeders in early March in Cook Co. (100+ on 1 March) and Lake Co. (80 on 2 March). The frosty air was escorted from the region with the month's first warm front originating on

3 March. Following this time, much of the state entered a period of above-average temperatures lasting through 10 March. Southern Illinois reported daily high temperatures of nearly 80 degrees on 8 March. Some reports of statewide significance were noted during this first warm period, including a record high of 25 White-breasted Nuthatches in Pulaski Co. (2 March) and record early Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in Champaign and St. Clair Counties on 6 March. The mercury dropped to below-normal temperatures as the back end of a strong low pressure system passed through the state on 10-11 March. Temperatures slowly recovered and reached a peak at over 70 degrees in the Chicago area by 17 March, which was nearly 30 degrees above normal. Suitable migratory conditions through this period were evidenced by a record high count of 13 Red-throated Loons tallied in Lake Co. on 16 March, a record early Dunlin in Clinton Co. on 16 March, and a record early Louisiana Waterthrush found singing in Massac Co. on 15 March. Another mass of warm air provided above-average temperatures through the period of 21-24 March with highs reaching 75 degrees in central and southern Illinois on 24 March. Not surprisingly, this system yielded some record early arrivals, including a Spotted Sandpiper on 23 March (Madison Co), two Caspian Terns on 24 March in different locations along the Lake Michigan lakefront (Cook Co), and a Palm Warbler on 23 March (Clinton Co). A moderate low pressure system finished out the month of March and brought heavy rains and a small flock of four record early Lark Sparrows on 26 March (Adams Co). Also noted at the month's end was the largest non-aerial spring high count of 3,500 Gadwall in Brown Co. on 31 March.

April weather was in constant flux. Consecutive low pressure systems throughout the month left plenty of wind and significant volumes of rain, but overall temperatures remained about normal through the first half of the month. Despite normal temperatures, record early arrivals followed two low pressure systems at the beginning of April, including a Piping Plover in St. Clair Co. on 3-4 April and a Clay-colored Sparrow in Lake Co. on 6 April. The latter half of the month provided several days with above-average temperatures that ranged in the low 80s. A fairly weak warm front pushed a record early Semipalmated Sandpiper into Champaign Co. on 18 April. The warmest period in April occurred with fairly constant south winds from about 22-27 April, where record early arrivals were noted for White-rumped Sandpiper (23 April in Knox Co) and Olive-sided Flycatcher (25 April in Adams Co).