

## Barn Owl at O'Brien Lock & Dam

During the pre-dawn hours of 24 April 1994, I met with several Chicago Ornithological Society members for a railing field trip at O'Brien Lock and Dam in the Lake Calumet area, Cook County. As is often the case, we saw our best bird before leaving the parking lot.

Shortly before 4 a.m., I noticed a whitish bird flying past a street lamp. My first impression was Ring-billed Gull, an ubiquitous species at O'Brien Lock during daylight hours. As the bird got closer, however, I noted the slim proportions, owl-like shape, and broad wings with perhaps slightly pointed tips. This was clearly *not* a Ring-billed Gull. The image before my eyes finally matched the template in my brain and I identified the bird. It was a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*).

While notifying the other observers, I took the time to note a few details. It appeared to be the size of a Short-eared Owl or slightly smaller, with its entire underparts pale ghostly white, save for the faint dusky barring on the undersides of its primaries and secondaries. It lacked the dark wrist marks and wing tips typically seen on a Short-eared Owl. Its slim proportions also seemed to eliminate Short-eared and Snowy Owl.

Dennis Lane got a better look at the bird as it flew directly overhead. He noted the enlarged head and heart-shaped face. Carolyn Marsh and Barbara Dodge also agreed with the identification. Lane and Marsh have previous field experience with Barn Owls.

It appears that at least one Barn Owl may have established a territory in the Calumet area. On 18 September 1993, Kevin Swagel reported a Barn Owl at the northeastern corner of Lake Calumet. On 2 January 1994, David Mandell, Sue Friscia, Margaret Baker, and I saw a bird at dusk flying overhead at Lake Calumet's Deadstick Pond which we thought was almost certainly a Barn Owl. The bird was never documented, however, because of the brevity of the observation and our lack of experience with the species.

Another recent local Barn Owl record was reported by Carolyn Marsh at the nearby "Migrant Trap" in Hammond, Indiana in October 1993. The bird was seen at very close range, first perched in a tree and later in flight. The identification was confirmed by a member of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources who was accompanying Marsh at the time.

Barn Owls are rare in northeastern Illinois. As early as 1934, Barn Owl was considered a rare Illinois resident (Ford, 1934). In a search through the literature, I was able to find only four records in the last ten years (other than the above) in the far northeast counties: pair with two young, (McHenry Co.) 15 July 1990; one, Woodstock (McHenry Co.) April-June 1989; one, Wilmette (Cook Co.) 22 October 1987; and one (Will Co.) 17 August 1987. In addition, a few individuals were noted at Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo (Cook Co.) during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kleen 1987, 1988, 1990).

— Walter Marcisz

13416 S. Mackinaw Avenue, Chicago, IL 60633

## 28 American Avocets at Clinton Lake

Having accumulated a number of hours of vacation time, I decided to take off work 13 April and look for rails. This seemed like an especially good idea, since Yellow Rails usually show up in mid-April. However, my timing put me out just after a heavy rain that produced a record 50-year flood in Clinton County. I found a good Yellow Rail spot was under water. Nevertheless, I began my search and was successful after three hours. It became clear that the storm had brought an influx of birds, as numerous waterfowl were seen on the flooded area and two White Pelicans flew over, quite an unusual occurrence this far east.

At this point, I decided to chuck my plans to go to wooded areas for landbird migrants (a good idea, as it turned out, since most wooded areas were also flooded) and to check flooded fields, instead. In a number of fields, there were Mallards, shovelers and Blue-winged Teal, but few shorebirds and no gulls. Considering that fields near Decatur and Springfield were hosting hundreds of gulls, I was somewhat disappointed.

Then, as I turned onto the road to the Clinton Lake sedimentation pond observation platform, I noticed what appeared to be a flooded pool full of gulls, right next to the platform. However, as I pulled up, I noticed that they were American Avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*), not gulls at all. Having only seen one avocet previously at Clinton Lake, I was quite excited!

I counted 28 birds. This was the second largest flock and the earliest date for avocets in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). The highest count of 31 was at Rice Lake 30 April 1989. See *Illinois Birds & Birding* 5:86.

— Robert Chapel

306 1/2 W. California Ave., Urbana, IL 61801

## Illinois' First "Cassin's Vireo"?

A vireo appearing to belong to the Pacific race of Solitary Vireo, (*Vireo solitarius cassinii*) "Cassin's Vireo", was seen and heard singing over a three-day period 3-5 May 1994 on and near the north end of Wooded Island in Jackson Park, Chicago. As far as I am aware, this represents the first report of this form for Illinois and one of the few for eastern North America.

"Cassin's Vireo" is currently listed as a race of Solitary Vireo by the American Ornithologists' Union, but Sibley and Monroe 1990 and 1993 (*Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World and Supplement*) adopt a three-way split of Solitary Vireo into "Blue-headed" (Canada and eastern U.S.), "Plumbeous" (primarily Rocky Mountains) and "Cassin's Vireos" (primarily Pacific coastal U.S., ranging inland in the northern Rocky Mountains to northwest Montana). They note that such a split is backed by unpublished biochemical data.

Birders in eastern North America have had little cause to