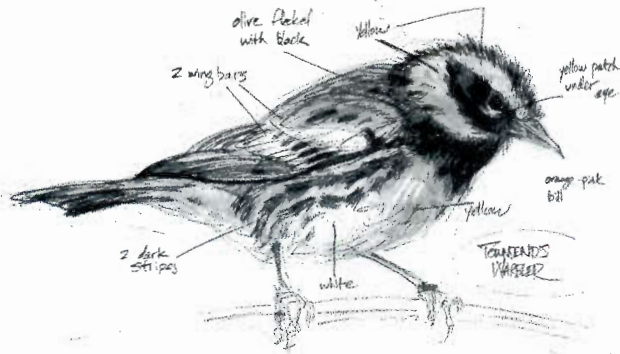


Field Notes

The 2007 spring migration season

by Travis A. Mahan



Field notes drawing of Townsend's Warbler by Peter Olson.

The spring of 2007 yielded reports of 15 species listed on the Illinois Review List, which was established and is maintained by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC). Species included on the Review List must be thoroughly documented by the observer(s) and subsequently reviewed by the IORC in order for the report to be accepted into the permanent record of Illinois' avifauna. Some of the 15 review list species reported this spring were represented by multiple individuals statewide. Unfortunately, many of these reports were not documented. It is highly encouraged that observers complete documentation for any review list species encountered in the field so that the state can maintain a continuum of quality data and establish patterns of vagrancy for these rarely encountered species.

Temperatures through the first half of February were below to well below normal for central and northern Illinois, but the southern stretches of the state maintained essentially average temperatures. The latter half of February yielded more typical temperatures statewide. Few weather systems provided conditions favorable for migratory movement, a fact that was evident by the paucity of reports of migratory activity throughout the month. Reports of roughly 30 species were received as February arrivals, the earliest of which followed the first onset of southerly winds from 10-12 February. As is typical of most years, this early push was dominated by waterfowl, which advance northward as soon as warmer temperatures thaw ice, providing open water. The most notable species reported from this early surge was a Black Scoter along Lake Michigan. Following a series of low pressure systems that passed through the state after 16 February, statewide temperatures recovered to normal following one of the coldest periods of the month. Temperatures remained static from about 19 February through the end of the month, but the low pressure systems offered some south winds that produced a trickle of zealous migrants. The highlight of February migration was a well-documented adult Black-headed Gull that remained at Chicago's Montrose Harbor from 23 February through at least 25 March. (See article in Meadowlark 16: 3)

March began with some very gusty westerly winds following a brief show of southerly air that occurred with a strong low pressure system that passed through the state from 28 February through about 4 March. Heavy rains of up to one inch were noted in more northerly locations during this time period. This system caused temperatures to drop down into the teens throughout much of the state on the night of 4 March, but temperatures quickly recovered to normal by 5 March. From about 9-14 March, statewide temperatures surpassed normal highs

with some areas reporting temperatures above 75°F from 12-14 March. North winds followed the passage of this low pressure system, which stabilized temperatures to normal through the period of 15-18 March. Sustained south winds through the last half of March provided favorable conditions for migrants. The warmest period statewide occurred from about 24-27 March, when temperatures exceeded 80°F in some areas. More than 110 species were reported as arriving in March, and some of these were record early: Green Heron (24 March), Marbled Godwit (25 March), Western Sandpiper (30 March), Wilson's Phalarope (26 March), Caspian Tern (26 March), and Sedge Wren (23 March).

The beginning of April maintained the high-temperature trend that persisted through the latter half of March. Temperatures in southern Illinois surpassed 80°F while northern and central Illinois reported temperatures above 70°F through 3 April. This brief period contained some strong winds from the south to southwest. However, a decimating cold front hit the state on 4 April causing temperatures to rapidly plummet below freezing in some areas. Much of the emerging vegetation in the state was affected by frost, especially in southern Illinois where many trees were barren of leaves later in the season. This unseasonable cold spell passed by 10 April, but another less severe cold front occurred from 12-14 April following a strong low-pressure system. Precipitation during this period was among the highest noted all month. Two periods during the latter half of April yielded south winds and above-normal temperatures: 20-24 and 28-30 April. These periods were marked by a heavy flow of a variety of migrants. Exceptional reports during the month of April included record early arrivals of Hudsonian Godwit (12 April), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (5 April), Eastern Kingbird (4 April), Philadelphia Vireo (23 April), and Prothonotary Warbler (2 April). A number of species on the Illinois Review List were reported in April; the following were accompanied by documentation: Black Rail in Fayette County, Snowy Plover in Macon County, White-winged Dove and Barn Owl at Chicago, and a Lazuli Bunting in Winnebago County.

May produced less dramatic temperature swings than those in April. Consistent east winds dominated 1-7 May, which maintained temperatures at normal levels for the statewide Spring Bird Count held on 5 May. A low pressure system that entered the state on 7 May brought temperatures up to the 80s statewide and held them above average from about 7-11 May. Northern Illinois reported temperatures above 90°F during this period. On 13-15 May, an additional warm front passed through the state that produced more south winds and high tempera-