

# Field Notes



*Magnolia Warbler drawing by James T. Ziebol.*

## 2003 Spring Migration

by Paul R. Clyne

The 2003 spring migration season was fairly uneventful. Reports were received for 294 routine species, plus 14 species requiring review by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee.

The onset of this spring's migration was the latest in the history of this journal (dating to 1992). For example, only two lone songbirds were reported as migrant arrivals in northern Illinois for the entire month of February – one American Pipit, and one American Tree Sparrow. This was the first spring since 1993 in which, e.g., northern arrivals of Song Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds were all delayed until March.

Among non-passerines, the list of northern arrival dates in February was exhausted by six species of ducks at Chicago's Jackson Park, one of which was also reported in Kane County. Elsewhere in the state, reports of February arrivals were confined to three additional species of ducks, plus single reports of four Horned Grebes, eight Sandhill Cranes, one Killdeer, five American Woodcocks, one Fox Sparrow, and 81 Rusty Blackbirds.

Of course, robins, grackles, and cowbirds eventually did show up statewide, but the trend toward late appearances continued through the spring. Weather certainly played a role, as this spring was nearly a carbon copy of the previous one. It was cold, wet, and dreary over much of the state, but overly dry in the south, with a couple of brief fronts of hot weather in April.

The first big push of routine migrants was recorded statewide on Saturday 8 March. Reports of migrant arrivals were received for a remarkable 45 species on this date, more than on any other date this spring. Indeed, excluding the Spring Bird Count (SBC) date, 8 March is the second most frequent date cited below, only narrowly edged out by the first Saturday in May. The next most frequent date documents the first weekend day when the backlog of early migrants finally made it to the northern tier of the state on Sunday, 16 March.

April began with a minor warm front, followed by subnormal temperatures until a blast of hot weather rolled in under gusty southwest winds on 14-15 April. This front was evidently just a bit too early in the season to precipitate widespread migration (only one high count amid this front merited boldfacing),

although 36 species were reported as migrant arrivals over the two-day stretch, the most notable being a record-early Cape May Warbler.

The highlight of May was the unusual coincidence of excellent conditions for migration and the statewide SBC on 10 May. While no all-time high counts were attained, counts for four species (Yellow-billed Cuckoo, White-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, and Orchard Oriole) were second only to the SBC of 1991, and the highest counts of the 2003 spring passage were obtained on the SBC for 65 species, of which 50 were passerines.

Waterfowl data were fairly routine this spring, with a few boldfaced high counts and dates. A tally of **300,000 Snow Geese** at Carlyle Lake is nearly unprecedented, but for a like count at this site in February of 2001. The one higher count (320,000) in the Illinois journals is an aerial survey datum from Feb 1997. The most unusual date of occurrence among waterfowl was provided by Illinois' first June record for Harlequin Duck.

Interesting loon records included an inland Red-throated Loon at Marion County and a very late Common Loon at Champaign County on 11 Jun. Grebes were rather well reported, highlighted by a very late Red-necked Grebe on 17 May. The boom in American White Pelican populations continued primarily via increased numbers in northeastern Illinois, where over 1000 individuals were found at various sites. Among the new record high counts set this spring, the tally of **17,000 Double-crested Cormorants** at Rend Lake was certainly among the most astonishing.

Populations of herons and egrets were normal to low; species below-par were Least Bittern, Great Egret, and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. One of the best finds amid a warm front in early April was a **White-faced Ibis** on the very early date of **3 April**. Swarming insects attracted phenomenal concentrations of up to **83 Mississippi Kites** in Alexander County. An article about this phenomenon will appear in the next issue of *Meadowlark*. It was no real flight year for Northern Goshawks, so two very late records (including one from southern Illinois) came as a surprise.