



Hooded Warbler drawing by Eric Secker.

Field Notes

2005 Spring Migration

by Travis A. Mahan

The first week of February brought with it the onslaught of unseasonably warm air and strong southerly winds which sparked the beginning of the 2005 spring migration. During this period, observers in the southern half of the state noted large movements of waterfowl. Migrant flocks of Snow Geese were prominent sights as countless thousands spanned for miles and miles across the sky. Territorial Red-winged Blackbirds became obvious as they returned to their roadside niches. Two separate reports of American Pipits on 5 and 6 February in Fayette and Clinton Counties (respectively) and 10 Western Meadowlarks on 6 February in Clinton County were exceptionally early. By mid-February, small numbers of American White Pelicans and Sandhill Cranes started passing through the state. Despite several days of 50-degree temperatures in the Chicago area, few migrants were noted in northern Illinois by the end of February; these included 10 species of waterfowl, 65 American White Pelicans, nine Sandhill Cranes, one Horned Lark, one American Robin, and one Song Sparrow.

Late February through March seems to be the developing migratory period for Trumpeter Swans moving through Illinois to their Wisconsin and other breeding areas. A record count of this species was made of birds, which were in a flooded field along a central Illinois section of an interstate highway.

Temperatures during March were largely below normal statewide with only a few warm spells to encourage movement. Some migrants were noted with the passage of a warm front on 6 March, but migration was rather uneventful until 29-30 March when a major warm front bolstered temperatures statewide into the upper 70s. Precipitation for March was about an inch below normal, which would become a trend in months to follow.

The best report for early March was of an adult male KING EIDER at Jackson Park on 3 March. A male EURASIAN WIGEON at Shabbona Lake State Park afforded looks to several observers from 19-24 March. Other impressive waterfowl reports were of 8,000 Green-winged Teal at Carlyle Lake and more than 14,000 Canvasbacks on the Mississippi River, providing the highest count for this species in recent years. Jackson Park tallied its earliest American Bittern and Caspian Tern on 30 March. Sandhill Crane migration peaked during mid-March with multiple reports from central Illinois where this species remains

quite rare. A record high spring count of 8 Northern Saw-whet Owls was part of a group of at least 10 that overwintered at Carlyle Lake. Three Purple Martins observed in Du Page County on 18 March were record early for northern Illinois and earliest for this spring's migration. A Sedge Wren found singing on 26 March in Jasper County constitutes the earliest arrival for this species in Illinois. Six species of warblers were reported in Illinois by the end of March, the most interesting being a record-early Palm Warbler on 25 March and an "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler remaining in Chicago 19-29 March. Several other notable species reported in March include two inland Red-throated Loons, three Eared Grebes, two Northern Goshawks, one immature Golden Eagle, one Harris's Sparrow, 15 Snow Buntings, and four Common Redpolls.

Observers statewide experienced an extremely poor migration in terms of number and diversity of migrants through April. Many species were reported to be in their lowest numbers ever, while several others were reported in below-average numbers. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, both kinglets, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird were among those species with greatly reduced numbers. Even with the passage of several strong warm fronts, yielding favorable winds, migration was low in volume. The period of 3-6 April provided the first encouraging wave of migratory conditions with strong winds and temperatures in the upper 70s that brought record early Prothonotary Warblers to far southern Illinois and Chicago on 4 and 5 April (respectively). Systems passing through the state in mid-April brought about a few record early arrivals. Temperatures during 16-20 April lingered in the low 80s marking the warmest period of the month, but consecutive cold fronts in the latter third of April forced temperatures down into the 50s and migration into torpor.

Considering the abysmal showing of migrants in April, there was a surprisingly nice array of rarities discovered in the state. The most significant discoveries included a rather metropolitan PURPLE GALLINULE found in a rural backyard in Champaign County, two Whimbrels and a RUFF in Johnson County, a single BEWICK'S WREN in Clinton County, and a long-staying GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE that provided many their first opportunity to view this species in the state. Illinois' first "SUTTON'S" WARBLER,