

Field Notes



Little Blue Heron drawing by Brian K. Willis.

The 1995 SPRING SEASON

by Robert Chapel

March was warmer and drier than normal statewide, while April and early May were cooler and wetter than normal. Consequently, migration, which started slightly ahead of schedule, seemingly stalled after mid-April. While waterfowl and early landbird migrants arrived in normal numbers and on time or even ahead of schedule, comparatively little neotropical migration had occurred by the time of the Spring Bird Count. Several count observers commented on the paucity of warblers and the surplus of lingering waterfowl. Shorebirds were generally hard to find, but there were good numbers at a few select areas.

Easily overlooked, but ornithologically significant were the record early arrival dates for 18 species. These dates occurred during 17 March to 22 April with half of the record dates falling between 9-18 April. This list included eight warbler, three shorebird, and two swallow species. Despite the few individuals that arrived so early, there were no noticeable concentrations of these species or passerines until later.

After approximately mid-April, neotropical migrants arrived late even in spectacular numbers statewide during the 8-10 May period. 9 May was the peak date in many areas. There continued to be good numbers of warblers, vireos, thrushes, flycatchers, and other later migrants into the last week of May, some even well into June. Although there were some spectacular days for observers, the total number of birds seen during migration was probably normal or even below normal.

Birding seemed somewhat dull until the mid-May onslaught of migrants when some interesting birds stirred interest. The most cooperative bird was an **Anhinga**, seen at McKee Marsh by many observers for a week. At least two flyby **Anhingas** were observed at Jackson Park during the same period. Other cooperative birds included

the season's only Red-necked Grebe, a breeding-plumaged adult, seen at a pond adjacent to a major shopping mall in Champaign for three days; a **White-faced Ibis** seen by many observers during its stay at Goose Lake Prairie; the winter Gyrfalcon at Clinton Lake that lingered until March 5; and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher that spent a week in De Kalb County.

The most exciting bird of the season was a **White-tailed Kite** seen briefly in Springfield. Unfortunately it could not be relocated. Other highlights included huge flocks of American White Pelicans in southern and western Illinois; a **Neotropical Cormorant** at Riverdale; two Cinnamon Teals and an out-of range Swainson's Hawk near Havana and even one in Lake County; many Yellow Rails in central Illinois, a Black Rail in Henderson County; an **Arctic Tern** at Braidwood, numerous Black-throated Blue Warblers downstate (unusual in spring), a Swainson's Warbler in Urbana; good numbers of the *Oporornis* warblers down-state, and many Harris' Sparrows statewide.

Please note, all breeding records will be reported in the 1995 Breeding Season Report. A special thanks is extended to all contributors to this report, who are listed here in full and by initials following each observation:

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Meadowlark