



Field Notes

The 2002 Spring Migration

by Paul R. Clyne

The 2002 spring season was mostly cold, wet, and dreary, except for two back-to-back fronts bringing scorching heat in the middle third of April, followed by a 42° drop in temperature with more gray skies and chilly rain. While some of the best birding may be had amid inclement weather as fronts collide, none of this spring's collisions seemed to yield avian "fall-outs" of any great magnitude, and several were correlated with rains too heavy for effective birding, followed by more cold, wet, and dreary weather.

There were few remarkable species noted this spring. The best bird of the season — Brown-headed Nuthatch — was a leftover from the previous summer. The second and third best birds — two species of longspurs — are under IORC review. Other rarities include Illinois's sixth **White-winged Dove** (making the fifth consecutive year of occurrence since the first record in 1998), **Painted Buntings** returning to their recent nesting areas in East St. Louis, and a window-casualty **Western Tanager**. See the end of this summary for additional reports under IORC review.

Despite the low number of rarities, species diversity was good. A total of 299 species not on the IORC review list was reported for the season. The most noteworthy omission from the summary is Least Tern, which had been reported every spring since 1993. Bewick's Wren has been verging on extirpation for several years, and none were located this spring.

A few species appeared in exceptional numbers. Five species set new all-time high counts for Illinois, and four more attained spring-season highs. The most sobering (almost frightening) high was set by **10,000 Greater White-fronted Geese** at Clinton Lake; this is not only four times the previous high count for that species, it also makes this one of only five species to have reports of 10,000 or more individuals this spring — so white-fronted goose joins the ranks of Mallard, Ring-billed Gull, Red-winged Blackbird, and Common Grackle in terms of Illinois abundance.

Other notable high counts (excluding Spring Bird Count data) include **65 Ross's Geese** — a species on the original IORC review list of 1988; **5 White-faced Ibis** — only the second Illinois count in excess of two birds; **34 Avocets** in Lake County (which was also the site of most of this season's few shorebird highlights); counts of **32 to 57 Eastern Phoebes**, providing the second through fourth highest counts for Illinois; a single-observer tally of **84 Black-capped Chickadees**; **122 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** and **53 Northern Parulas** one day in Union County; **141 Hermit Thrushes** at Chicago; **64 Cape May Warblers** at Urbana; **67 Northern Waterthrushes** at Lake Calumet; two separate influxes of over **250 Swamp Sparrows** at Chicago; **six Harris's Sparrows** at the newly established Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge in Jo Daviess County; and **218 Bobolinks** and **337 American Goldfinches** in reverse migration at Waukegan.

Reports of early migration were dominated by January arrival

dates posited for a variety of waterfowl and sparrow species that maintain large wintering populations in Illinois. Given the extreme mildness of the preceding winter, some notably early migration may be expected. Unfortunately, the Illinois data on such mid-winter movements are so meagre that the significance of this year's reports is not readily assessable. The relevant records have been boldfaced for future reference.

Other early arrivals include a very early Red-necked Phalarope on 28 April; Illinois's fourth March record for Laughing Gull; record early Warbling Vireos at sites all over the state beginning 6 April; a Wood Thrush on 28 March; a Northern Waterthrush as far north as Chicago on 12 April; a Louisiana Waterthrush in southern Illinois on 17 March; Illinois's fifth April record of Canada Warbler on a record early date; an extremely early Summer Tanager on 7 April; and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on 12 April. A Gray Catbird in far southern Illinois on 27 March seems much more likely an overwintering bird than a three-week-early migrant, and the same may be said of an Indigo Bunting on 20 March.

This spring's cold weather after the July-like blast of 10-19 April seemed to stall the appearance of neotropical migrants (warblers in particular), but this is perhaps mostly in contrast to the comparatively early migrations of several recent springs. This year's arrival dates actually seem to fall closer to long-term averages. At Chicago's Jackson Park, for example, warblers altogether averaged four days ahead of average, but among the 20 species that arrived after 19 April, the average arrival date was precisely the same as the 20-year average of those species for the years 1979-1999.

Migration wound down uneventfully. There were few real highlights after mid-May. A widespread Arctic front emanating off Baffin Island brought lows in the 30s from 17-21 May, setting record low temperatures at 123 stations in 32 states on 20 May. Nonetheless, 18 May (a Saturday) is the third most frequent date of occurrence in the following summary (after the Spring Bird Count on 4 May and the first Saturday of great bird diversity this spring, 13 April), with 39 records for departures, 27 for high counts, and 5 for arrivals. In fact, 18 May was not a great day for migration, but it was the second best Saturday during the month of May. Its prominence in this summary underscores the role that multiple observers can play, even on an ordinary day. For the following Saturday, 25 May, only 17 records made it into this summary.

Significantly late departures were few. Ruby-crowned Kinglet tied a previous Illinois late date; a Black-throated Blue Warbler on 16 Jun set a second-latest date; and a Dark-eyed Junco in Champaign County on 2 Jun provided central Illinois with its second latest date. In addition, two species with widespread breeding populations in Illinois (Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Red-eyed Vireo) were reported as significantly tardy migrants in late June.

In sum, the 2002 spring season fell close to average, or slightly above. Most (not all) disappointments were in keeping with the colder-than-average spring. The number of species in high numbers was mod-