

annually in Illinois along a 24.5 mile route where observers stop every half mile at the same 50 stops, once each year, sometime in June. These routes give us some of the better maximum counts for species like Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Killdeer, American Crow, Blue Jay, House Wren, American Robin, European Starling, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, all of the blackbirds, and House Sparrow, for this report. All of these birds are rarely counted or even mentioned by most, yet there are questions to answer about the populations of many. These routes also provide us with some of the longest running (since 1966) breeding bird census numbers that provide the backbone for the best information we have on the breeding birds of the U.S. and Canada, and often sound the alarm on whether our birds are declining or increasing. If you think you would like to help conduct such a census, contact the Illinois coordinator Matt McKim-Louder (mckimlou@illinois.edu) or the national coordinator, Keith Pardieck (kpardieck@usgs.gov) as there are always a few routes open. Interestingly, both Western Meadowlark and Brewer's Blackbirds can be found on several northeastern Illinois sod farms and nesting during the breeding season...though not enough attention has been paid to these uncommon/rare breeding species (at least in this portion of Illinois) until shorebirds arrive and the above two species are finished nesting, so breeding goes unconfirmed for them in all of these sod farm locations. A Eurasian Tree Sparrow found in DeWitt County likely extends this species' expanding breeding range into another county, though the species is already breeding farther north. How much farther eastward is it going?

Though no new first state record species of breeding bird was reported in Illinois this year, it likely won't be long before another is found. My money is on Black-bellied Whistling-Duck or Great-tailed Grackle. If you are out and lucky enough to find such rare Illinois vagrants, will you be watching them closely and long enough to detect whether they are showing signs of breeding behavior?

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