



Field Notes

The 2001 Spring Migration

by Paul R. Clyne

The 2001 spring migration showed wide-scale patterns within Illinois, albeit slightly complicated, and with a pronounced mix of positive and negative reviews. The southern third of the state was graced with a heavy dose of significant early arrivals, big numbers of waterfowl, and truly astonishing numbers and diversity of shorebirds. Carlyle Lake in particular stands out as the right place to have been, with record-breaking hordes of ducks and shorebirds, as well as huge flocks of starlings and blackbirds lingering later than usual into March.

Outside of southern Illinois, the season seemed a bit poor, or mediocre at best, although a good number of notably early migrant arrival dates were also obtained in the central and northern parts of the state. Few significant late migrant dates were reported anywhere in Illinois.

The combination of numerous early arrivals and few late departures superficially suggests an early migration overall, but larger field data do not support this interpretation. It was a harsh winter, and many of the early dates in February and March involved isolated individuals and flocks amid brief southerly fronts. The main movements of hardy migrants (especially early spring passerines) were, in fact, later than usual by as much as two weeks. Similarly, many of the later spring neotropical insectivores made isolated early appearances, while peak passages were unspectacular by either date or volume, and they went downhill from there.

A respectable total of **12 species set new Illinois high counts**, and another **18 species reached maximum spring highs for the state. Fifteen of the new records were set at Carlyle Lake**, and two were from other areas in the south. Central Illinois observers provided nine records from scattered sites, and northern Illinois birders supplied only four new state spring-season maxima (but no all-time highs), all from different sites.

The high counts were dominated by three species groups. Seven species of waterfowl, nine shorebirds, and four species of largely overwintering blackbirds (coupled with European Starlings) formed the core. Additional non-passerine maximum counts were confined to Sandhill Crane and Ring-billed Gull. Only six neotropical migrant passerines reached new peaks, and numbers for such species were unimpressive to discouraging statewide.

This spring's roster of notably early migrants included **record early arrivals for 27 species**, plus second earliest dates for 15 additional species. Passerines dominated the list,

with boldfaced arrival dates for over a third of the species recorded and earliest or second earliest migrant dates for 23 species covering a broad spectrum of species groups. Alas, none of these records were documented except as IORC review-list species; indeed, the only documentation of early migration received statewide was for a Canada Warbler in April. No documentations of late migrants were submitted except as required for the Spring Bird Count.

In the following recapitulation of the season by species groups, several records are pending IORC review, but controversial and undocumented reports are omitted.

Loons through Cranes

Highlights of the season include **Western Grebe in late May** at Lake Springfield, an **Anhinga** at Pere Marquette State Park (see seasonal highlights), **four Tricolored Herons** from scattered sites, and one or two **Glossy Ibises** in Madison County. Twelve of the 33 waterfowl species reported this spring attained noteworthy high counts. The high concentrations likely reflect, in part, the tardy thaw of waters, which impeded early movements, but see also the previous winter season report for late winter concentrations, especially among geese. The only exceptional waterfowl species reported was a **King Eider** that overwintered at Lake Springfield.

Raptor movements were unremarkable overall, although Bald Eagles attained near-record numbers at Lake Chautauqua. Rails were poorly represented, especially in northern Illinois. A record flight of **nearly 6,000 Sandhill Cranes** over northeastern Illinois on 18 March highlighted this species' widespread showing this spring.

Shorebirds through Woodpeckers

In the spring summaries published in the Illinois journals dating to 1985, shorebird species totals range from 31-33 species, except in three exceptionally good years (1986, 1996, and 2000), when the total climbed to 35 species. That threshold was attained once again in spring 2001. In fact, including the **Curlew Sandpiper** (see seasonal highlights and photo) at Great Lakes Naval Training Center, the number of shorebird species recorded in spring 2001 was a remarkable 36. A remarkable 30 species were noted at Carlyle Lake alone, including four species reported nowhere else. The greatest diversity was on 18 May, when 19 species were found there. Birders at that site provided the highest counts of the season for 19 species of shorebirds; eight of these counts set new