

There is no mention of breeding Caspian Terns or American White Pelicans in any of Illinois's oldest, historic ornithological literature including Kennicott (1854), Nelson (1876), and Ridgway (1889). In fact, these authors considered both of these species uncommon to rare in the state, but their numbers have increased rather dramatically fairly recently.

I added a few records into the field notes this season to show a few numbers of much smaller maximum counts for some species such as herons, swallows, hummingbirds, kingbirds, sandpipers and others. This was done to show that a good maximum count for certain species such as Great Egret, kingbirds, many of the swallows and a few others can be much lower in June, than it will be in July after the species have fledged young, families gather up and begin flocking in preparation for migration. Some of the maximum counts for these and other breeding species such as the Spotted Sandpipers likely include birds which have already migrated in from out of state. A count of 20 Rough-winged Swallows is locally impressive in June, but will be heavily trumped in mid to late July when flocks of these and about every other swallow can be seen along the utility lines or flying low over lakes like Chautauqua, Carlyle, Rend, and others, by the hundreds or even thousands. Likewise 20-50 Great Egrets are impressive just about anywhere until young, post-nesting dispersers, and groups taking advantage of a localized fish glut can swell numbers into the hundreds or even thousands in some areas. Lastly, Vern Kleen's amazing hummingbird congregations have been impressive the last few years where he goes to band, showing that what might simply appear as 10-15 birds coming to a few feeders, may actually be 100 (or considerably more), by identifying the numbers of such birds simply by placing bands on each one's legs. However, any count made in the field (by non-banders) is exceptional, even in the southern part of the state where they are more common, if one exceeds 5-10 birds.

I will also likely not report each and every Bald Eagle and Cooper's Hawk that is found after this year, and have done so the last couple years simply to show the extent to which their populations have rebounded since their once rare status in the state. Try to count more than 3 or 4 Cooper's Hawks in one day sometime...but they are just about everywhere if you can find them. Both species' breeding populations are likely better, or at least almost as good as their numbers were before DDT caused such a collapse in their populations. The same goes for my reporting of the increasing numbers of the ever northward expanding populations of Orchard Orioles and Blue Grosbeaks. Compared to the numbers reported of these birds even ten years ago, I think I have dramatically shown how they are increasing and expanding their ranges, especially in central and northern Illinois. All of these things have been done to show a clearer picture of Illinois's breeding bird populations.

Vagrants, especially southern dispersals

Possibly the best vagrant sighting of the summer was a very cooperative Tropical Kingbird, seen and photographed by many near Lake Carlyle. This bird was found and tentatively identified by a birding pipeline worker. He noticed the bird next to a cross-country pipeline, which was being installed How convenient! This makes one wonder how many such birds are out there, where the birders generally aren't.

This bird was spending a lot of time eating mulberries, but when it was banded and identified to species, the kingbird appeared emacated. The berry-stained breast of this bird helped tell another story, that of its long and stressful migration. This species has a large distribution over Central and South America, barely entering the U.S. in the extreme southwest during summer. In its normal range, southernmost populations (in southern South America) are migratory, while those living farther northward are not, or little so. Most are austral migrants. It would be nice to know the provenance of this bird.

A recent study has found that some normally insectivorous birds in preparation for or during migration can consume up to three times their own body weight in berries. The study suggests that the birds seek berries with the most deeply colored pigments because they contain high amounts of antioxidants that can help protect the birds during long, stressful migrations.

Only about the third record for the state, a cooperative Royal Tern at LaSalle Lake put on a show for those lucky to get there in time to see it, and amazingly another one (the same individual?) had been seen about a hundred miles down river a couple days earlier. A more regular Illinois vagrant, the White-winged Dove was nicely photographed while coming to Ed Franks' backyard feeder. Franks, an ornithologist, is Professor Emeritus at Western Illinois University. Another vagrant, encountered yearly in Illinois, an adult male Rufous Hummingbird, was photographed and banded. Both species were detected on typical dates for these species. Another vagrant, the Brown Pelican was seen in several locations in the state—perhaps a record number of this species for one season were detected during the 2009 summer season.

Other birds common to the southern Gulf coast were found in Illinois during summer. Observers noted summering and post-nesting dispersing Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Neotropic Cormorant, White Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbill (all appearing for the second consecutive summer) as well as Mottled Duck and the previously mentioned Brown Pelican and Anhinga. Most/all of these species were also found this summer (and/or last summer) in nearby southern Indiana and southeastern Missouri, including Fulvous Whistling-Duck. Perhaps these species will become regular post-breeding wanderers to this state. Interestingly, the place where many of these birds were found this summer was the same area where historic sightings of the same species occurred, likely on a regular basis—in Monroe County, back when these species' numbers and the wetland acreage were much higher.

Other good finds included several lingering northern birds, mainly ducks—Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common and Red-breasted Merganser, Surf Scoter and a beautiful, alternate-plumaged Horned Grebe, all in Chicago or other northern Illinois areas. Three, possibly four Western Grebes lingered, one until the end of the season in several areas of the state, likely a record number of individuals for summer in Illinois. A late July record Scissor-tailed Flycatcher apparently didn't involve a locally nesting bird.

Other rare/endangered nesting species

Exciting nesting species included the second consecutive year for the small and far northern, disjunct breeding Mississippi Kite colony in a residential area of Rockford.