

American Bitterns were found in increased locations compared to most years. Black Rails were also found for the second consecutive year, this time two at opposite ends of the state. One was photographed displaying aggressively and showing territorial/nest-defense behavior. A pair of state and federally endangered Piping Plovers attempted to nest at one of their last, previous breeding spots in the state, in Waukegan (last noted nesting there in 1973 and 1979). Due to potential human disturbance at this heavily used public beach, scientists collected and hatched the eggs at the Lincoln Park Zoo, with the young later released in Michigan. Black-necked Stilts continued their march across Illinois as a breeding species. New nesting birds were located in northern and central Illinois, with increasing breeding areas located in southern Illinois.

Other interesting finds of mostly state-endangered species include several Barn Owls in southern Illinois found with nest boxes full of young. This species has likely become more common than records suggest, especially in southern Illinois, both possibly even in more northern areas of the state. Swainson's Hawks may be decreasing, even given their small breeding population, as active searching for breeding pairs turned up few birds. Another active search for Swainson's Warblers, partially aided by a \$500 research grant by IOS, did produce a few singing males and possibly a breeding pair. Bewick's Wren was only located at its one known, annual Illinois nesting location. A single, singing male Painted Bunting was found again at its lone, known Illinois breeding location. A fair number of Black-billed Cuckoos (recently listed as state-threatened), mostly singletons, were found this summer, mostly in Chicagoland. The state-endangered Loggerhead Shrike continues to breed in small numbers at Lost Mound NWR, Midewin NTP, and in southeastern Illinois near the prairie-chicken refuges. The species none-the-less continues to disappear from many other long-held territories and still seemingly good habitat, and thus was recented upgraded from state-threatened. Will this species still be found in Illinois at the end of the following decade?

Interesting breeding and post-nesting dispersal patterns

American Crows seem to be slightly increasing or holding their own in their battle with West Nile Virus. Corvids and their relatives, in general, are particularly susceptible to the virus so Blue Jays as well as chickadees have also suffered. I am trying to keep track of maximum counts of these species in the field and encourage observers to keep regular counts of these birds and report them to the journal. I wonder if Illinois's relatively small Fish Crow population has declined significantly as well.

The massive winter invasion of Pine Siskin (both in Illinois, neighboring states, and points much farther south) resulted in numerous and widespread breeding evidence throughout Illinois, but especially in Chicagoland. There were likely more breeding siskins in Illinois this season, than I have witnessed in my 35+ years experience observing nesting birds in the state. Small and good sized flocks were also being encountered very late into the summer season at feeding stations, even in far southern Illinois. Although not as in evidence on the same scale, a number of Red-breasted Nuthatches were detected throughout the summer, but with

no confirmed breeding. Some of each species were thought to be early fall "migrants", but keep in mind that when nesting this far south, both species' normal wintering range is usually much farther **north**, not south. So unlike most species migrating out of Illinois after nesting, these two species are heading north in late summer and early fall, not south. These species leave the north when cone crops are low and return when seeds become more plentiful.

About the only place in Illinois where it is relatively easy to detect migratory movements of bird species, even those considered mostly sedentary or partially migratory (Blue Jays, chickadees, etc.) is the Chicagoland lakefront. The latest of the late migrants can easily be found there, with some of the last individual gulls, flycatchers, warblers, thrushes, sparrows and others present at least until the first 10-15 days of June. Such late, migratory birds are only rarely ever found outside the Chicagoland lakefront, and then usually represent only a very few individual birds found with an extraordinary amount of birding time put forth. Because of this factor, some exceptional insights can be had regarding the regular, late-season migratory movements of species that are found along the lakefront. Some of these birds' movements (especially shorebirds and flycatchers) can be so late as to make it difficult to distinguish between a late, northbound arriving, boreal-nesting migrant and an early southbound, migrant in fall migration. Even the most experienced birder/ornithologist might have to flip a coin to determine which way a given bird is moving.

One has to wonder: Are some of these birds, found away from the lakefront parks (with little nesting habitat), actually trying to set up a territory and breed (e.g. Least and Alder Flycatchers, Blackthroated Green and Nashville Warblers, all of which have summered or attempted to breed in Illinois)? There were interesting examples this season of many especially late, boreal breeding flycatchers, thrushes, warblers and even sparrows that were found, for example, Dave Bohlen's mid-July Black-throated Green Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow. Which way were those birds going? And what's up with Bob Hughes's end-of- July Prairie Warbler, Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Wren at Montrose or Paul Clyne's late July White-crowned Sparrow? Some of these birds, often termed summer wandering birds, are likely a result of one or more nesting failures and they may be looking for a better spot to try to nest the following year.

Other interesting birds such as Keith McMullen's mid-July Bobolink at Prairie Ridge SNA (where the species does not nest), and Bob Hughes's several sightings of Dickcissels (7 records) and Bobolinks (3 records) in early June through mid-July at Montrose (where neither species nests), serve as evidence of the continual, large-scale amount of mowing that goes on throughout these species' breeding range in Illinois and elsewhere. When these birds' nests are destroyed by mowing, the species may head north or south early looking for a new breeding area to re-nest in or start south early on their long trip back to their southern South America wintering areas.

I once had a landowner/farmer proudly tell me that he could now get off four to five mowings of his hay fields each year, and I have noticed in my extensive statewide summer travels that first mowed fields can be seen in Illinois now as early as May, just as Bobolinks and Dickcissels are building