

Field Notes

The 2000 Breeding Season Report

by Vernon M. Kleen, Compiler, Natural Heritage Division, Department of Natural Resources

The 2000 Breeding Season for grassland birds was "...very good...," especially at Illinois Beach State Park (Al Stokie), but, was "...normal to poor..." (Paul Clyne), and "...a bit on the uninteresting side..." (Doug Stotz) for most of the state. The spring drought ended by mid June and reservoirs that had become "dangerously low" (according to human standards) filled rapidly during June's rainstorms. The most severe storms traversed Illinois in the late afternoons, evenings or early mornings and rarely interfered with established bird surveys and special projects. Weather for the period was (fide Paul Clyne) not an obvious factor, and the Chicago area did not suffer the heat and drought that plagued much of the U.S. In fact, much of the state was blessed with a moderating jet-stream that prevailed over the Great Lakes region all summer long, forestalling the first 90 degree temperature of the year (at least in the Chicago area) until the remarkably late date of 15 Aug. The latter half of June and most of July were cloudier than usual with below-average rainfall. From the human perspective, the summer generated much talk as the most gorgeous in living memory.

Perhaps the most interesting record of the season was the state's first recorded nesting of Painted Buntings. Other significant breeding accounts included: a record number of heron/egret colonies (see Fig. 1), excellent numbers of nesting Pied-billed Grebes and Least Bitterns, the return of 2 nesting pairs of Little Blue Herons to Lake Calumet, the 3rd consecutive year of successful nesting Ospreys, Virginia Rails at 16 locations, a Sora's nest with eggs, good numbers of nesting moorhens and coots, plenty of nesting Sandhill Cranes, a fair number of Black Terns, new locations for Eurasian Collared-Doves, hundreds of hummingbirds (banded) in Jackson County, two sites of multi-nesting Western Kingbirds, potential nesting Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, seven Loggerhead Shrike nests at Midewin Prairie, low-headed Blackbirds in the northeast.

Of course, there were scarcities as well. Doug Stotz was

particularly concerned about both species of cuckoos, indicating that "...they were non-existent this summer as far as I could tell in n.e. Illinois...."

Several June and July occurrences, not specifically identifiable as late spring departures or early fall arrivals, appear as NBSO

(Non-Breeding Summer Occurrence) records. The most notable observations that fit this label for the 2000 season were:

Neotropical Cormorant, Western Grebe, American White Pelicans (which I predict will be an Illinois nesting species very soon), Tricolored Herons

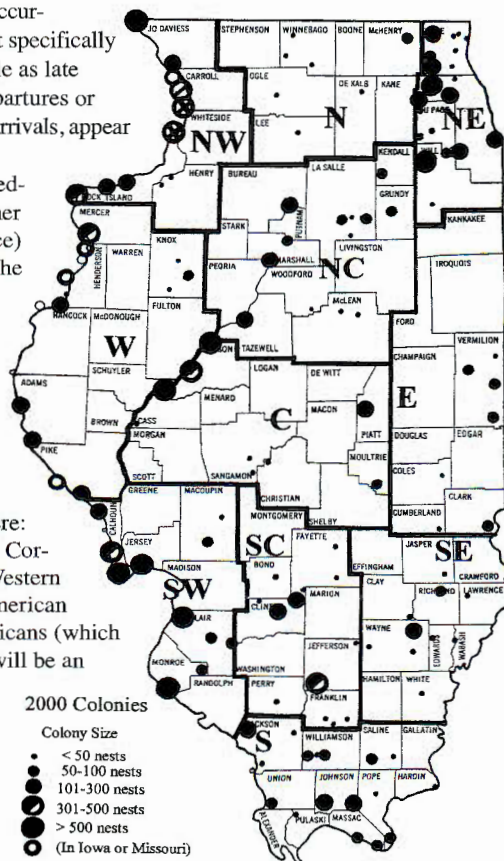


Figure 1.