



Field Notes

The 2001 Breeding Season

by Vernon M. Kleen, Compiler

The 2001 Breeding Season may best be summed by the following comment from Doug Stotz, "My overall sense of the summer is that it was a good one, I saw a number of rare breeders and there were some incredible finds, both vagrants and new and interesting breeders for Illinois."

For a starter, some of the more notable breeding records were Illinois' first nesting White-throated Sparrows (see future issue of Meadowlark for details), rooftop nesting of Ring-billed Gulls (see article this issue), inland-nesting Least Terns (see future issue of Meadowlark for details), Illinois' second Scissor-tailed Flycatcher nest (see this issue for details), and the return of Painted Buntings. Some of the incredible vagrants were Illinois' first Brown-headed Nuthatch (see Meadowlark 10: for details), and June records for Tricolored Heron, Marbled Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, and Arctic Tern. Perhaps not incredible, but certainly significant, were the documented population increases for Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Canada Geese, Bald Eagles, Sandhill Cranes, Ring-billed Gulls, and Henslow's Sparrows. Other less common, often sporadic, species that were fairly well represented this year included Pied-billed Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Common Moorhen, American Coot, and several passerines in the northeast such as Cliff Swallow and Blue-winged, Chestnut-sided, and Kentucky Warblers. Rarer nesters reported again this year were Little Blue Herons, Gadwall, Osprey (2nd Illinois site), Peregrine Falcon, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common and Black Terns, Western Kingbird, and Bewick's Wren. In contrast to the above, species for which there were detected population declines included Double-crested Cormorant and Carolina Wren, and no reports were received for Swainson's Hawk, Clay-colored Sparrow, Brewer's Blackbirds or Cook County's nesting Ospreys.

The 2001 season began in March with cold temperatures, snow still on the ground and flooding, especially along the Mississippi River, but transformed into a reasonable summer and successful breeding season. The flooded or overly wet conditions in some parts of the state played havoc for early nesters but provided favorable habitat for the later, opportunistic breeders. The month of June was rather moderate temperature-wise with an average of 3-4 inches of rain, mostly during the early weeks. July also showed fairly moderate temperatures but was rather dry, averaging less than 2 inches of rain.

Most of the season's highlights were mentioned above, however, other breeding species of interest included Least Bittern, Upland Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Bell's Vireo, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Pine Siskin. As usual, there were an excellent number of Non-Breeding Summer Occurrences (NBSO) including loons, pelicans, dabbling and diving ducks, Purple Gallinule, Black-necked Stilt, Franklin's Gull — the 5th consecutive year for the KFC Laughing Gull — Caspian Tern and several flycatchers and warblers. Perhaps one of these years the pelicans and Caspian Terns will move from NBSO status to nesting; keep watching!

History has shown that some species do not do well when exposed to long, cold spells and continuous snow cover. Two species, the Northern Mockingbird and Northern Bobwhite did "okay" this past winter, but the Carolina Wren did not. However, in some parts of the state there was an apparent late-summer rebound of the wrens (pers. comm. Bob Chapel, Keith McMullen).

At the Savanna Army Depot, Dan Wenny has been conducting a series of grassland bird surveys; when reviewing the species accounts, there'll be very high counts for several species; Dan noted that the "...figures are "exact" numbers of birds recorded during two June censuses at 68 census points; the extrapolated numbers of birds for each species at the site (which are not used in this account) are considerably higher..."

Southern Illinois' Prothonotary Warbler is another species of research interest. Jeff Hoover reported that "...The drought that began in the fall of 2000 in the Cache River watershed resulted in a lot of the swamps and backwater areas being dried up throughout the winter, spring and summer. A consequence of this was a reduction in the populations of Prothonotary Warblers in the watershed, and also some late-summer starvation of warbler nestlings on sites where the water had dried up. It appears that the lack of water all summer resulted in a lack of insects late in the summer (because there was no water to promote insect emergence). This is the first time that there has been nestling starvation associated with drought in the Cache Watershed. There were a number of male and female warblers in the watershed that are at least 5 years old and a few of each sex that are at least 8 years old (based on my long-term study of color-marked birds in the watershed). These are longevity records for this species."