



Field Notes

Field Notes drawing of a Wood Thrush by Denis Kania.

The 1997 Breeding Season Report

by Vernon M. Kleen

The 1997 breeding season was unlike that of any other in recent memory. The cool, wet, and delayed spring created a threatening challenge — the severity of which may never be fully realized — for many species. Here's the scenario: the exceptionally cool and damp weather that persisted through the first week of May precluded the development of normal and anticipated food sources that early nesting species depend upon. By instinct, these birds delayed and further delayed their breeding attempts waiting until the needed food sources were more abundant. In the meantime, during this deficiency period, large numbers of migrants were arriving, staying, and competing for and seriously depleting the already inadequate food supply needed to fuel the next leg of their northward migratory journeys. By this time, the nesting neotropical migrants had returned and were both ready and eager to begin their annual breeding cycles, but the paucity of food sources continued to prevail. As a result, all three groups: early breeders, later breeders, and neotropical transients, which don't usually compete seriously with each other, were now simultaneously competing for and further depleting the limited food resources as well as critically preventing those resources from naturally replenishing themselves until much later in the season. Although data are not available for this report, it would be of ornithological value to know what really happened to the populations of the two, normally asynchronous, groups of nesting species as well as the transient species as a result of this food shortage during the height of the "primary" nesting season and whether nesting attempts later in the season were more successful or not.

As in the past, greater numbers of Bald Eagles, Double-crested Cormorants, and Sandhill Cranes are nesting in Illinois. On the flipside, we regret the loss of some of our traditional Great Blue Heron colonies (especially at Carlyle Lake and Rend Lake) and all of the Black-crowned Night-

Hérons nesting along the Illinois River. Black-crowned may also be in serious trouble at Lake Calumet. Although a pair of Ospreys once again constructed a nest, and incubation may have occurred, we're still waiting for the first confirmed evidence of a successful nest in Illinois since 1952. A new Ring-billed Gull colony was found at Waukegan (see article in future issue), and Herring Gulls attempted nesting at Lake Renwick. Least Terns did very well along the lower portions of the Mississippi River, and Western Kingbirds were back and may have had successful nests near the gambling boat east of St. Louis. Other records of interest include the presence of a Red-breasted Nuthatch at Sand Ridge State Forest (see seasonal highlights), Golden-crowned Kinglets and Black-throated Green Warblers at Lowden-Miller State Forest, and the Black Rail heard in Lee County (see seasonal highlights).

For those still unaware, the Cooper's Hawk was officially delisted from the state's list of threatened and endangered species effective 3 March this year. However, what's happened to immature Red-headed Woodpeckers? Perhaps it's time to keep track of the number of adult and immature Red-headed Woodpeckers observed for the seasonal reports.

As normal, there are always an interesting array of June and July occurrences of non-breeding birds. The Red-throated Loon beyond mid-June in s.w. Cook County is a perfect example (see seasonal highlights). Records such as these are referred to as Non-Breeding Summer Occurrences (N.B.S.O.) and have been incorporated into (and placed at the end of) the individual species accounts. Records of migrant birds, such as shorebirds and warblers, that lingered into June or had returned in July have been forwarded to the seasonal editor for inclusion in the appropriate Spring or Fall Season Reports.

1997 was another excellent year for the Breeding Bird

Meadowlark