

An Initial Estimate of Illinois Shorebird Numbers and Implications for Management

by Robert Russell

Recent advances in shorebird surveying and monitoring and publication of the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan (Brown et al., 2001, 2nd edition) have resulted in initial population estimates for all species of North American shorebirds (see Table 1). The authors of that study considered the population information a first approximation, subject to refinement and revision as additional surveys become available. The quality of these estimates varies from "poor" with an educated guess of 0–50 for the extremely rare Eskimo Curlew now recorded perhaps once a decade (and seldom verified) to an estimate of 6,200 and a high confidence level rating for the often-censused Piping Plover. Unfortunately, for most species the population estimates tend toward "poor" with only a few species rating a "good" level. Many of those "good" ratings are the result of recent intensive surveys on Arctic breeding and South American and Mexican wintering sites.

For a talk at the recent Illinois Ornithological Society annual meeting in Danville, Illinois, I made initial estimates for all regularly occurring species of Illinois shorebirds. Utilizing published high counts of Illinois shorebirds from *North American Birds* and various

Illinois bird books (Bohlen, 1989; Robinson, 1996; and unpublished Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas materials) and some personal knowledge of shorebird routes coupled with input from many Illinois bird folk, helped produce this first approximation of Illinois shorebird popu-

Perhaps 20 percent of the world's population of Lesser Yellowlegs migrate through Illinois annually making it of high conservation interest in the state.

lation estimates. What is more important to note than the actual numerical estimates is the percentage of the continental population that migrates through or over Illinois, and in many cases this translates to a significant percentage of the world population of a species since many of these species breed only in North America.

That Illinois harbors a significant percentage of the world population of a shorebird species on migration should have major implications for federal and state wildlife managers who can now utilize this information to focus



This photo of a Lesser Yellowlegs was taken by Mary Kay Rubey at the Cooling Sod Farm, Boone County, 23 August 2002.