

(1960) states, "These two groups are not racially distinct and it seems likely that the intervening territory was once occupied by another population, one which migrated down the Mississippi Valley and was snuffed out perhaps like the Eskimo Curlew." The current migration routes of the two breeding populations are considered "separate and partially transoceanic with apparently little mixing" (Skeel and Mallory 1996). The western group moves north and south along the Pacific coastline. The eastern group moves north up the coast to the mid-Atlantic states in the spring and then overland to the lower Great Lakes before going on to Hudson Bay. In the fall, these birds are said to move east from Hudson Bay to the Maritimes and then south along the coast (Hall 1960). Skeel and Mallory (1996) state that there is "no evidence of migration through the interior from the Gulf or south Atlantic states." Dinsmore et. al (1984) considered the Iowa records of Whimbrel "probably westward strays from the eastern population." Historical comments from Ken-nicott (1854), Cooke (1888) and Elliot (1895) suggests that the Whimbrel did indeed migrate through the Mississippi River Valley and although sparse, current data from the Middlewestern Prairie Region suggest the same.

Illinois and the Middlewestern Prairie Region

In support of this statement, published and unpublished records of the Whimbrel from 1895 to 2003 for the Middlewestern Prairie Region of Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky have been compiled from various sources. (See bar graph). Great effort was



A Whimbrel at Montrose Harbor, Chicago, Cook County. 25 July 2003. Photo by Kanae Hirabyashi.

taken to ensure that the data are accurate and as current as possible, although some data may be incomplete, especially for Lake and Cook counties in Illinois. Data for the region have been separated into two categories. MPR (Middlewestern Prairie Region) which includes all records for the region away from Lake Michigan and LAKE, which includes all records for Lake and Cook counties in Illinois and Lake, Porter and La Porte counties in Indiana.

The migration data from the Chicago area (Lake and Cook counties) are significant in that these are the most comprehensive set of notes concerning the daily migrations of birds over the last 100 years for the Middlewestern Prairie Region. The downside is that there is so much data that it becomes very difficult to gather it all. Chicago has had the luxury of an unbroken line of dedicated birders that are not only skilled in identifying birds but have

taken the time to submit their notes for publication. Data from other areas within the region are far less comprehensive and suffer from great lapses as birding interest fluctuates at the local level. This differentiation is important because data from the Chicago area are likely disproportional and tend to overshadow the data from the remainder of the MPR.

Detection of a species as scarce as the Whimbrel is very much dependent on adequate coverage of potential stopover habitat. The Lake Michigan lakefront and the large cities that border it provide a very narrow strip of consistent and suitable habitat for migrating shorebirds. Heavy birding pressure and relatively easy access to the beaches make for very good and accurate coverage of the Chicago area. Monitoring the Middlewestern Prairie Region away from Lake Michigan presents a much more difficult challenge. The Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Wabash and Ohio Rivers provide the most consistent shorebird habitat for the greater part of the MPR, but access to all portions of these rivers is very limited.

