

The various agricultural and levee districts that occupy the floodplains of these rivers do everything they can to keep these areas dry and free of standing water. During wet years when conditions are suitable, you may get huge concentrations of shorebirds, with a much greater likelihood of observing a Whimbrel. Most years, conditions are dry and poor for shorebirds, and the chances of observing a Whimbrel are slim. In spite of these conditions, the spring observations of Whimbrels in the MPR from 1895 through May 2003 include, 98 records of 314 individuals, compared with the heavily birded LAKE, 65 records of 280 individuals. Although the MPR has more records than LAKE, flocks on LAKE tend to be bigger producing a greater number of individuals. It is reasonable to assume that a larger number of Whimbrels are going undetected as they move along the river systems of the MPR than those using the beaches of Lake Michigan.

Spring migration – a historical pathway?

Another piece of supportive evidence for a spring movement of Whimbrels through the Mississippi River Valley, is the distribution of records along Lake Michigan. The spring observations along the Illinois lakefront from 1902 through May 2003 include 55 records of 259 individuals, while the Indiana lakefront observations include only 10 records of 21 individuals. These disproportionate numbers suggest that many of these birds may not be entering the lake from the east, as common migration theory for this species would have it. Instead, the MPR region population probably also consists of birds moving up from the south through the Mississippi River Valley. These records may also be further evidence of a small, remnant popula-



During the late morning of 27 May 2000, heavy fog rolled in off Lake Michigan and downed a flock of seven Whimbrels, pictured here, at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Lake County, Illinois. They stayed for a few hours, feeding and resting, and waiting for better weather to continue their northerly journey. Photo by Eric Walters.

tion of Whimbrels, whose numbers may have been much larger in pre-settlement times.

The distribution of records for the remainder of the MPR also suggests a southerly or Gulf Coast origin of migrants. The distribution of records in Kentucky and Missouri show this trend most clearly. Kentucky has no records for the eastern portion of the state, two in the central and fourteen in the west, at or near the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Eastern Missouri has five records all near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers in St. Louis and St. Charles counties. Central Missouri has eight records, with six recorded in the Columbia area of Boone, Cole and Cooper counties and two recorded at Swan Lake NWR. At least nineteen spring records have been cited for northwest Missouri, dominated by observations from the St. Joseph area and Squaw Creek NWR. All of the Missouri records are along or within the proximity of the Missouri River. In each of these cases, a greater concentration of records in the western portion of the state argues against an eastern source for these birds. When comparing greatest with least, the number of spring

Whimbrel records within the MPR presents a similar pattern. Missouri (32 records), Iowa (27 records), Illinois (18 records), Kentucky (16 records) and Indiana (5 records).

Whimbrels likely move into the region from the south via the Mississippi River and probably scatter as they reach the confluence of the major rivers. The ten records from western Kentucky, southeastern Illinois and southwestern Indiana seem to show a pattern of movement along the Ohio River into the Wabash River system. The few records from eastern Illinois and the remainder of Indiana are probably extensions of this movement as the birds make their way north toward Lake Michigan. It appears then, that birds that continue up the Mississippi River and past its confluence with the Ohio River tend to continue west up the Missouri River. A few may stray back to the east, either moving up the Kaskaskia River and stopping at Carlyle Lake, or northeast up the Illinois River. Either of these rivers may be the source of the scattered records for central Illinois as these birds continue on towards Lake Michigan.

The pattern of spring records for Iowa is less clear. The nine records for western Iowa in Freemont, Mills, Pottawattamie and Woodbury counties follow the Missouri River and seem to be an extension of birds moving beyond Squaw Creek NWR. The eighteen spring records for central and eastern Iowa are scattered with only a single record from a county that borders the Mississippi River. Some of the birds moving into Missouri may be diverting north and scattering into central Iowa instead of going as far west as Squaw Creek NWR. The Mississippi River is the likely source of the birds moving into eastern and central Iowa, but the lack of records north of the St. Louis area is puzzling. If birds are moving up the