

Four Whimbrels at Lake  
Carlyle. Fayette County.  
27 May 2000.  
Photo by Al Seppi.



Mississippi River into eastern and central Iowa, at least a few scattered records should be expected along the Mississippi River as far north as Keo-kuk. Lack of observers in these areas and possibly limited access to the river bottoms is likely the problem. A similar lack of records exists for southern Missouri from St. Genevieve south along the river to Sikeston. Records of spring Whimbrels for the MPR have increased substantially over the past few decades. Totals since the turn of the century include: 1890s (1), 1930s (1), 1940s (3), 1950s (4), 1960s (14), 1970s (13), 1980s (23), 1990s (41), 2000s (30) through the summer of 2003. At this rate of growth, the current decade could produce up to eighty Whimbrel records for the MPR. Do these numbers indicate an increase in the Whimbrel migration through the Mississippi River Valley or are they evidence of increased birding activity and better record keeping? Also, as prevailing winds during spring migration are virtually always from the south or southwest, it seems highly unlikely that the birds that are sighted in the MPR at this season are wind-blown vagrants from birds moving up the Atlantic Coast.

Spring Whimbrel migration through the MPR extends from April into June with an early arrival date of April 12 and late date of June 10. A breakdown of records for the spring movement reveals: April (10 records), May (81 records), June (7 records). The greatest concentration of birds occurs from May 15 through May 27. Multiple birds are often encountered with a record

high-count of 17. The spring of 2000 produced a wave of birds moving through western Kentucky and southern Illinois, which should alert birders to pay special attention to their own shorebird areas when the reports of Whimbrels begin to occur. Over a three-day period as many as 14 birds were encountered in five observations between Smith-land Dam (on the Illinois/ Indiana border) and Kentucky Lake. Interestingly, the Illinois sightings preceded the Kentucky sightings. On the last day of these observations, 15 additional birds were recorded in central Kentucky. Ten days later 15 Whimbrels were recorded in central Indiana and a group of four were recorded at Carlyle Lake, Illinois.

Much like Willets and godwits, when encountered, Whimbrels rarely linger. Only three of the 98 spring records for Whimbrel in the MPR have occurred over multiple days. Surprisingly, marginal shorebird habitat often is sufficient to attract Whimbrels. On each of the three spring encounters at Carlyle Lake, the water was so deep that the birds were forced to roost upon inundated logs and stumps. During the fall when conditions are typically dry at Carlyle, Whimbrels have been observed feeding on caterpillars while running along the berms and skulking through the Smartweed (*Polygonum sp.*) and Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) like a rail.

## Fall migration

Fall migration within most of the MPR is far less spectacular and the region is heavily dominated by records along Lake Michigan. Most interesting is the almost complete reversal of the distribution of records within the MPR compared with spring: Missouri (5 records), Iowa (6 records), Illinois (16 records), Indiana (5 records) and Kentucky (0 records). Records along Lake Michigan are substantial: Illinois (134 records) and Indiana (71 records). The 11 fall records for Iowa and Missouri are spread over a wide range of dates (June 26 to October 21) and likely represent both adults (the late June and early July records), and juveniles, the later records. These records may be considered vagrants or simply birds that when moving southeast from western Hudson Bay to the Great Lakes passed west of Lake Superior. The 11 records for downstate Illinois in fall tend to contradict the seasonal pattern of migration as established by Iowa and Missouri. Based on published records, birders in downstate Illinois are just as likely to observe a Whimbrel in the fall as in the spring. Movements into Illinois during the fall could reasonably be from two sources. Presumably, some of the movement into Illinois can be attributed to birds moving southeast out of Iowa and Missouri and into the Mississippi River Valley. The other source of movement into downstate Illinois could simply be birds pushing south off of Lake Michigan and into the Mississippi River Valley rather than east out and onto the Atlantic seaboard. Considering that 11 of the 16 fall records for Whimbrel in the state (away from Lake Michigan) are concentrated in southern Illinois, it seems likely that