

Wood Stork at Crawdad Slough, Cook County: third northern Illinois record

by Robert Fisher

The paths leading birders to rare birds are sometimes very convoluted. In early October 2004, at the Cook County Forest Preserve District's Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center, Julie Vandervort (the Center's Director) and Laura Brown (the Center's naturalist) were confronted with a sight which made them think they had suddenly been transported to the Everglades – a Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) standing in Crawdad Slough, a small marsh on the southeast corner of Willow Springs Rd and 95th St. just north of the Nature Center. After confirming the identification, they called Jim Phillips, an avid birder who also works for the District as a fisheries biologist. Jim checked it out that same day and was unable to locate the bird. The next morning, carpooling with a colleague on the way to a meeting, Jim persuaded his colleague to make a quick detour past the area, and there was the bird, placidly foraging for food in Crawdad.

Jim reached Chuck Westcott, recently retired from the District, and Chuck in turn called me and my wife, Karen, on Thursday, 7 October, knowing we lived close by and could go to Crawdad to check it out. In mid-morning, we visited Crawdad. The bird was not present. But when we went back late that afternoon, there it was, an immature Wood Stork. We immediately called other birders who live nearby and posted the sighting to IBET, the state's birding list serve. The rest is history; over the next weekend and early into the following week, dozens if not hundreds of birders from the Chicago metro area and across the state (also quite a few from adjacent states) made the trek to Crawdad to see the stork.



Top: Wood Stork, Crawdad Slough, Cook County. 20 October 2004. Photo by Wes Serafin.

Bottom: Wood Stork flashes dark wings at Crawdad Slough, Cook County. 9 October 2004. Photo by Eric Walters.

A few had to make more than one trip to see it, but just about everyone who tried got great looks. Numerous digital cameras and telephoto lenses were kept busy photographing this cooperative and photogenic bird.

The bird was usually found at Crawdad in the early morning and late afternoon/evening, but it would often fly over to a more secluded marsh a little to the east called Cranberry Slough in the morning, spend the day there and then return to Crawdad to feed late in the afternoon. Some birders saw it at Cranberry. How long it was present after

7 October is difficult to pin down. It was seen on the 12th, and there was a post to IBET, on the 13th containing a second hand report of a sighting that day. No first person reports exist in the IBET archives after that date.

Only the third documented Wood Stork for northern Illinois (two immatures were confirmed in August 2001, one in DuPage and one in Kane County, both backyard birds seen by the respective homeowners only [see *Meadowlark* 11:52-55]), it may also be a record in another sense. From our first post on 7 October until the last "the bird's not there" report on 18 October, a total of 47 posts appearing on IBET listed the stork as the subject. This may be the most email ever devoted to a rare bird since IBET began. The Black Skimmer found on the Indiana side of Wolf Lake around the same time received only modest attention by comparison. But birders are fickle; as the stork receded in our memories, with little ado we all turned our attention to the Vermilion Flycatcher found in Afton Park at DeKalb County. Reports and updates about the Vermilion's presence dominated IBET as it very cooperatively hung around into early November. But that's a whole other story. (Read about it in the article on page 54 by Mary Kay Rubey, a staff photographer for *Meadowlark*).

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Editor's Note:

For a table containing Illinois records of Wood Storks from 1894 to 2001, see *Meadowlark* 10:54.