

# Field Notes:

## The 2012 Fall Migration

BY DAVID B. JOHNSON

*Illustration of Golden-crowned Sparrow by Matt McKim-Louder.*



Douglas F. Stotz for a decade, fall 2002 through fall 2011, compiled the fall field notes for the *Meadowlark*. His insightful notes on the distributional trends during the fall migration of birds throughout the state were received by so many new birders, seasoned birders, and professional ornithologists alike. His sifting out of significant data points during each of those seasons simply made for a better journal. From noting rarities like Sooty Tern, Grace's Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, and so many other avian waifs which occurred during his tenure to issues like West Nile Virus, conservation concerns, effects of weather on migrants like hurricane-borne species, birds ahead of or behind a weather front, numerical spikes or irruptions of certain species, and more--Doug always gave us great reflective and scientific notes. Thank you Doug—very much for all your hard work and professionalism—it has been sincerely appreciated.

Extreme hot and dry conditions can best describe the beginning of the autumnal field season. Chicago and Rockford recorded their warmest summers on record. The 2012 year was the fifth driest year on record and second warmest for Illinois and the state was in a significant drought right up to the beginning of fall migration. Groundwater levels were 2 feet below normal and streamflow and water surface levels were below normal. However, by the end of August temperatures were near normal, plus an enormous amount of rainfall occurred in the central and southern parts of state due to Hurricane Isaac thus ending Illinois's drought in most areas of the state by September and October and putting the state—at least—in a recovery stage from the drought (Illinois State Water Survey, Aug-Oct 2012, Illinois State Climatologist). A positive effect of the early unseasonably hot weather and drought was the dry shorelines of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers providing an ample amount of exposed mudflats to hold hundreds if not thousands of migrating shorebirds.

The most outstanding rarity to be found this fall was the state's first **WANDERING TATTLER** discovered at Montrose's fish hook pier by Matthew Ligas. (See IORC report in this issue). Both Matthew Ligas and Steve Spitzer photographed this amazing interior North American record. See a more complete account in this journal. Other notable rarities included a **BRANT** at IBSP, **REDDISH EGRET** at Rend Lake, **WHITE IBISes** at Burkesville Lakes and Carlyle Lake, **SWALLOW-TAILED KITES** at three locations, a **FERRUGINOUS HAWK** at GVHW, a **RUFF** at Rice Lake State CA, **LITTLE GULL** at Lake Springfield, **WHITE-WINGED DOVE** at IBSP, **BURROWING OWL** at Montrose, two **RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRDS**, **PRAIRIE**

**FALCON** in Douglas Co, a **SAY'S PHOEBE** at IBSP, two **ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHERS** at separate locations, several reports of **CAVE SWALLOWS** in northern Illinois, a **BEWICK'S WREN** in Sangamon Co, a **VARIED THRUSH** at MARb, a banded **SAGE THRASHER** in Winnebago Co, three **BOHEMIAN WAXWING** reports, a first southern Illinois **GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW** in Wayne Co, two **HOARY REDPOLL** reports, and finally--multiple **EVENING GROSBEAK** reports. As always it should be noted that several of the above rarities are still subject to a final review by IORC.

### Ducks through Hawks

Many observers lamented the tardy arrival of arctic geese. Nevertheless, the 30,000 Snow Geese and 12 Ross's Geese at Carlyle Lake and 2,250 Cackling Geese at Rocelle in Ogle Co were noteworthy. A rare flyby Brant was noted at IBSP. Shovelers, Northern Pintail, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teal were noted in good numbers along the Illinois River Valley. Most remarkable were the 50,000 Lesser Scaup at Carlyle Lake in November. The only Harlequin Duck was a one day wonder at Montrose. All three scoters made good showing with a particularly good day at GillsonP on 28 Oct with seven Surf, 85 White-winged, and 28 Black Scoters seen by multiple observers. Common Mergansers barely made it into the state with a maximum count of only 12 in Kendall Co on 18 Nov.

Conspicuous by their near absence were low numbers of game birds except for, perhaps, Wild Turkey reported in 43 counties. There were only two Pacific Loons reports: one in Tazewell Co and another (the same bird?) in Woodford Co. The early arrival of a Red-necked Grebe on LSpfld on 10 Oct was noteworthy as one of 4-5 reports. Only three Eared Grebes were noted and at least 4 Western Grebes were noted this season with a Jo Daviess Co bird being a bit extraordinary. Two Neotropic Cormorants were noted: one at IBPS and the other downstate at Carlyle Lake both in Sep. The "whiteness" of 7,400 American White Pelicans at HennepinL must have been extraordinary. The post-breeding dispersals of Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons during the dry August was very substantial and 88 Cattle Egrets noted at Emiquon was a good tally. The **REDDISH EGRET** at Rend Lake, a first well documented occurrence (by photograph) for southern Illinois certainly was one of the finest finds in the waterbirds department. There were too few reports of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons perhaps more difficult to detect in fall. A report of three adult White Ibis at Burkesville Lakes (Monroe Co)