



Field Notes

The 2008 fall migration

by Douglas F. Stotz

Drawing of a Sandhill Crane by Jenny Vogt.

Fallouts of migrants were unimpressive in fall of 2008, as has been the case over the last few years. As a result, numbers of migrants were not particularly notable, but rarities kept Illinois birders entertained throughout the state and throughout the season. Most notably, two species were added to the official state list this fall. For the second year in a row, this included a plover, this time a MOUNTAIN PLOVER, photographed at the Mommence sod farms in mid-September, playing hide and seek with the scores of observers that went to look for it. CAVE SWALLOW, which has been reported several times via sight reports over the last few years, was definitively added to the state avifauna, with birds photographed at Carlyle Lake in September and in Richland County in November, and a window-kill in Chicago in November. BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCKS continued into the fall with 5 birds collected out of a flock of 15 in Mason County in November. A BRANT moved around the Chicago lakefront from late October into December. A MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD was photographed flying over I-74 in Vermilion County in early September, presumably accompanying the remnants of Hurricane Gustav into Illinois. Two WHITE IBISES--one at Horseshoe Lake in August and one at East Cape Girardeau in September--were eclipsed by up to 4 ROSEATE SPOONBILLS that wandered between southeastern Missouri and southwestern Illinois for much of September. A SWALLOW-TAILED KITE was in Jackson County in late August. The Illinois Beach Hawk Watch had reports of both GYRFALCON and PRAIRIE FALCON, and another Prairie Falcon was at Prairie Ridge. A CURLEW SANDPIPER was a half-day wonder at Greene Valley Forest Preserve in Du Page County in late August. Chicago's Montrose Harbor was the place to be for a brief period at the end of October, when the wandering Brant was joined by a BURROWING OWL (killed by a Cooper's Hawk), and a TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE. Carlyle Lake produced a second rare swallow with a mid-September VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW. A SPRAGUE'S PIPIT was documented in Kane County in early October, and a TOWNSEND'S WARBLER was found in Will County in late November. A SWAINSON'S WARBLER that hung around until late August rounded out this fall's rarities.

Ducks through Hawks

Waterfowl migration was fairly typical, although high counts were not very impressive. Scoters made a good showing on Lake Michigan, but there were few downstate reports. Pacific Loons appeared at Carlyle Lake and Clinton Lake,

and Red-throated Loons made a good showing at the end of the season along Lake County's lakefront, but otherwise loons and grebes did not produce headlines. There were no Western Grebe reports, and only one Red-necked Grebe and two Eared Grebes were noted.

As usual, American White Pelicans were in large flocks on downstate reservoirs and along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, but several records into December were unusual. Heron numbers were generally good, especially in the Mississippi River bottomlands in southern Illinois, where there were impressive counts of Great, Snowy and Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons. Plegadis ibises appeared at 3 sites, totalling at least six birds. The Illinois Beach and Greene Valley hawk watches were a little below average this season. Highlights were a single day count of 1,695 Broad-winged Hawks at Greene Valley in mid-September and record (although still small) numbers of Golden Eagles at both sites. Mississippi Kites, usually gone by the end of August, were very much in evidence into mid-September and were found even later in northern Illinois at Rockford and Greene Valley.

Rails through Woodpeckers

Rail migration was good, with big numbers of Soras at several sites throughout the season. Several Yellow Rails were seen at Prairie Ridge, but a bird at Sauer Family Prairie in Kane County was unexpected. Common Moorhens at two sites in Chicago in November were unexpectedly late. A huge count of Sandhill Cranes at Greene Valley in early November was the only significant count of the season. Whooping Cranes from the Wisconsin reintroduced population migrated in small numbers with Sandhills. Shorebird migration was generally poor because of high water levels along the Illinois River. The season provided only two Piping Plovers. Huge numbers of Black-necked Stilts were in southwestern Illinois, especially at East Cape Girardeau. There were three Whimbrels reported. Godwits were well reported this season with six Marbled Godwits and two reports of Hudsonian, including seven at Mommence in mid-September. Western Sandpipers were scattered throughout, with a November bird at Carlyle Lake. Several peeps remained into late November-early December. There were good numbers of phalaropes including two Red. There was an enormous movement of American Woodcocks through Chicago in mid-November, but unfortunately this was detected primarily via window kills. Four jaegers were reported--two Parasitics at Carlyle Lake, and two unidentified