

Field Notes:

The 2010 Fall Migration

by Douglas F. Stotz



Sabine's Gull drawing by Michael Retter

Autumn of 2010 was warmer than usual, with August much above average, and the rest of the season slightly above average. Cold snaps were few and short-lived. Rainfall was slightly above average, with most of the excess falling in August. The warm August resulted in little landbird migration until September. Shorebirds were impressive in the lower Illinois River valley, but poor elsewhere in the state. Not surprisingly, fronts were few and there were few days with notable migratory movements. A good set of rarities made the season an interesting one. Hummingbirds were the stars of the show with huge numbers of Ruby-throated at downstate feeders. A RUFIOUS stayed at a Coles County feeder for more than a month. The state's second BROAD-BILLED was photographed and banded at a DeWitt Co feeder in August, but remained only two days. The state's first ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD was at a Chillicothe feeder in late November and early December. (See an article in the next issue of Meadowlark.)

Other rarities included a BRANT at the end of November at Lake Renwick. A NEOTROPIC CORMORANT was at Emiquon in August, and the summering bird in the Lake Calumet area remained until late August. The ANHINGAS that nested along the Cache River in the summer remained until late August. WHITE IBISES made a remarkably good showing downstate with up to 9 in Monroe County and 2 in St. Clair County. But one in mid-September at Illinois Beach State Park was a complete surprise. Also a surprise was a SWALLOW-TAILED KITE photographed in mid-August in McHenry Co. This species is clearly becoming more regular in Illinois. Two FERRUGINOUS HAWKS were reported at northern Illinois hawkwatches in October, but documentation has not been evaluated by IORC yet.

A RUFF in Brown Co in late August was a one-day wonder. The state's second SANDWICH TERN was along the Lake Michigan lakefront in September between Evanston and the south side of Chicago, making sporadic appearances at multiple locations. All three jaegers were at Carlyle Lake, and a PARASITIC at Montrose became ill and was eventually taken to be rehabilitated. An immature CAVE SWALLOW was photographed at Carlyle Lake in September. A BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER in DuPage County from mid-September until mid-November was seen by most active birders in Illinois at some point, except for yours truly.

Ducks through Hawks

Waterfowl migration was largely on time, but concentrations were mostly unimpressive. The only really good count was 15,000 Canvasbacks in Hancock County in November. Scoter migration was fairly typical with most reports from Lake Michigan, but scattered birds downstate. A stunning 38 Black Scoters were seen at a Gillson Park lakewatch in November. There were also several impressive 1000+ counts of Red-breasted Mergansers along Lake Michigan in late November. Loon migration was fairly typical with some good counts of Common Loons on downstate reservoirs and on Lake Michigan. Red-throated Loon reports came mainly from Lake Michigan, remaining into December. A Pacific Loon at Carlyle was the only report. Red-necked and Western Grebes were both represented by two reports. Four-hundred Pied-billed Grebes at Hennepin in October were notable. There were good concentrations of Horned Grebes on downstate reservoirs in late November, but only two Eared Grebe reports were received. Several concentrations of more than 1,000 American White Pelicans were found. A decade ago, this would have seemed impressive, but now seems fairly ordinary. Heron counts were good with Monroe County and Cahokia Mounds having the largest counts. This is also home to White Ibis reports. Besides the White Ibises mentioned above, there were multiple Plegadis ibises at Carlyle Lake and Connor Lake, as well as one identified as a White-faced in Mason County. The data from the hawk watches at Illinois Beach and Greene Valley both indicate somewhat below average migrations of raptors overall. Broad-winged Hawks again had a poor migration. Small numbers of Mississippi Kites and Swainson's Hawks are being found regularly now away from known breeding areas during fall migration.

Rails through Woodpeckers

Our understanding of rail migration remains poor. There were a few King Rails and Yellow Rails reported as usual. Virginia Rail reports were few, but Soras were widely reported. Good Common Gallinule counts came from known breeding sites. Sandhill Crane migration was fairly unimpressive until a spectacular day of movement on 23 November represented by a record count of more than 26,000 at Greene Valley. Accompanying this movement on the 23rd were a minimum of seven Whooping Cranes (from the reintroduced, but still unestablished, population in Wisconsin) scattered across five counties in northeastern Illinois. Shorebird diversity was spectacular along the Illinois River, peaking