

## SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS - Fall Migration 1996

### Lake County's Second Black Vulture

On 19 October 1996, I was birding the Lake County lakefront with Alan Stokie Bob Erickson, and Rick Siebert, all experienced birders, and my mother, Janice. After an eventful morning in Waukegan and at Illinois Beach State Park's main unit, we drove to the park's Camp Logan unit. Sand Pond was crowded with fisherman, so we walked east on an old road leading from the parking lot north. By 1:30 p.m. we had nearly reached the beach. While the rest of the group was arguing over an Orange-crowned Warbler and the season's first American Tree Sparrow, I scanned the skies north hoping for migrating hawks. I was immediately rewarded with a large dark raptor flying south toward us. It took several flaps and settled into a slight dihedral, and I figured I had a Turkey Vulture (*Catharus auratus*). Once I put my Tasco 10X50 binoculars on it, though, several more quick flaps and a black head changed my mind. Unfortunately, my next thought was an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). I said as much, and someone replied, "No." The bird continued towards us, and soon its naked black head, relatively short wings, and pale gray outer primaries, contrasting sharply with the inner primaries and wing linings, convinced us all that it was a Black Vulture (*Coragyps stratus*)! It flew nearly overhead and continued its flap-flap-glide flight undeviatingly southward, 50 yards west of the lakeshore.

Although this was my first sighting for Illinois, I have had experience with Black Vultures in Texas and Louisiana. We knew it was a good sighting, but until later, I had no idea how unusual.

Subsequent research turned up one previous sighting for Lake County, a bird found dead in Highland Park on 18 November 1909 (Mlodinow 1984). The only other record that I am aware of for northeastern Illinois is one that was photographed in southwestern Will County on 28 April 1985 (Illinois Birds and Birding 1:81). Interestingly, though, two individuals were reported in Wisconsin this fall, including one in Sheboygan which apparently lingered into early December (*vide* Alan Stokie). At the time, we joked that we must have missed an important record for Wisconsin by a mere mile, as there was nowhere else for the bird to have come from. Be that as it may, we will long remember the day when, as Mom put it, "You've never seen four grown men so excited about a buzzard!"

#### Literature Cited:

Mlodinow, Steven. 1984. Chicago Area Birds. Chicago Review Press. Chicago IL.

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### Swainson's Hawk in Flock of Broad-wings

On 22 September 1996, at the end of a lackluster day of birding, I stopped at the latest frozen custard place in Urbana. Fortunately, my binoculars were still in the car. At about 5 p.m., as I left Jarling's Frozen Custard, I noticed several shadows on the parking lot. Looking up, I saw several Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) gliding by. Above them was a kettle of another 175 Broad-winged Hawks. Since Urbana is not on any major flyways, ridges or bodies of water, this was an unusually high number.

As the kettle went by, I noticed others. And as I drove home, more Broad-winged kettles appeared. Before I had even made the turn north to drive home, I had already seen over 500 Broad-winged Hawks, about doubling the previous single day total for Urbana. Yet the hawks kept coming. As I arrived home, I noticed a kettle of 125 hawks over my house. By 5:30 p.m., the

thermals began to dissipate and the hawks began gliding out of their kettles and heading into trees in Urbana.

At 5:35 p.m., a kettle of about 50 birds appeared from the east near my house. As I scanned the flock, one bird appeared larger and longer winged, but as the birds milled about, I could not see any distinctive field marks or even be sure about its size. Then the flock began to break up and the individual birds began gliding. One notably larger (about double the bulk of the Broad-winged Hawks) immature hawk glided out of the kettle to within 50 yards of me and only 25 feet above the ground. I noted its heavy, blotchy streaking on the breast and other background color to the underparts characteristic of the immature Swainson's Hawk (*B. swainsoni*). I also noted it had a long finely barred gray-brown tail with a single wider subterminal band. While not as noticeable as in adults, this bird also clearly showed

Meadowlark