



Field Notes: The 2009 fall migration

by Douglas F. Stotz

Field notes drawing of a Sage Thrasher by Jenny Vogt.

Autumn of 2009 was unimpressive for common migrants. Temperatures were near normal through October, but November was substantially above average. August and October were very wet, but September and November were much drier than usual. Landbird migration got a late start, with little moving in August. Shorebirds were generally below average in numbers and diversity due to high water levels. Fronts were few and weak resulting in little in the way of strong migratory movements. However, an extremely good showing of rarities made it an exciting fall for most birders. A GREEN VIOLETEAR photographed at a feeder in St. Clair County was a first record for the state. Unfortunately it stayed only one day and was seen only by the homeowners. Other one-day wonders were a gorgeous FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER, the state's third, photographed in Rock Island Co. in November and a SAGE THRASHER, the state's fourth, photographed and seen by many at Northerly Island on Chicago's lakefront in November. An INCA DOVE photographed at Glenview is the second for the state, if accepted by the records committee. This is another species spreading north out of the southwest. MOTTLED DUCKS in Clinton and Monroe Co. were photographed (both continuing from July) and continue a developing pattern of small numbers of mostly late summer/fall records for this southern wanderer. The first record in Illinois was only in 2004. Other impressive rarities included a BROWN PELICAN continuing from summer through August at Two Rivers NWR, a SWALLOW-TAILED KITE in Monroe Co. in August, a PRAIRIE FALCON and a RUFF at Lake Shelbyville in September, and a GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL at Winthrop Harbor in October. Carlyle Lake produced its usual suite of rarities including a November PACIFIC LOON, a NEOTROPIC CORMORANT continuing into September, a ROSEATE SPOONBILL near Vandalia late September through early October, a LONG-TAILED JAEGER in early October, and an adult LITTLE GULL in late October to November. Landbirds produced fewer significant rarities, but there was a SAY'S PHOEBE in Sangamon County in October, a SPRAGUE'S PIPIT in DuPage Co. at the end of October, and a LARK BUNTING at Montrose in August.

Ducks through Hawks

Waterfowl migration was slow. Numbers in October built normally, but the unrelenting warmth of November kept

numbers low through the end of the period. An impressive single day count of over 1000 Tundra Swans came from Illinois Beach State Park in late November. There were good counts (100+) at the same time in Will Co. and Carroll Co. Numbers of dabbling ducks were generally unimpressive, but there were good counts of all of the regular diving ducks. Scoters were scattered across the landscape in small numbers. There were several inland reports of multiple Black Scoters. Red-necked and Western Grebes made a good showing downstate, but there was only a single Pacific Loon report, and no significant counts of Red-throated Loons. An impressive 251 Common Loons were in Richland County in mid-November. As usual there were a number of counts of over 1000 American White Pelicans from large reservoirs in southern Illinois and along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. The 18,000 from Mason County in October is a record count for the state. There were several impressive Double-crested Cormorant counts from downstate reservoirs and Lake Michigan. Heron counts were good, with Calhoun County seemingly the epicenter this fall. Two October *Plegadis* ibises were the only reports. The hawk watches at Illinois Beach and Greene Valley continue to provide valuable data on hawk movements through the state, but numbers were not particularly impressive at either site. It was a poor year everywhere for Broad-winged Hawks. Other hawk species seemed to be in normal to slightly below normal numbers.

Rails through Woodpeckers

Rail migration may have been poor, but certainly was not much noted this fall. The high counts of both Sora and Virginia Rails were low by recent standards, and Yellow and King Rails were poorly reported. Sandhill Crane migration was late and only one count over 1000 birds was reported. Movement peaked in the latter half of November and continued into early December. A Whooping Crane spent a couple of weeks in Winnebago Co. Shorebird migration was poor almost everywhere because of high water levels. Two jaegers were reported, a Parasitic from Lake Michigan, and a Long-tailed from Carlyle Lake. Winter gulls arrived mostly late, with few reports before November. Winthrop Harbor was, as is now typically the case, the best place for rare gulls. Besides the Glaucous-winged Gull there were 2 California Gulls there, as well as good counts of Thayer's and Lesser Black-backed