

3,500 American White Pelicans at Swan Lake in Calhoun County

American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) began amassing on 16 Sept. 1995 in southwestern Illinois, when 53 were seen at Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge, Calhoun County. On 23 Oct., Jack Van Benthuyzen saw 2,014 pelicans there and on 28 Oct. at 9 a.m., I estimated 3,500 present on the upper access of Swan Lake in Calhoun County. It was a clear day, 48 degrees F.

I saw three flocks on the lake. One group of 1,004 pelicans lined up along the far shore and was easy to count. The other two flocks were approximately one-tenth to one-quarter mile off. The number of birds in the larger of these two groups could not be accurately estimated. I believe that there were actually between 4,000 and 5,000 individuals and that my 3,500 count is a conservative estimate. Other observers of this great spectacle were Irene Mondhink, Jean Eaton, Bernice Dalton, Edna Alexander, Gilbert Ives, and Steve Dewall.

In September 1985, some 90 American White Pelicans were first observed (refuge personnel pers. comm.). The pelicans have returned every year since. In the summer of 1994, a group of 50 pelicans summered at the lake, from June through October. On 18 March 1995, I observed 230 pelicans and on 25 March 1995, I estimated 1,000 birds on Swan Lake. In several places along the Mississippi River, where the river flooded its banks, pelican flocks were present. This species is an occasional migrant in western Illinois (Bohlen 1989). This spectacular fall pelican flock plus recent data during the last 10 years suggest a change in the species encounterability status at least in the western portion of the state particularly along the Mississippi River.

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H. D. 1989. The Birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press.

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Clinton Lake's Second Common Black-headed Gull

On 8 Nov. 1995, knowing that two Little Gulls (*Larus minutus*) and an unidentified jaeger had been seen at Clinton Lake in recent weeks, I decided to check the gulls

there. I noticed that there were plenty of gulls at the lake, especially Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*). I began at an area known as the overlook at 7 a. m., but saw only Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) and Bonaparte's gulls. The gulls fed about a mile west of the overlook, so I made my way to the nearer Peninsula Day Use Area. Shortly after arriving, at 8:05 a.m., I spotted a rather large gull with the Bonaparte's Gulls. It had the typical Bonaparte's upper wing pattern, but with an unusual blackish-gray underside to the primaries. I immediately thought of a Common Black-headed Gull (*L. ridibundus*), which occurred at Clinton Lake in 1988.

As the bird flew within 100 yards of me, the underwing pattern was confirmed. The bird was intermediate between a Bonaparte's and Ring-billed in size. It also appeared to have a dark red bill. When it landed on the water, I clearly could see the dark red bill, which was also noticeably heavier and more angular than those of the Bonaparte's Gulls surrounding it. In addition, the Common Black-headed Gull had a longer neck and head with a much smaller ear spot, compared with Bonaparte's Gull. This rare gull was seen only the one day. Interestingly, a Common Black-headed Gull was found on the Ohio River between Indiana and Kentucky shortly thereafter. This Old World species is a very rare vagrant and was first recorded in Illinois on 10 Feb. 1973 at Quiver Lake (Bohlen 1989).

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A September Sanderling Albino at Jackson Park

On 13 Sept. 1995, I discovered an "imperfect albino" Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) on the beach at 6300 South on the Chicago lakefront (Terres 1980). The bird was in near company with 13 normally plumaged Sanderlings. The combination of size, shape, and behavior allowed immediate identification to species, despite the abnormal plumage. I was also able to determine the species-diagnostic lack of a hallux, largest toe, on the odd bird.

I first studied the albino at about 6:40 a.m. under Bausch & Lomb 10x40 binoculars, with full sun over my shoulder from distances as close as 12 feet as paced. At that time I tape recorded a description, essentially