

Birding Illinois 100 Years Ago: Part 1

Birds of the Chicago Area at the Turn of the 20th Century

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THE PIPING PLOVER

The glistening sand and pebble beaches are the resting places of a multitude of bird wayfarers on their way to their northern breeding grounds, or enroute from their summer homes to their winter resorts. But not all the shore birds pass on, for the piping plover remains throughout the summer. Their nests are mere depressions in the light colored sand, and their large eggs are protectively colored.
(Photographs by Alfred M. Bailey)

Alfred M. Bailey found a Piping Plover nest with four large spotted eggs laid in a depression in the sand at Waukegan Beach on 18 June 1930. Here is one of his photos published in July 1930.

(*Coturniculus savannarum passerinus*), Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), and during migrations LeConte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*), Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*), Laplund Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*), and others."

He continues: "An especially good field for studying warblers during their migrations is in the higher timbered region of DuPage County, in the northern portion of our area. Here we also have as summer residents the Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*), the Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), and the Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*). While about the region of Chicago with its chains of lakes divided by long ridges of timber may be found all of our more common forms of bird life in abundance."

Certainly bird life has changed since then in DuPage County. Black-throated Blue Warblers do not breed in northeastern Illinois nor anywhere in Illinois today. But some things never change. Jackson and Lincoln Parks have always been great places to bird, although these two spots need management if they are to continue to provide habitat for migratory avian species.

Woodruff writes: "The fine city parks of Chicago are the most favorable localities in which the birds may be studied with a field glass. The wooded island in Jackson Park is an

Black-throated Blue Warbler breeding in Illinois. Hundreds of Black Terns nesting at Lake Calumet.

Twenty pairs of Piping Plovers nesting along the Chicagoland lakeshore.

No, this is not science fiction. This is reality—100 years ago! Illinois birders and researchers are fortunate to have a rich resource indicating what birds were present and breeding in the state a century ago.

In Volume 9 of *Meadowlark*, Nos. 1 through 4, we will present excerpts from literature written at the turn of the last century to enlighten you as to what type of avifauna we had long ago, and to encourage you to protect what we have now. In the year

2000, it is time to celebrate the rich history of bird life in Illinois, as well as to rededicate ourselves to maintaining and improving habitat for birds and for future generations to enjoy.

On 15 April 1907, the Chicago Academy of Sciences published "The Birds of the Chicago Area" by Frank Morley Woodruff in Bulletin No. VI of The Natural History Survey. Here is how Woodruff viewed bird life in the Chicago region at the beginning of the 20th century:

"On the rich meadows in the western portion of Cook County, in the vicinity of Worth Township, may be found resident such species as Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), Grasshopper Sparrow