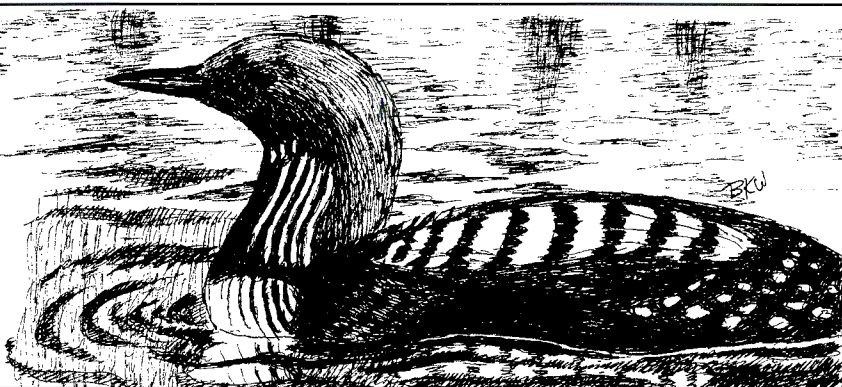


Field Notes



Field Notes drawing of Pacific Loon by Brian K. Willis.

The 1996 Fall Season

By Robert Chapel

The autumn air has turned crisp with the first hard freeze of the year. Snow flurries are starting to blow. Time to go look at hummingbirds! At least it was true in the fall of 1996. In addition to Champaign County's first Rufous Hummingbird, during a chilly October (see seasonal highlights), there was the amazing **BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD** that graced a feeder in Trivoli (Peoria County) until November 23, lingering through several snow flurries and freezing temperatures. See story in this issue for more information. In the future, feeder watchers and their birding neighbors should be alert to any hummingbirds that are unusual in timing or appearance (especially considering the occurrence of the Green Violet-ear in nearby Michigan).

If this was the fall for hummingbirds, it was also the fall for jaegers, loons, grebes, and Snowy Owls. An unusual number of jaegers were seen both downstate and along Lake Michigan (while most of the Lake Michigan birds were reported as Parasitic Jaegers, only one was documented as such and the others have been reported as Jaeger, sp.). Most of the downstate birds were documented as Pomarine Jaegers and seen over a number of days. There were unusual numbers of Pacific and Red-throated Loons, Red-necked Grebes, and Western Grebes seen this fall also. By the end of the period, many Snowy Owls had appeared along the Lake Michigan Shore, and a few had made it to downstate locations as well. One observer reported sighting nine Snowys in a single day.

August and September were dryer than usual, although temperatures were moderate. October continued dry, although cool weather came early. This made for comfortable birding. Unfortunately, it did not provide much in the form of migratory waves. Consequently, land birding was spotty. Some places reported a few good migratory waves, while others found few if any good days. While not as spectacular

as last year, hawk flights were moderately good along the lakefront, although the only sizable Broad-winged Hawk flight was in downstate Urbana (which normally doesn't get any).

November was unseasonably cold with snow accumulation on some dates. However, the birding was as brisk as the weather. Not only were there many of the less common loons and grebes, but there were also invasions of the aforementioned Snowy Owls and of Red Crossbills into the northern portion of the state.

Shorebird sightings were concentrated at the traditional shorebird spots along the Illinois River, Rend and Carlyle Lakes, and along Lake Michigan. Waterfowl were also concentrated in these areas, plus other major downstate reservoirs. Numbers at many locations seemed low. Quite ominous was that the least reported Phalarope was Wilson's. It is possible that some are not being reported because they have not traditionally been thought as "significant" as the Red-necked and Red Phalaropes, but veteran shorebirders were reporting single observations as the "only one found." This species deserves close monitoring to see if numbers rebound.

Despite a seemingly rather poor passerine migration, some of the top highlights for the season were the **Kirtland's Warbler** at the Magic Hedge in Lincoln Park, the Varied Thrushes at Lincoln Park and Waukegan (see seasonal highlights), and the **Brewer's Sparrow** at the Bird Sanctuary in Lincoln Park, which lingered through winter. See Vol. 6 No. 3 of Meadowlark for details. Other notable sightings this fall include White-faced Ibis, **Wood Storks**, **Fulvous Whistling Duck**, a **Painted Bunting** specimen (see seasonal highlights this issue), and Black-necked Stilts.

A special thanks is extended to all contributors to this