

The few southern Illinois sightings have been in the northern portion, just south of what is admittedly an arbitrary line. This distribution coincides closely with the original prairie areas of Illinois. Interestingly, while about 40% of all reports in the north are from Christmas Bird Counts, only 28% of sightings in the central and south are from CBCs, indicating, perhaps, that the majority of shrikes arrive later than in the north.

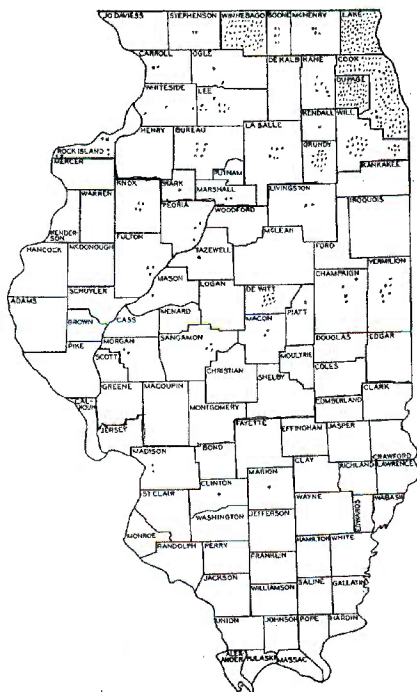
The record of sightings of Northern Shrikes in central Illinois appears puzzling. Hardly any observations were recorded until the mid-1980s, indicating a bird of accidental occurrence, until the species began appearing as a scarce but regular winter visitor. Interestingly, while many of the central Illinois sightings have occurred at popular birding areas, some of the most heavily birded areas around Springfield did not record any sightings until 1995. However since then there have been three sightings in metropolitan Springfield (Buckhart, Sangchris State Park, and Springfield). It is possible that Springfield is at the southwestern limit of their normal winter range, although it is only a little farther south than Decatur, which had sightings as far back as 1985. This scarcity in Springfield may indicate that there has actually been a change in the wintering habits of the Northern Shrike, and it has taken them longer to reach the extreme southwestern edge of their winter range.

Also, few records exist of the Northern Shrike in west

central Illinois. However, the Loggerhead Shrike has been reported fairly frequently by competent observers until quite recently in the winter. It appears the winter distribution of shrikes in Illinois is not just north and south, but east and west as well. However, as numbers of the Loggerhead Shrike, a state-endangered species, continue to decline, the Northern Shrike may increase, or at least become more evident in the west.

Have Northern Shrikes always followed their current pattern of winter distribution, or have they begun pioneering new areas further south of their traditional winter range? It's doubtful this can be clearly determined. When Loggerhead Shrikes were more common, Northern Shrikes could be overlooked, given their great resemblance, and given the assumption of shrikes seen in central Illinois to be Loggerheads. A look through past *Illinois Audubon Bulletins* reveals that prior to the 1970s, few people regularly birded in the winter and even fewer with the knowledge to clearly distinguish between the two species. More sophisticated field guides and articles, such as Larry Balch's "Shrike Identification" from the Winter 1977/78 *Illinois Audubon Bulletin* (#183) facilitated the identification of individuals of this difficult species pair. Also, the invasion year of 1985-86 gave many central Illinois birders practical field experience with Northern Shrikes. Further, the decline in Loggerhead Shrikes, particularly in central Illinois, made any shrike worthy of close scrutiny.

Map 1: Northern Shrike (1983-1997)



Map 2: Loggerhead Shrike (1983-1997)

