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Summer 1997 Report

Weather for the Period:

The first of June saw warm temperatures and strong southerly winds that blew the lingering migrants right out of Iowa. For a few exceptions, see the observations below (as well as the enclosed documentations). The lovely, dry summer days continued well into the middle of the month. As the month proceeded, it got warmer. Only six days of June registered temperatures below 80.

The first week of July ushered in some cool (near record low) temperatures. But in the second week it turned hot and muggy. On July 9 several tornadoes were spotted in Sioux and Lyon counties (no serious damage). Two adjectives describe the remainder of the month: hot and humid. Most days we were in the 90's -- even reached 100 several times (e.g., on July 16), with dew points in the 70's or 80's. On July 28 a cool front came through, removing some of the humidity and lowering temperatures to more comfortable levels. The heat wave was punctuated by intermittent thunder and rain showers.

Observations:

Note: My estimates of how various species are doing are, to a large extent, based on subjective impressions. Nevertheless, having kept records for a number of years, my evaluations do have some basis in fact.

- Pied-billed Grebe: A pair nested, quite visibly from Highway 12, in a small pond just south of Hawarden (Sioux county). Apparently the nest did not succeed. No doubt they also nested in the ponds near Doon (Lyon county, just north of the border with Sioux county), as individuals could be seen throughout June.
- American White Pelican: Six were at Hottes Lake in Dickinson county on July 31.

- Double-crested Cormorant: About half a dozen or so were at Jemmerson Slough in Dickinson county on July 31.
- Snow Goose: A single individual (blue morph) was at the Hawarden South Pits (Sioux county) on June 4.
- Wood Duck: Excellent nesting success this year. Mama ducks with babies were swimming about in nearly every pond in Sioux and Lyon counties.
- Lesser Scaup: One lonely individual was still present at Winterfeld Park in Rock Valley on June 6.
- Swainson's Hawk: The only one I saw was an individual a few miles east of Melvin, Osceola county, on July 31.
- American Kestrel: Apparently enjoyed a successful nesting season, judging by the numerous birds throughout Sioux county by the end of July.
- Northern Bobwhite: One was calling in an uncultivated field at the east end of Sioux Center on July 26.
- Upland Sandpiper: On July 11 I found three of them near a field of oats some five and half miles southwest of Sioux Center. On July 31 I saw a pair in Dickinson county, along A-22 just southwest of Cayler Prairie. [I also saw one in southwest Iowa (Fremont county) along I-29 on June 19.]
- Other shorebirds: In Sioux county the fall migration apparently began in earnest on the early date of July 11. See species and dates below:
 - Semipalmated Plover: Four were at Hawarden on July 30.
 - Greater Yellowlegs: Six were at a slough along Highway 9 near Lake Park, Dickinson county, on July 31.
 - Lesser Yellowlegs: Arrived at Hawarden on July 28.

- Solitary Sandpiper: The first two were at Hawarden on July 11. On July 19 there were at least six Solitaries at Hawarden, and about ten of them on July 28 and 30.
- Spotted Sandpiper: Easy to find wherever mudflats or riverbanks were visible.
- Semipalmated Sandpiper: A dozen or so were at Hawarden on July 11.
- Least Sandpiper: A flock of 25 was at Hawarden on July 11.
- Pectoral Sandpiper: The first ones -- two of them -- were at Hawarden on July 11.
- Stilt Sandpiper: Three of them were at Hawarden on July 19.
- Franklin's Gull: Scattered throughout Dickinson county by July 31.
- Caspian Tern: Two were with a flock of Ring-Billed Gulls (including some Franklin's Gulls, Forster's Terns and Black Terns) in the slough near Kettelson Waterfowl area (along 125th off Highway 276 in Dickinson county) on July 31.
- Black Tern: One in second-summer (not yet breeding) plumage was at a quarry five miles south of Sioux Center on June 6.
- Common Nighthawk: Doing rather poorly this summer. Not only were they extremely late in arriving, but their familiar overhead calls were scarce in Sioux county.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: This species is quite uncommon in Sioux county in mid-summer. Two individuals were observed in Sioux Center on June 14.
- Red-headed Woodpecker: Their numbers seem to be down this year.
- Empidonax: Still migrating on June 1, judging by the numbers of fly-catchers flitting about everywhere. By June 3 they became scarce.

- Western Kingbird: I did not see them in Sioux county this summer. The only ones I saw were at Gateway airport in Sioux City (Woodbury county) on June 28.
- Purple Martin: They experienced a successful nesting season in Sioux Center (especially on the campus of Dordt College).
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow: Rather uncommon this summer. Normally we see them zipping over almost every body of water. Not so this year. However, on July 30 I saw sizable flocks of 50+ individuals at Hawarden.
- Cliff Swallow: Flocks of 40+ birds began to gather on July 19.
- Sedge Wren: In June and July a few were singing in their traditional fields just to the east of Oak Grove Park. In past years, however, they have done better in this area. On July 31 they were very conspicuous at Cayler Prairie in Dickinson county.
- Marsh Wren: These were easy to observe in the cattails at Rush Lake, Osceola county, on July 31.
- Veery: One was in my yard on June 2. I noted its faded breast spotting and the tannish (not olive) hue of the upper parts. However, I must confess, the upperparts were not as tawny as I have seen in Veeries before. Could it have been the subspecies *C. f. salicicolus*?
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: One was in my yard on June 1 and 2. See enclosed documentation. This date matches one of the late date records listed in your and Tom's book. On June 1 I observed the Gray-cheeked Thrush and a Swainson's Thrush together. So they offered an excellent comparison. The next morning (June 2) I saw the Gray-cheek once again. During the day it was joined by a Veery.
- Swainson's Thrush. Still in my yard on June 1. Another one in my yard on the (record?) late date of June 8. See enclosed documentation.

[The observations of the three species discussed above nearly prompted me to write a report titled "A Thrilling Tale of Three Thrushes"!]

- Cedar Waxwing: Two flocks totaling an estimated 140 individuals were in Sioux Center on June 29.
- Loggerhead Shrike: Apparently these birds successfully nested just south of Hawarden. On July 9 I observed a family of 4 in this area. I again saw a shrike in the same area on July 11, 19, and 28. One was also quite reliable just north of Hawarden. I observed it on May 30 and June 6. About three miles separate these two locations.
- Hooded Warbler: A female was in my yard on June 3 (actually in the same area where I had seen the thrushes the day before -- I was in fact looking for the thrushes). Looking through the window of my living room I spotted a yellow-colored warbler flitting through the bushes. I noticed at once the white outer-tail feathers as the bird constantly flicked its tail. About 5 minutes later I saw the bird again, this time very clearly: yellow below, no wingbars, uniformly greenish-olive above, a bit darker near the back of the head, black eye with a bit of dark behind it, and (flicking) white outer-tail feathers. This is the second time I see a Hooded Warbler in Sioux Center. (This was also bird # 129 on my yard list.)
- Mourning Warbler: The last migrants came through my yard on June 1 and 2 (at least two on June 1, just one on June 2).
- Blue Grosbeak: As usual, easy to find in Sioux county.
- Dickcissel: Still doing fine, but they were not as abundant as last summer. They appeared to be concentrated in favorable areas. Last year they were much more widespread throughout the county.
- Lark Sparrow: A pair was in western Sioux county on June 6, and again, some three miles farther north, on July 11. This species is very uncommon in northwestern Iowa.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: Doing okay, it seems. They were easy to find, at least in June, and again at the end of July.
- Bobolink: They're doing fine. I was pleased to note that they were widespread throughout Sioux county.

- Yellow-headed Blackbird: There were several pairs nesting in a relatively small cattail-covered pond just southwest of Doon.

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P.S. Jim -- I like the new book *Birds in Iowa* you and Tom Kent recently published. I suspect you have already received suggested corrections. Although I have not studied the book in detail, the following two notes may be of use to you: (a) Northern Mockingbird -- I have observed this bird in Sioux county on two occasions; (b) Bohemian Waxwing -- this species, too, occurred in Sioux county a number of years ago. I can check my records for specifics, if you wish.

JVD