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Spring 1998 Report

Note: Once again, due to frequent out-of-state engagements, this report is sketchy and contains gaps. I have benefited, however, from reports by a growing number of observers in the Sioux Center area. JVD

Weather for the Period:

March:

After a balmy winter, March introduced an arctic, snowy blast. On March 1 virtually all water, both still and running, was open -- a very unusual situation. However, with temperatures steadily getting colder (-1 on March 9, -7 on March 10, and -9 on March 11) and remaining much below normal, water quickly froze up again. The large snow storm that hit much of Iowa on March 7 and 8 pretty well missed us here in the northwest: we received only three or so inches of snow. The sudden cold during the first half of March brought the early migration to a complete standstill, perhaps even put it in reverse. Temperatures remained much below normal until the last week of the month. On March 25-26 the temperatures rose dramatically into the 70's and near 80, melting the snow and the ice on the water, and bringing a flood of spring migrants. Suddenly some of the birds we had not seen since February reappeared in numbers.

April: Though rainy at first, weather steadily improved. We were in the mid-70's by April 9. No further report.

May: In general, temperatures averaged above normal. The slow and lacklustre migration, therefore, created a good deal of puzzlement on the part of observers.

Observations (following your list in Summer 1996 Iowa Bird Life):

- Pied-billed Grebe: Four were at Rock Valley on March 28.
- American White Pelican: Observed on April 10.
- ✓ - Double-crested Cormorant: The first flocks (of 25+ birds) were in Sioux County on March 22.
- ✓ - Great Egret: The first one observed was at Rock Valley on April 3.
- Greater White-fronted Goose: The only ones I saw were a dozen or so at Anderson lake in Hamilton County on March 21.
- Snow Goose: Normal migrations.
- Canada Goose: Normal.

- ✓ - Wood Duck: The first ones were at Rock Valley on March 13 (in spite of cold weather and frozen water)
- Green-winged Teal: Several were at Rock Valley on March 13.
- Northern Pintail: Several were at Rock Valley on March 13.
- ✓ - Blue-winged Teal: The first one was in western Sioux County on April 3.
- Northern Shoveler: They had arrived by March 28.
- Gadwall: Some 25 individuals were at Hawarden on March 3.
- American Wigeon: The first ones I saw were at Rock Valley on March 13.
- Canvasback: Arrived by mid-March.
- Redhead: Six were at Rock Valley on March 13.
- Ring-necked Duck: Plenty of them by March 28.
- Lesser Scaup: The first ones were at Rock Valley on March 13.
- Bufflehead: Plenty of them by March 28.
- Hooded Merganser: Very scarce this spring.
- Common Merganser: They had arrived in goodly numbers at Hawarden by March 3. When the water froze shortly thereafter, they bunched up in open spots in the bigger rivers.
- Ruddy Duck: The first ones were at Rock Valley on April 3.
- Bald Eagle: Two adults were at Hawarden on March 3. A few were observable throughout the month of March.
- Northern Harrier: First migrant in Sioux County on March 28. I saw three of them on April 3.
- ✓ - Red-tailed Hawk: Splendid migration on March 25-30. On March 25 I drove to Sioux Falls, and noticed kettles of 25+ individuals soaring about at various places in Sioux and Lyon counties. On March 28 a fine example of the dark-phased "Harlan's Hawk" was in western Sioux County near Hawarden.
- ✓ - Rough-legged Hawk: Not observed.
- ✓ - Merlin: One was in a Sioux Center yard on March 1. The bird was virtually drooling near a feeding area alive with juncos and tree sparrows.
- American Kestrel: Migration in full swing again second half of March. In the first week of April they were positively abundant.

- Gray Partridge: Continues to be scarce and difficult to find.
- American Coot: The two that wintered at Rock Valley stayed during the first part of March. On March 28 they were numerous on ponds and lakes throughout the county.
- Killdeer: Already arrived in late February, but the March colds chased them away -- hopefully back to the south. On March 25 they reappeared in large numbers -- calling just about everywhere.
- ✓ - Greater Yellowlegs: Four were at Doon (Lyon County) on March 28.
- ✓ - White-rumped Sandpiper: Five were at Doon on May 23.
- ✓ - Baird's Sandpiper: Several were at Doon on the early date of April 3.
- Ring-billed Gull: First migrants in Sioux County observed on April 2.
- Mourning Dove: Returned with the warm weather on March 25,
- Belted Kingfisher: The first one back was at Rock Valley on March 13.
- ✓ - Long-eared Owl: One was reported at Oak Grove Park on March 29. On April 3 I found four of them in Oak Grove Park.
- ✓ - Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Nesting behavior was observed near Rock Valley on April 28.
- ✓ - Common Nighthawk: First observed on May 12.
- Chimney Swift: Very late this year, with none observed before May.
- Olive-sided Flycatcher: Observed on May 19.
- ✓ - Eastern Phoebe: The first one was at Doon on April 3.
- ✓ - Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: One was in my yard on May 27.
- Empidonax: The migration seemed spotty and sporadic with relatively low numbers moving through.
- Purple Martin: Not observed until mid-April.
- ✓ - Red-breasted Nuthatch: They stuck around for quite a while. Two were still present on May 1.
- ✓ - Brown Creeper: First one observed in Sioux Center on March 2.
- ✓ - Sedge Wren: In a farm area near Sioux Center on May 22.
- ✓ - Ruby-crowned Kinglet: The first one I saw was in our yard on April 4.

- Eastern Bluebird: The first migrant was reported on March 29.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: Scarce thus far.
- Swainson's Thrush: Scarce thus far.
- ✓ - Hermit Thrush: First one observed in Sioux Center was on April 4.
- Wood Thrush: Many were singing in western Sioux County by May 23.
- Vireos and Warblers: Migration was late and slow. Best day was May 25. On this day I saw 9 species of warblers pass through my yard within a span of two hours (Tennessee, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Redstart, Ovenbird, Mourning, Yellowthroat, and Canada).
- ✓ - American Tree Sparrow: Fine migration in March and into early April. Last one observed on April 3.
- ✓ - Chipping Sparrow: First one arrived in Sioux Center on April 7.
- ✓ - Savannah Sparrow: The first migrants were in Sioux County on April 3.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: On territory by May 25.
- ✓ - Fox Sparrow: The first migrant was in my yard on March 2. But they were rather scarce until the first week of April. On April 3 there were four in my yard at one time, six on April 4. Still common by the 10th of April.
- White-throated Sparrow: Arrived late. Good migration in last week of April.
- Harris's Sparrow: Arrived in late February, but scarce until the first week of April, when they were common everywhere in the county. On April 5 there were seven or eight at one time in our yard. They remained plentiful to well into May.
- ✓ - Dark-eyed Junco: On March 2 an albino version of this bird appeared under my feeders. At first glance I thought: What is this Snow Bunting doing here? It turned out to be a junco. The bird was almost pure white, except its slightly pinkish bill, black eye, very dark wing primaries, and dark tail. Close observation revealed dark-grayish smudges around the head and breast. In size, shape, and behavior it was identical to the normal juncos with which it associated. It was observed by others in other yards until April 4.
- ✓ Several individuals of the "Oregon" race were present throughout March and into early April. Last one observed on April 12.
- ✓ Masses of juncos were congregating on April 4. The next day only a few stragglers remained. The last junco observed was on April 19.

- ✓ - Lapland Longspur: They were positively abundant in Sioux County in early March. On March 3 I saw literally thousands of them between Sioux Center and the Big Sioux River, many of them in flocks of 500+ individuals. On several occasions I had opportunity to study them closely, as at times they literally covered the roadways and nearby fields. The flocks were very "pure": only Lapland Longspurs; no other species of Longspur, no Snow Buntings, and no Horned Larks mixed in with them. By mid-March the Longspurs were mostly gone. Last flock observed on April 1.
- Red-winged Blackbird: Large flocks reappeared after the March 25 warmup.
- Western Meadowlark: Singing in many places immediately following the March 25 warmup.
- Rusty Blackbird: Conspicuous migration after the March 25 warmup.
- Common Grackle: First migrants returned to Sioux Center on March 10.
- Brown-headed Cowbird: First ones arrived on March 28.
- ✓ - Common Redpoll: Four individuals (one male, three females) visited a feeder in the town of George (Lyon County) every day from February 28 through March 13.

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