

April 1, 1976

Dear Vern:

Here are some observations on birds in the Iowa City area for the winter season. This has been an exceptionally warm winter, with hardly any snow, and the birds seen reflect this.

A Whistling Swan was on the Coralville Reservoir Dec. 14-16. Actually, there were two, but a hunter shot one (and was arrested). The skin was turned over to the U. of Iowa Museum. Mike Newlon saw the bird first among the birds, but the hunter evidently saw them even earlier. I and several others saw it on the days indicated.

Canada Geese, about 200, were seen for the first time on the CBC since its inception in 1951. White-fronted geese, rare this far east, were seen on several occasions: one on the reservoir several times late in February; 34 at Cone Marsh in Louisa Co. March 13 and 20, and about 70 March 27 (M. Newlon for the latter two dates).

Because of the late freezing on of the reservoir and lake, there were large numbers of Mallards on the CBC (≈ 2000), with a few Black Ducks, a Wigeon, a Flooded Merganser. Migration of ducks started early, with personal sightings earlier than the first spring dates in Woody Brown's annotated list() for the following: Am. Wigeon 2/27 (3/3); N. Shoveler 2/27 (3/11, 3/9 two year ago); Canvasback 2/29 (3/10, 3/8 two years ago); Bufflehead 2/26 (3/1); Ruddy Duck 3/7, tie.

Documentation is appended for a Greater Scaup very favorably seen 3/26. This is apparently only the 10th record for Iowa in recent times, and the 44 for Spring. Anderson in 1907 classified this as a common migrant. I see in Oberholser's book that a same apparent decrease in incidence occurred in Texas. The probability is that people have become more cautious. My guess is that scrutiny of the large flocks of Lesser Scaups migrating through might yield more Greater Scaups, but who looks at every scaup, and how often is the sighting, distance

etc. adequate for unequivocal distinction?

Accipiters have been rather scarce. I have not seen sharpies since the CBC, nor a Cooper's since May '75. Bald Eagles were unusually common because of all the open water. Marsh Hawks, up to 3 together, have been seen on most winter trips. Am. Kestrels have been hard to find, on the other hand.

After last year's massive flux of Franklin's gulls, I have only seen 1 (among the numerous Ring-bills) on 3/24. Two Bonaparte's in winter plumage on the reservoir on 3/28 were earlier than WTB's earliest spring date.

This has been a banner year for owls: all but Barn and Snow have been seen. Several roosts of Long-ears were noted by a number of people, one shared by Short-ears around mid-January. A pair of Saw-whets was stumbled on by Marilyn Glatton and M. Newlon, and when I went back to the site with Marilyn, she caught one with her bare (and subsequently bloody) hand and photographed it sitting on my glove.

Red-headed Woodpeckers, still abundant around here in summer, were scarce all winter.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were confined to singles in widely scattered places. I know of at least 5 Carolina Wrens which have spent all winter in the Iowa City area. A Brown Thrasher on the CBC was just one of several half-hardies that braved the winter. Am. Robins never really left - I estimate that there were several hundreds in the area at any given time during the winter. Cedar Waxwings were common up to early February, with about 300 downtown on Febr. 1. A single Bohemian was seen independently among them by two reliable observers (Rob Lane, Rich DeCoster), but it was gone by the ^{time} M. Newlon and I were summoned to the scene.

Ten Yellow-rumped Warblers were a first for the local CBC. The two I saw 2/18 were close enough to that small flock to suggest that these overwintered. A roost of about

150 Red-winged Blackbirds near the Iowa County line (1/27) was unusual for the area (we usually see a few singles in winter). A Brown-headed Cowbird nest (~50) downtown was active early late Jan. - early Febr.

Evening Grosbeaks had a good year. They occurred in several places, up to 10/group, from late November to the present date (I saw 2 ♀♀ at the neighbors' feeder 3/31). Purple Finches were also pretty good, with an unusually large flock of 70 some 15 miles west of North Liberty on 1/17. Com. Redpolls peaked at 150 on the CBC (another just for the count), and have been seen sporadically into mid-February. Pine Siskins have been steady at feeders and in ekgreens since late Dec. Neither sp. of Crows was seen during the period (no Red Crows at all all winter). Snow Buntings occurred on several dates, up to 30+/flock: 12/5; 12/20; 2/22. all told, not a very good nor a very bad year for winter finches.

Sincerely

Mick

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