

## Special Alert

An intense weather front that swept across the northern great plains in November produced one of the greatest mass migrations of waterfowl and arguably the largest migration of Sandhill Cranes recorded in Iowa in this century. Throughout the day of 10 November, as an intense low pressure system moved across the Dakotas and Minnesota, strong winds from the west and later from the northwest, blew across Iowa. Sustained winds of 40 mph with gusts in excess of 60 mph were recorded throughout the state. Although precipitation was fairly light across most of Iowa, as much as 10 inches of snow fell in extreme northwestern Iowa as well as parts of the Dakotas and Minnesota. These blizzard conditions followed what had been a very mild fall with little southward movement of waterfowl and cranes. Most ducks, Snow Geese, and Sandhill Cranes were still in southern Canada or the Dakotas when the storm hit. The storm pushed the birds south and, with the strong winds, tens of thousands of birds were displaced to the east. By the afternoon of the 10th, some observers were hearing large flocks of Snow Geese passing over in the storm but the main fallout wasn't evident until the 11th which fortuitously was a holiday (Veterans Day). Many state conservation workers were hunting that day, and they reported seeing massive flocks of ducks, geese, and to a lesser extent, Sandhill Cranes. Tens of thousands of Snow Geese were reported from throughout Iowa, far east of their usual Missouri River fall migration path. Likewise, thousands of ducks were reported statewide, whereas the previous week few had been present. Perhaps most unusual were the reports of Sandhill Cranes, a species that is rare in Iowa. Numerous observers reported cranes from as far east as the Mississippi River. Most striking were reports of more than 500 moving south near Council Bluffs and 2 or 3 flocks per hour passing over southwestern Iowa, both on the 11th. Numerous flocks were also reported from the Mt. Ayr and Lake View regions, the former moving to the west-southwest as if returning to their normal pathway. Reports from observers throughout Iowa accounted for at least 2,500 Sandhill Cranes in Iowa; probably many more passed throughout unseen. At least on the 11th, Iowa probably had more Sandhill Cranes within its borders than in any other day in this century. By the 12th, the movement had subsided considerably although both Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes were still seen migrating. In all, it was one of the most dramatic massive waterbird migrations on record.