

March 7

Dear Vern:

I had another letter from Gladys Black and am enclosing her update of the Snowy Owl Count (got it also into IBL gallery). She said you asked her for a photo 2 years ago. She sent an 8x10 print, quite grainy, which I cropped to manageable size. I don't know whether you will want to use it. The shot was taken on December 15, 1976, 3 miles west of Pleasantville, by Herb Dorow of Newton (apparently from quite a distance). The enclosed note from Gladys re 2 more Gray Jays came as a surprise — I don't have the documentations yet, and will send them on when I do get them (if they look OK).

A Canadian biologist Gladys wrote to blame the drought rather than a crash in lemming populations for the exodus of Snowies (also shrikes etc.?).

No sign of spring here yet — no open water to speak of.

Sincerely
Nick

Fix March '77
IBL
up to 2/18 - later
data in green

FIELD REPORTS

The species marked with * are on the Blue List of the AOU (Am. Birds 29:1067, 1976), on the Iowa Blue List (IBL XLV:95, 1975) and/or on Dean Roosa's list of endangered, threatened or declining species in Iowa (IBL XLVI:40, 1976).

General Comments. The winter has been cold, on many days brutally so, but with relatively little snow in the E and hardly any in the W. Thus there has been no relief from the drought. Rivers, many reduced to a trickle, froze over early. Even the Mississippi stayed open to a much more limited extent than in normal years. The second week in February brought a few days of record high temperatures. Ornithologically, the season was one of several pleasant surprises: unexpected strays from the W and N appeared, Snowy Owls invaded in impressive numbers, N. Shrikes were unusually common, and some half-hardy species valiantly braved the bitter cold. However, it was a rather poor season for winter finches. The report supplements and should be read in conjunction with W. Ross Silcock's summary of Christmas Bird Counts. Only where a point is to be made will there be duplications. Abbreviations used: CoR = Coralville Reservoir; RRR = Red Rock Lake, Reservoir and Refuge; CBC = Christmas Bird Count.

Good
forceful
enough -
see CBC's

Grebes through Ducks. A Pied-billed Grebe was on the Mississippi at Lock 14 in late December (Elton Fawks fide PP). Princeton's resident* Am. White Pelican, correctly sensing that this winter was not going to be a replica of 1975/76, disappeared by floating down the river in late October (PP). Southbound Canada Geese were seen overhead in late December: 30 in Carroll Co. (GeB) and 750 on December 31 at Waterloo (MB). Two White-fronted Geese on January 22 near Cordova (Bryan Bielems fide PP) were remarkable. The only ducks that spent the winter in good numbers on the Mississippi, at RRR, and in Cedar Rapids were Mallards, joined by a few Black Ducks at Davenport (PP) and on Cedar Lake. A lone Pintail also wintered at Davenport (PP). Single Wood Ducks were seen in late December and early January at Cedar Lake (MN, NH) and from December 19 to February 9 in Davenport (PP). Common Goldeneyes stayed into early January at Cedar Lake; their number at Davenport was in the hundreds (PP). The Oldsquaw recorded on the Cedar Rapids CBC was first seen on Cedar Lake around December 10 and last on January 2 (TS). Common Mergansers were "numerous" at Riverton (Don Priebe fide RP); 75-80 wintered at Davenport (PP). A male Hooded Merganser was spotted at Riverton on December 26 (RS).

Diurnal Raptors. The only N. Goshawks in Iowa were 2 seen on December 21 in Fremont Co. (D. Priebe fide GB). Reports of single *Sharp-shinned Hawks came from many parts of the state. Outside those seen on CBCs, a single *Cooper's Hawk was reported, with convincing details, from E of St. Lucas (JS). The consensus is that Red-tailed Hawks were less numerous than in past years. Although the CBC tabulation (RS) would indicate that Rough-legged Hawks wintered in average numbers, their distribution must have been quite uneven, with none in Des Moines (WB) or at Pleasantville (GB), only 3 in NE counties (DK), one near Iowa City (NH), numbers down around Jamaica (GeB), and very few in the Sioux Center area (JV). There were 2 sightings of imm. Golden Eagles: one on December 14 at Lock 14, by Elton Fawks, and another on February 6 in central Scott Co., by Fred Lorenzen (both fide PP). Bald Eagles had the unusual distinction of being the most numerous diurnal raptors on the CBCs (RS); they were present in good numbers along the Mississippi (PP), scarce at Riverton, and reported from numerous places in the state where none had been seen before (fide GB). One can only speculate about the correlation of this distributional anomaly with the diminished availability of bodies of open water and the statewide occurrence of fishkills due to low oxygen tension in the drought-reduced rivers and lakes. Almost all correspondents had seen fair numbers of *N. Harriers.

But see
GB's
Feb. 25
letter
about one
more
in NE Iowa
1/77

Remarkable was the presence of 3 Ospreys near Pella on January 15-16; they were fishing with Bald Eagles, and good size comparisons could be made (J St). Winter records of *Merlins are always noteworthy: in addition to the one on the Clinton CBC, one was seen on December 30 in Davenport at 12', snatching a House Sparrow from a feeder (Fred Lorenzen fide PP), another early in December N of Dedham, Carroll Co. (GeB), and one (date?) at Shenandoah (MS). *Am. Kestrels were relatively common all over the state, more so than during the fall migration.

Turkeys through Gulls. Wild Turkeys were seen in good numbers by several observers: flocks of 50 were present at Stephens State Forest (WB, Gene Armstrong); 19 birds released 3 years ago in the Amana Woods have multiplied phenomenally (to an estimated 150) and spread 10 miles up and down the Iowa River (Wendell Simonson fide FK)--they can be easily seen roosting high in trees along Highway 149 S of Middle Amana in the morning; most interesting is the report that 25 Wild Turkeys S of Seymour (Charlotte Scott fide GB) were not birds reintroduced by the Conservation Commission but had spread N out of Missouri (of original stock?). The Spotted Sandpiper on the Dubuque CBC is an extraordinary record; ~~without documentation, it can, unfortunately, only be reported in the "un corroborated" category.~~ Herring and Ring-billed Gulls moved out of the Davenport area in late December, as the ice closed in. The former started back on January 31, with 60 counted on February 2 (PP). Iowa's fourth Black-legged Kittiwake, an immature bird, was seen January 22-23 near Cordova (Bryan Bielems fide PP).

Doves through Owls. Two unbanded Ringed Turtle-Doves were at John Petersen's feeder all fall and into early winter. One was found with frozen feet in late January (fide PP). The provenance of these birds is not known. The species (man-bred) is established in Los Angeles, Tampa and some other places, but keeps cropping up in unexpected locales. Owls were reported by many contributors. On the Ames CBC, 25 Com. Screech Owls and 29 Great Horned Owls responded to tapes (BC). It was suspected that in the Malvern area the Great Horned Owls have become so numerous that they have driven out the Com. Screech Owls (RS). The season's spectacular happening was the greatest invasion of Snowy Owls in half a century, and perhaps ever: after Gladys Black called attention to them in two articles in the Des Moines Register, 177 birds were reported from 74 counties (as of February 28, GB), one in October, 24 in November, 47 in December, 93 in January and 16 in the first 2 weeks of February. Reports of Barred and Long-eared Owls were about par for the course. The *Short-eared Owls seen in widely scattered localities were mostly singles; S of the CoR, up to 9 were present all December and January. Single Saw-whet Owls, aside from the 3 on the CBCs, were found NW of Iowa City on January 27 (Marlyn Glasson fide MN) and on January 19 in Sioux Center (JV).

Kingfishers through Corvids. Although Belted Kingfishers were fairly well represented on the CBCs, only one contributor (GeB) commented on their presence all winter in his territory. Twenty "Red-shafted" Flickers in Fremont Co. (D. Priebe fide GB) were unusually numerous. An albino flicker occurred W of Davenport in late January (PP). Pileated Woodpeckers in unusual places were one at Osage on December 27 (fide GB) and near Iowa City on January 16 (Mrs. Robert Fountain, fide GB). It seems that *Red-headed Woodpeckers stayed through the winter in better numbers than in the last two years, presumably because of good food supply. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers came to feeders in Davenport (PP) Iowa City (FK) and Des Moines (fide WB), well into January. There were few specific comments on *Hairy Woodpeckers. The CBC compilation suggest neither a calamitous decline in numbers nor any lacunae in their distribution. One of the season's 2 most exciting records is the Gray Jay, Iowa's first, near Decorah. It was first noted by Bill Walker at a feeder by their cabin on October 30, identified the next day by Mrs. Walker, and, when word finally spread, the object of pilgrimages by birders from as far as Davenport. Color photographs of the bird were taken on January 15 (PP). It is still a regular at the feeder as of mid-February.

range expansion?
+ 1 Frautlin's gull 2/27 Davenport PP (spring plumage)
Davenport

documentation sent to 7P 3/11
found OK

191

Titmice through Waxwings. The Boreal Chickadee in Des Moines has stayed through the season. There are sporadic reports of a few Red-breasted Nuthatches; Des Moines, with 5 mentioned, seems to have the most. The season's second sensation is a Pygmy Nuthatch in Des Moines. It was first spotted at their feeder by Mrs. Lawrence Ely in early January. On the 25th, she called in the experts (WB, Margaret Brooke), who agreed on its identity (see longer note by Mrs. Brooke and attached editorial comment). The bird is regularly present at the feeder, and has been seen by observers from Cedar Rapids, as well as local birders. This is the first record of this species for Iowa. Winter Wrens, outside those on CBCs, were seen in Fremont Co. in December (RP). Carolina Wrens came to several feeders in Iowa City (FK, BK), Davenport (PP), and Ames, and took shelter in a garage near Knoxville (GB). One was seen on January 1 in the Yellow River Forest (DK), quite far north. If these birds survived the cruel winter, it was mostly because of human help: some evidently did--one singing in early February (FK), one of 3 back to the Knight's feeder after the big blizzard (BK), and one on Credit Island in February (Walter Zuurdeeg fide PP). Wintering N. Mockingbirds, in small numbers, were widely dispersed. Several Brown Thrasher's "attempted to winter" in Des Moines (fide WB), and one did in Burlington (fide GB). The CBCs show some surprisingly high numbers of Am. Robins and E. Bluebirds, considering the weather. Although technically falling into the fall period, the observation of a male Varied Thrush in Emmet Co. on November 28 must be noted. The documentation is absolutely convincing (BM). Two Bohemian Waxwings were observed on December 16 in Fonda by Mrs. Dwayne Beckfield and Edythe Fritz (fide GB). Sizable flocks of Cedar Waxwings occurred in several places.

a Townsend's Solitaire was seen December 17 in Hamburg (IG).

Shrikes through Icterids. This has been a banner winter for N. Shrikes. In addition to the 20 (1971-75 average: 1.2) recorded on CBCs and those included in the Fall Report, there were 27 sightings, far too many to allow individual acknowledgements. Awareness of these birds was undoubtedly heightened by Gladys Black's Des Moines Register article. Counties with unusual concentrations were Winneshiek (see Fall Report, CBC), Fayette (at least 4 recorded, JS), Johnson (6 in addition to the 3 reported for November) and Guthrie (4, GeB). Shrike sp. reports came from 6 counties (fide GB). *Loggerhead Shrikes were also up: the CBC total of 40 exceeds the 1971-75 average (12.6) by a factor of 3+. They were easy to find in some southern and central counties (DM, BW, GB), and one was as far north as Pocahontas Co. (fide GB). Only Gillaspay in Lamoni commented on a shortage of Loggerhead Shrikes in his territory. A few Yellow-rumped Warblers defied the arctic onslaught: one on the Cedar Rapids CBC, and 2 seen in Macbride Field Campus, chipper after a -8° night, on December 11 (NH). Meadowlarks were either relatively few or hard to find because of the lack of snow cover. Roosts of Red-winged Blackbirds were found in several places, with large ones in Cedar Rapids and Davenport. Flocks of Rusty Blackbirds were also seen, with the largest (200-300 birds) observed near Des Moines on December 26 (WB) and in the Malvern area (RS). Brewer's Blackbirds were not uncommon: see CBCs, and 14 found E of Jamaica February 14 (GeB). The biggest roost of Com. Grackles (500-1000 birds) was reported from Davenport (PP). Aggregations of wintering Brown-headed Cowbirds were observed in Iowa City (MN), NE of Pleasantville (GB), and in Davenport (PP).

Finches, Sparrows. Evening Grosbeaks were at a premium, with only 7 seen in the whole state, all in central counties (GB). On the balance, Purple Finch reports were moderately favorable: most of them seen at feeders, and a flock of 10 in the field, W of Iowa City, on February 2 (RH). Com. Redpolls were not living up to their name: flocks (size not given) in Polk and Clarke Counties in January and early February (fide GB), and singles at feeders in Cedar Rapids on January 22 (LS) and in Davenport, January 28-February 13 (PP). Most contributors commented on the lack or paucity of Pine Siskins: by far the highest concentration (up to 25 at a time, 100 + altogether) was at Petersen's feeder. He banded about half of

these between November 22 and February 3. The consensus is that Am. Goldfinches were unusually numerous. Few Red Crossbills were seen outside the CBCs: a single female represented the species from December into February at Iowa City, and 2 were reported from Des Moines in early February (LS). There were no White-winged Crossbills beyond those on the Muscatine CBC. Single Rufous-sided Towhees (mostly of the spotted race) were reported from several widely scattered places. Savannah Sparrows seen on January 22 near Malvern were well described (RS). A Lark Sparrow observed from 10' on February 5 at a Davenport feeder (Fred Lorenzen fide PP) is quite unusual. Comments on the extraordinary size of Am. Tree Sparrow flocks came from the CoR and RRR (GB), no doubt because of the suitable habitat created by the receded water. The CBC summary attests to the relative abundance of Harris' Sparrows in the state this winter; additional observations (GeB, GB, DM) corroborate the trend. There were several reports of overwintering White-crowned Sparrows, with a maximum of 30 at Pleasantville (GB). White-throated Sparrows were mostly at feeders, in several locations; 9 were banded in Davenport (PP). Fox Sparrows lingered rather extensively (see CBCs). The single Lincoln's Sparrow on the Davenport CBC was matched by one in the SW corner of the state, on December 14 in Manti Park, Fremont Co. (RP). Swamp Sparrows were encountered in the SW as late as January 22 (RS). There were numerous reports of Lapland Longspur flocks, the largest (about 1000 birds each) seen on January 22 near Alburnett (LS) and W of West Union (JS). Snow Buntings were seen all over the state, mostly in groups of a few birds or in small flocks; "large flocks" were observed near Spirit Lake and in the vicinity of St. Olaf (Lorraine Wallace, Larry Stone, fide GB) in December and January.

Contributors. Gladys Black, Pleasantville; Woodward Brown, Des Moines; Merle Burk, Waterloo; Gene Burns, Jamaica; Marie Carlson, Boone; Barney Cook, Ames; Nicholas Halmi, Iowa City; Rick Hollis, Iowa City; Fred Kent, Iowa City; Bernie Knight, Iowa City; Darwin Koenig, Decorah; Bob Moats, Estherville; Dean Mosman, Ankeny; Mike and Carol Newlon, Iowa City; Peter Petersen, Davenport; Ruth Phipps, Shenandoah; Joe Schaufenbuel, St. Lucas; Lillian Serbousek, Cedar Rapids; Tom Shires, Iowa City; Ross Silcock, Tabor; Marie Spears, Shenandoah; Jon Stravers, Pella; John Van Dyk, Sioux Center; Betty Walters, Essex; Gary Wymore, Ottumwa. N. S. HALMI, R. #6, IOWA CITY, 52240

Charlotte Scott, Seymour;

Herb Dorow, Newton;
Ione Getscher, Hamburg;