

FIELD REPORTS
WINTER 1979-1980

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WEATHER AND HABITAT CONDITIONS

The mild winter contrasted sharply with the severity of the previous two winters. December was warm with practically no snow and much open water. January was also mild with little snow. February brought some snow and more normal winter temperatures.

GENERAL TRENDS

Bird population trends paralleled the weather pattern. Large numbers of waterfowl and gulls remained through December and in the s. w. and n. w. geese and mallards overwintered in large numbers. The number and variety of lingering passerines was also unusual. Winter finches were greatly decreased in numbers and variety. As usual, the Christmas Bird Counts produced the most intensive birding. Ross Silcock presents the results of the CBC's elsewhere in this issue. I have not duplicated information from the CBC's unless it was reported separately to me.

UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS

Casual species were Ross' Goose in s. w. Iowa (see CBC),

Glaucous Gull at Davenport, Say's Phoebe at St Anthony, Marshall Co., and Varied Thrush at Monticello. A number of unusual species for winter are reported in the CBC--Greater Scaup, Turkey Vulture, Broad-winged Hawk, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Northern Oriole, and Dickcissel. Northern oriole was also at a feeder in n. Iowa. Golden Eagles wintered in n. e. Iowa. Osprey and Barn Owl were reported from s. w. Iowa.

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Common Loon: Lingered into first week of Dec. in Fremont Co. (IG).

Great Blue Heron: Singles at L. Macbride on 2 Dec. (TK), Cedar Rapids on 15 Dec. (WN), and n. Linn Co. on 12 Jan. (FT, PW).

Whistling Swan: 50 were still at Lock & Dam 9 in n.e. Iowa on 6 Dec. (DK).

Snow Goose: 100,000 remained in Fremont Co. until at least mid Jan. (IG, DP fide RP).

Ross' Goose: See CBC.

Canada Goose: 2,000 wintered in the Ruthven area, Clay Co. (WS fide JD); 350 were at Bay's Branch, Guthrie Co. on 17 Jan. (RC); and 18 were at L. Manawa, Council Bluffs on 15-17 Jan. (CS).

Wood Duck: One was reported from DeSoto N.W.R. on 25 Feb. (JR).

American Wigeon: One lingered at Sioux Center until 1 Dec. (JV).

Mallard: Large numbers wintered in Iowa: 100,000 in Fremont Co. (DP fide RP), 11,000 at Bay's Branch on 17 Jan. (RC), 1,000 at Big Creek S.P. in early Jan. (HZ, LZ), 200 at Rock Valley in

*consistent
to late fall*

*I have
no more info*

n.w. Iowa all winter (JV).

good #s
American Black Duck: There were reports from many areas of the state: 10 from Princeton A. on 1 Dec. (TK, TSh), 2 at L. Macbride on 2 Dec. (TK), 1 at Coralville Res. on 9 Dec. (TK), 2 at Bay's Branch on 17 Jan. (RC), 2 at Lansing on 1 Feb. (DK), 2 at Davenport on 23 Feb. (PP), 1 at DeSoto N.W.R. on 25 Feb. (JR).

Common Pintail: 1 was at Lansing on 1 Feb. (DK) and 5 at DeSoto N.W.R. on 25 Feb. (JR).

Ring-necked Duck: 3 were at Bay's Branch on 17 Jan. (RC).

unusual
Greater Scaup: See CBC.

Lesser Scaup: 3 were at Bay's Branch on 17 Jan. (RC).

VULTURES THROUGH TURKEY

Turkey Vulture: See CBC.

may have been in IL
Osprey: Winter records of this species are unusual. One was reported from Riverton N.W.R. on 17 Jan. (IG).

not well documented
Bald Eagle: Numbers along the Mississippi R. were down slightly--252 were seen by air from Bellevue to Keokuk on 12 Jan, 10% less than last year (PP). Good numbers wintered along the Missouri R. with 40-50 at Forney L. on 9 Jan. (RP) and 15 at DeSoto N.W.R. on 25 Feb. (JR). One ad. was at Big Spirit L. on 9-10 Dec. (DH, LF fide DH) and immatures were at Center L., Dickinson Co., on 6 Jan. (LH fide DH) and at Coralville L. on 1 Jan. (TK).

also more in land
Northern Harrier: Wintering birds in n.e. Iowa (DK) and at Big Creek S.P. (HZ, LZ) were considered unusual.

Cooper's Hawk: Two reports: 1 on 20 Dec. in Boone Co. (JMS) and

1 on 5 Jan. at Des Moines (DMoo fide WB).

Red-tailed Hawk: Most observers thought that numbers were increased. Darwin Koenig found 14-35/100 miles traveled or 1 per 4 miles on seven trips in Allamakee Co.

* Red-shouldered Hawk: One was seen at the Coralville Res. on 5 Jan (FT, PW).

Broad-winged Hawk: See CBC.

Rough-legged Hawk: Several active observers reported this species to be decreased (JDG, DH, JSb) or absent (DMos, JV, TK). Koenig saw 15 in n.e. Iowa in Jan. Only 7 others were reported (IG, TH fide RC, DH, JR).

* Golden Eagle: 1-2 were still present in Allamakee Co. on 6 Dec., 1 Feb. and 12 Feb. (DK).

Merlin: One was reported from Red Rock Res. on 16 Dec. (DM). See CBC.

American Kestrel: Many observers reported increased numbers from many areas of the state (JD, IG, DK, DMoo, JSb, JV).

Gray Partridge: 26 were seen in Pocahontas Co. on 13 Jan. (RC).

Wild Turkey: One was seen at the Coralville Res. on 26 Dec. (FT, PW).

CRANES THROUGH TERNS

American Coot: Wintering birds were at Bay's Branch on 17 Jan. (RC) and Lansing from 23 Jan. to 12 Feb. (DK).

Killdeer: 1 was at Matsell Bridge in n. Linn Co. on 1 Jan. (FT, PW) and 3 at Lock & Dam 9 on 23 Jan. (DK).

Common Snipe: The only report was from Yellow R.F. on 12 Feb. (DK).

X Glaucous Gull: An immature was seen at Lock & Dam 14 on 16 Dec. during the Davenport CBC (+TK, TSh).

Herring Gull: 3 stayed at the Coralville Res. until 1 Jan. (TK).

Ring-billed Gull: 2-50 remained at Davenport through January (PP).

PIGEONS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Barn Owl: 2 were reported n. of Shenadoah on 3 Dec. and 1 at the same location on 21 Jan. (DP fide RP).

Great Horned Owl: A nesting bird was found on 23 Feb. near Laurens (RC).

Snowy Owl: Three reports: Dec.-Jan. at Ft. Atkinson, Winneshiek Co. (KRo fide JSb), 1 Jan. in Dickinson Co. an injured bird sent to Iowa State University (JD), and 25 Jan. in Buena Vista Co. (EC).

Long-eared Owl: There were several reports from Big Creek S.P. and Story Co. (DMos, HZ, LZ). The only other report was from n. Linn Co. (FT).

Short-eared Owl: There were many reports from Story and Polk Cos. (JMS, DMos, GA fide WB, HZ, LZ). There were two reports from n.w. Iowa (DBi, RC) and one from e. Iowa (PP).

Saw-whet Owl: Reports were from Central City, Linn Co. on 29 Dec. (FT, m.ob.), Marshalltown on 21 Jan. (CKu, HKu, DD, RZ) and Ledges S.P. from 9-24 Feb. (GF fide JD, HZ, LZ, JD).

Belted Kingfisher: 2 were at Ames on 28 Feb. (JR). More than usual wintered in n.e. Iowa (JSb).

Common Flicker: 1 red-shafted was seen at Hamburg on 22 Jan. (IG).

Seen by
Conservation
Three

Pileated Woodpecker: 1 was seen at Nora Springs, Floyd Co. on 17 Dec. and 8 Jan. (DAB).

Red-headed Woodpecker: Reported as numerous by m.ob. in contrast to last year.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Singles reported from 4 areas.

Hairy Woodpecker: Doing well along Rock and Big Sioux Rivers in n.w. Iowa (JV).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH STARLING

Say's Phoebe: This species is unusual at any time, but what about one showing up at our President's front yard near St Anthony, on 22 Dec. to be photographed (+CK, HK)!

Horned Lark: Several observers reported numbers decreased in Dec. and Jan. (DBi, JD, DMos, JV) perhaps more than usual. However, they are usually scarce during this period, and there was no snow to concentrate them along roads.

American Crow: 1000 wintered at Ames (HZ, LZ), 100 at Sioux Center (JV).

Tufted Titmouse: Joe Schanfenbuel noted a continued decrease in n.e. Iowa.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: The only reports were from Shenandoah (Bwa) and Cherokee (DBi).

Brown Creeper: Reported as exceptionally common at Sioux Center (JV); only other report was from Ames (HZ, LZ).

House Wren: See CBC.

Northern Mockingbird: One was at Jester P. on 18 Dec. (DMos) and one was in Cedar Rapids on several occasions (WN).

Brown Thrasher: Two wintered in Davenport (MLP, ME fide PP) and

normal
x

XXX
I saw photo -
OK

13 in Linn Co. (WN).

American Robin: Many wintered. Some were reported by almost all observers.

Varied Thrush: Paul and Margret Whear reported this bird at their rural home located in a large cedar grove near Monticello, and it was seen by many observers (+FT, PW, TG, +TK, CKn, BKn, MN, TSh, PP (photographed), SC). It was present from mid-Dec. through mid-Feb.

Hermit Thrush: Wintering birds were found in Boone Co. on 9 Feb. (+HZ, LZ) and Cedar Rapids on 28 Feb. (WN).

Eastern Bluebird: The only report was from Nine Eagles S.P., Decatur Co. (JDG).

Golden-crowned Kinglet: Good numbers were reported from Fremont and Sioux Cos. (IG, JV).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: One was seen near the Coralville Dam on 16 Dec. (+TK). See also CBC.

Cedar Waxwing: 300-500 were at Nine Eagles S.P. on 26 Dec. (JDG).

Northern Shrike: 2 were seen in n.e. Iowa (DK) and 2 in n.w. Iowa (+DBi, JC fide RC).

Loggerhead Shrike: 1 was reported from Cherokee on 29 Dec. (DBi) and they were said to be scarce at Lamoni (JDG). We need documentation of winter shrikes because of the difficulty separating the two species and because of the need to determine their winter status in various areas of the state.

MEADOWLARKS THROUGH BUNTINGS

Western Meadowlark: Numbers were down in Sioux Co. (JV). The

... only other meadowlark report was from DeSoto N.W.R. (JR).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: See CBC.

Red-winged Blackbird: Many wintered and were considered unusual in northern parts of the state (DK, RC, JV, DH).

✓ Northern Oriole: A male at Nora Springs, Floyd Co., was a remarkable winter record (DAB). See also CBC.

Rusty Blackbird: Reports were from Cherokee (DBi), Rush L., Palo Alto Co. (RC), DeSoto N.W.R. (JR) and n.e. Iowa (JSb).

Brewer's Blackbird: See CBC.

Common Grackle: Several were reported from widely scattered areas in the state including one from the n.e. corner at New Albin (DK).

Brown-headed Cowbird: The only one reported was at Rush L., Palo Alto Co., on 23 Feb. (RC).

✓ Dickcissel: One was reported from Squaw Creek P., Linn Co. (FT). See CBC.

Evening Grosbeak: The only reports were from Hamburg, Fremont Co. (IG) and Nora Springs (DAB).

Purple Finch: There were only three reports this winter (DBi, DMos, WN).

Common Redpoll: There were no verified reports.

Pine Siskin: Siskins were scarce. The only wintering reports were at Cherokee (DBi) and Davenport (MLP fide PP).

Red Crossbill: One female was at Sheldon, O'Brien Co. on 4 Jan. (JV).

Rufous-sided Towhee: Wintering birds were present at Iowa City (western race, TK) and LeClaire, Scott Co. (DM's fide PP).

good #15

close to CBC

low

more

XX reliable
Field Sparrow: One was observed at Yellow R.F. on 12 Feb. (DK).

Harris' Sparrow: Good numbers were present in w. Iowa (DBi, RC, JV, JR, DMos) and 1 was in Johnson Co. on 12 Jan. (TK).

Good #1
White-throated Sparrow: Wintering birds were observed at feeders in Iowa City and Davenport (TK, ME fide PP, PP). Birds were singing at Iowa City on 1 Jan. and at Sioux Center on 27 Feb. (JV).

Fox Sparrow: One was seen at Coralville Res. on 5 Jan. (FT).

Lapland Longspur: 30 were in n. Linn Co. on 2 Feb. (FT, TG) and 150 in the same area on 10 Feb. (TK, CKn, BKn, MN, TSh).

Snow Bunting: Numbers were down with scattered reports, mostly in Dec.

+ = documented

CONTRIBUTORS

Dick Bierman, Cherokee; Woodward Brown, Des Moines; Dorothy A. Brunner, Nora Springs; Edwin G. Crocker, Storm Lake; Raymond Cummins, Pocahontas; James Dinsmore, Ames; Ione Getscher, Hamburg; J. Donald Gillaspay, Lamoni; Douglas Harr, Larchwood; Thomas Kent, Iowa City; Pearl Knoop, Marble Rock; Darwin Koenig, Decorah; Carl Kurtz, St Anthony; Dean Mosman, Elkhart; Weir Nelson, Ely; Peter Petersen, Davenport; Ruth Phipps, Shenandoah; John Robinson, Ames; Joseph M. Schaefer, Ames; Joe Schaufenbuel, St Lucas; Conrad F. Schlemmer, Council Bluffs; Fred Thompson, Marion; John Van Dyk, Sioux Center; Betty Walters, Shenandoah; Hank Zaletel, Ames; Linda Zaletel, Ames;

OTHER OBSERVERS

Gene Armstrong (WB); Judy Carlson (RC); Mrs. Dale Devid (CKu); Margret Ebert (PP); Gary Frederick (JD); Tom Gates (PT); Linda Hinshaw (DH); Thaine Hopkins (RC); Wally Jardine (RC); Bernie Knight (TK); Calvin Knight (TK); Hazel Kurtz (CKu); Mr. and Mrs. Don Moeller (PP); Dick Mooney (WB); Michael Newlon (TK); Mary Lou Petersen (PP); Don Priebe (RP); Keith Rowley (JSb); Scott Clark (PP); Thomas Shires (TK); Wayne Souer (JD); Pete Wickham (PT); Ruth Zorn (CKu);

COMMENTS

In these comments I would like to briefly review the birds seen in 1979 and discuss the Blue List for 1980.

The year 1979 was a good one for birding in Iowa in spite of scarcity of northern winter species. According to my review, the 291 species reported in IBL for the year comprise 169 of 175 Field Checklist species and 22 casual and accidental species. The Field Checklist species not reported were Snowy Egret, King Rail, Whimbrel, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Bewick's Wren, and Common Redpoll. Casual and accidental species reported include Red-necked Grebe, Ross' Goose, Black Scoter, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Greater Prairie Chicken, Sandhill Crane, Yellow Rail, Purple Gallinule, Purple

Sandpiper, Glaucous Gull, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Western Pewee, Varied Thrush, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Prairie Warbler. I am not aware of a previous compilation of a year's species list for Iowa, but I thought it might be useful as a means of keeping tract for future determination of status changes.

American Birds has just published "The Blue List for 1980" which is a "new" annual "early warning list" of declining, threatened or vulnerable species. First started in 1971 to augment the Endangered Species List, the Blue List has been revised annually by asking birders with more than ten years' experience in their area to note additions or subtractions to the list. This year, in an attempt to remove bias and encourage more "voters", the participants were asked to develop their lists from scratch. The 210 respondents identified 297 species of which 73 were Blue Listed for 1980. American Birds has encouraged reporting of these species to subregional and regional editors for use in development of their seasonal reports.

Woody Brown and Nick Halmi encouraged contributors to IBL's Field Reports to report their observations of Blue List species. As a contributor, and now as Field Reports Editor, I have found two problems in using the Blue List for reporting. First, the list is based on opinions with little

representation from Iowa. Often birds are put on the list because of votes from regions other than ours. Second, the data needed to "watch" these species is not the same for all species. I would conclude that we should not evaluate all of the Blue List species in the same manner and that we should be concerned about some species not on the Blue List.

Of the 73 Blue Listed Species for 1980, 55 are regular in Iowa (listed on the IOU Field Checklist). I have sorted these into three categories. The 14 rare species are worth reporting in all instances. These include Western Grebe, Least Bittern, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Merlin, King Rail, Piping Plover, Common Tern, Least Tern, Barn Owl, Bewick's Wren, Yellow-breasted Chat and Henslow's Sparrow.

The 20 uncommon species should often be reported, especially when more than usual are present or when absent or decreased is their usual habitat. Reporting all of them would produce too much data to handle. Species in this category are Common Loon, White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, American Bittern, Black Duck, Osprey, Upland Plover, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Willow Flycatcher, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo and Vesper Sparrow.

There are 21 Blue Listed species which I would consider relatively common in Iowa. Individual reports of these species are of interest but are of little help in evaluating their frequency and may be misleading. Surveys done in a reproducible manner are needed to detect changes. Species in this category are Great Blue Heron, Canvasback, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Marsh Hawk, American Kestrel, Bobwhite, Black Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Common Nighthawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Purple Martin, Least Flycatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel and Grasshopper Sparrow.

Some non-Blue Listed species which I think merit more careful evaluation in Iowa include Common Gallinule, Belted Kingfisher, Tufted Titmouse, Marsh Wren, Blue-winged Warbler and Lark Sparrow. I would appreciate hearing your reactions to the Blue List and how to deal with it.

I would like to thank contributors for getting their reports to me on time and apologize for confusion on the deadline for the winter season. Almost all reports are now coming to me arranged in check list order on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper.

Please send your spring reports by June 1. Send stamps if you need report forms or documentation forms.