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Spring 1991 Report

Weather for the period: March presented a very changeable picture. It started off on a roller-coaster ride: On March 1 the temperature dropped from 50 during the day to about zero at night. On March 4 we bounced upwards to equal a record of 64. Next day, a record at 69. The anticipated snow in mid-March fizzled: We got only 2", which quickly disappeared. On March 26 we set a record high of 77. Next day we received 4 inches of snow!

April presented a similar picture: record highs of 87 and 91 on April 5 and 6, causing trees and shrubs to begin to leaf out, then suddenly a sharp drop in temperature. Substantial rains along with a lingering low pressure system April 11-14. The remainder of April, however, saw below normal temperatures, slowing down the leafing out of trees and the bird migration. At the end of the month we finally received much needed rain. While April was very wet for most of Iowa, here in the northwest the rainfall for the month was about the lowest in the state.

The first half of May saw below normal temperatures. Thus the spring was slowed down and rather protracted. Our rainfall for the month was above normal (especially because of some heavy rains towards the end of the month), but we did not experience any of the flooding problems common in other parts of the state. The last week of May was very warm and humid.

- Common Loon: One was in a large gravel pit south of Sioux Center on May 9.
- Eared Grebe: Half a dozen were at Winterfeld in Rock Valley on May 4.
- White Pelican: Good migration. Flocks of 50 to 100 were coming over western Sioux Co. on May 4.
- Double-crested Cormorant: Flocks of 30 to 40 birds were migrating through Sioux County on April 9. They were in evidence throughout the remainder of April, and well into May.
- Great Egret: Fine migration. On May 4 a half dozen were at Hawarden in western Sioux County.
- Snow Goose: Large flocks were overhead in Sioux County on the somewhat early date of March 5.
- Greater White-fronted Goose: No unusual migration.

- Northern Shoveler: Arrived early on March 20. They reached their peak on April 9: a flock of 120 was present at Winterfeld park in Rock Valley.
- American Wigeon: Arrived a bit early. A half dozen were at Rock Valley on March 15.
- Redhead: Definitely earlier than usual. A flock of 40 was at Hawarden on March 9.
- Lesser Scaup: Excellent migration. They reached their peak on March 21: about 1000 individuals were on various ponds and lakes in Sioux and Lyon Counties on this date.
- Common Goldeneye: One was still at Winterfeld Park in Rock Valley on April 13.
- Bufflehead: One was still at Winterfeld Park in Rock Valley on April 13.
- Ruddy Duck: Arrived early on March 20.
- Common Merganser: Excellent migration. An estimated 175 individuals were in the Hawarden area on March 8. A very late single male was still at Hawarden on May 9!
- Red-breasted Merganser: One was at Hawarden on April 14.
- Turkey Vulture: They appear to frequent our corner of the state more often than they did in the past. Flocks of half a dozen or so were not uncommon in mid-April.
- Osprey: One was south of Sioux Center on May 4.
- Bald Eagle: Very visible. Two adults were at Oak Grove Park in western Sioux Co. on March 8. Four (three adults, one immature) were along the Sioux and Rock Rivers on March 15.
- Northern Harrier: This usually plentiful spring bird seemed definitely much more scarce this year. Usually I see them every time I go out into the County. This time I observed only a couple of them in all of March and April. A female was west of Sioux Center on May 29.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: Several were migrating in western Sioux Co. on May 4.
- Cooper's Hawk: I observed one about six miles ^{north}~~south~~-east of Sheldon (O'Brien Co.) on April 30. The bird flushed out of a farm woodlot, and flew off in front of me. Its accipiter profile was evident at once: relatively long tail and rounded wings. The bird was definitely larger than a Broad-winged Hawk (which were arriving at this time). I took it to be a female Cooper's.

- Red-shouldered Hawk: One was at Oak Grove Park on March 15. I observed the bird as it sat, facing me, on top of a small evergreen on a hillside. Thus I could observe its rusty underparts. Three crows were pestering the bird, so I could see that it was somewhat larger than a crow. As I approached, the hawk flew off, providing an excellent view of its banded tail and reddish wing coverts (tail narrowly banded, quite different from the Broad-winged Hawk). This is the first Red-shouldered Hawk I have seen in northwest Iowa (although I am familiar with the bird from other parts of the country -- in fact, I saw several in February in Louisiana). Hopefully its appearance in Oak Grove Park suggests a come-back in this area of Iowa.
- Red-Tailed Hawk: Nothing unusual.
- Broad-winged Hawk: Arrived on April 30. No unusual migration.
- Swainson's Hawk: One was southwest of Rock Valley on May 15.
- American Kestrel: Excellent migration. Throughout March there were Kestrels just about everywhere in Sioux County (at some points as many as four or five per mile of road). Two nest boxes north of Sioux Center contained Kestrels on eggs.
- Merlin: None observed during the spring season.
- Northern Bobwhite: Both observed and heard calling at their accustomed haunts in western Sioux Co. as early as the first week of March. They are doing well in Sioux County.
- Wild Turkey: Continues to do very well. Recent TV reports indicate that Wild Turkeys are a pest in the western suburbs of Sioux City.
- Killdeer: We usually hear its cheery call around the first of March. This year, however, we did not see them until the middle of March.
- Other shorebirds: a somewhat meager migration, partly because the increase in rainfall this spring eliminated some of their regular stopovers. No unusual observations. [Only species observed in Sioux Co.: Semipalmated Plover, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Wilson's Phalarope.]
- Ring-billed Gull: Two individuals were very early at Hawarden on March 1.
- Franklin's Gull: Normal migration.
- Forster's Tern: First arrived in Sioux County on April 14.

- Mourning Dove: Early migrants arrived on March 1.
- Cuckoos: Both the Black-bill and Yellow-bill were in Sioux Co. by May 20, but in very meager numbers. Last year and this year again the Black-billed Cuckoo has been particularly hard to find. The number of Yellow-bills seems down as well.
- Chimney Swift: Undoubtedly because of the cool April weather, arrived later than usual on April 26.
- Common Nighthawk: Normal migration; arrived on May 15.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: First observed on May 5.
- Olive-sided Flycatcher: One was at Oak Grove Park on May 20. They are more numerous in the fall than in the spring.
- Empidonax: Arrived in startling numbers on April 29 and 30. On the 30th there were six of them in my yard at one time. From them on a protracted and unspectacular migration.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: One was in my yard on May 26.
- Eastern Phoebe: One was in my yard April 11-13. Two more were at Oak Grove on April 14. Still another was singing in Oak Grove Park on May 9.
- Great Crested Flycatcher: Arrived in Sioux Co. on May 22.
- Purple Martin: Arrived in Sioux Center somewhat later than usual on April 12. Smart move to delay their trip, I'd say, because of the cool April weather. Goodly numbers are present in Sioux Center.
- Tree Swallow: On time in the first week of April.
- Barn Swallow: One was just south of Sioux Center at the rather early date of April 13.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch: A single bird was observed and reported (and well described) in Sioux Center on May 7.
- House Wren: Arrived early on April 23.
- Winter Wren: None observed.
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: Several were in Sioux Center on April 1. Not a conspicuous migration.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Arrived a bit earlier than usual, on April 10.

- Eastern Bluebird: First observed in Sioux Center on March 25. Thereafter they were quite plentiful throughout the County: two or three of them were seen every time we went out to bird. At some stations in western Sioux County pairs were present.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: Arrived in impressive numbers on April 29. They came together with Swainson's Thrush, but clearly outnumbered the Swainson's Thrush. The Gray-cheek and the Swainson's seem to alternate annually: This year the Gray-cheek was first to arrive and in larger numbers. Next year the Swainson's will be first and outnumber the Gray-cheek!
- Swainson's Thrush: Good migration, especially in early May. Their migration was very protracted. Two were still in my yard on the very late date of May 27.
- Hermit Thrush: Very good migration. It is remarkable that one year they are hard to find, in other years they seem plentiful. They arrived on April 10. From April 11-14 there were at least three in my yard every time I looked. Their migration continued throughout April. Two of them were still present in my yard (along with Gray-cheeks and Swainsons) on May 1.
- Wood Thrush: The usual number arrived at their stations in woodsy areas along the Big Sioux River on May 9.
- American Robin: Arrived early. Early migrants were here in late February, and widespread in the first week of March.
- American Pipit: Two were in a field in western Sioux County on May 4.
- Loggerhead Shrike: An early migrant was in Western Sioux County on April 5. The bird allowed close observation, thus ruling out a possible lingering Northern Shrike. Another bird (possibly the same one) was at the same location on May 20.
- Vireos and Warblers: One the whole, a disappointing migration. Waves were few and far between. The following usual species were observed: Solitary Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo; Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Magnolia Warbler (quite plentiful), Yellow-rumped Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Blackpoll, Black+White Warbler (very plentiful), Redstart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler. In addition, the following deserve special mention:
 - Yellow-throated Vireo: One was at Oak Grove Park (along with numerous Philadelphia Vireos) on May 20. The Yellow-throated Vireo is rare in northwest Iowa.
 - Chestnut-sided Warbler: Very scarce. A late bird was in my yard on May 26.

- Palm Warbler: They arrived, peaked, and departed all within a day or so. On May 4 I counted about a dozen in various places in western Sioux County.
- Mourning Warbler: Appeared in my yard on May 26. This late migrant is uncommon but regular in northwest Iowa.
- Canada Warbler: This usually uncommon warbler was much in evidence this spring. At least half a dozen individuals were observed between May 20 and May 26.
- Scarlet Tanager: A pair was in Sioux Center May 18-20.
- Northern Cardinal: Continues to flourish along the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers in western Sioux Co. One was singing in Sioux Center on April 23. But for some reason, those towns of northwest Iowa some distance from the rivers do not appear to provide satisfactory habitat for this bird.
- Blue Grosbeak: Arrived on May 20.
- Dickcissel: After mid-May an extremely plentiful bird in western Sioux County.
- Chipping Sparrow: A very early bird was singing and observed in Hawarden, Sioux County, on April 5. Does this constitute the second earliest date for Iowa (see Dinsmore e.a., Iowa Birds, p. 289)? This occurrence is especially striking in view of our far northern location.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: Arrived in Sioux Center on April 30. As usual, this species was common in early May.
- Lark Sparrow: Two were in western Sioux County on May 20. This species is very uncommon in this part of the state.
- Lark Bunting: The Sioux City birders probably reported the sighting of several Lark Buntings in southwest Plymouth County in mid-May. This species seems to be wandering eastwards this year. (On May 29 I saw one in eastern Clay Co., South Dakota, near Beresford -- well east of their normal range.)
- Grasshopper Sparrow: Present in what seems ever lower numbers.
- Fox Sparrow: On time in the first week of April. Their migration was not spectacular. They trickled through, mostly one or two at a time, through the month of April.
- Lincoln's Sparrow: One was in Sioux Center on the very early date of April 14 (cf. Dinsmore e.a., Iowa Birds, p. 296).

- White-throated Sparrow: Spectacular migration! They descended upon us in large numbers April 26-30. On April 30 (a blustery, windy and cold day) there were an estimated 500 of them in a woodlot near Sheldon (O'Brien Co.). As by signal, they all disappeared on May 8.
- White-crowned Sparrow: Filtered through right along with the much more numerous White-throated Sparrows. Last one observed on May 9.
- Harris' Sparrow: Very common in Sioux County by the first week of April. Good migration into early May.
- Dark-eyed Junco: Lingered until mid-April. A final flock of a half dozen or so was still in my yard on April 20.
- Rusty Blackbird: Migrated through in small numbers throughout the month of March and into the second week of April.
- Brown-headed Cowbird: First observed in Sioux Center on March 27.
- Orchard Oriole: Very much in evidence this spring. On May 20 I counted 10 different individuals in western Sioux County.
- Northern Oriole: An early individual [^]was reported in Sioux Center on April 25.
- Purple Finch: A female was in Sioux Center on April 16. No others observed.
- House Finch: Several pairs were in Sioux Center through the winter and spring. Several males were singing in the first week of March. Increasing numbers (as many as half a dozen) were singing in various parts of Sioux Center in April. Their cheery song constitutes a welcome addition to the sounds of spring!
- Pine Siskin: Not observed this spring.

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