

HEARD ON THE BIRDLINE
Winter 1997-98
December 15-March 15
by Jim Fuller, Iowa City

All sightings of rare birds reported to the Iowa Birdline are considered tentative until submitted and approved by the Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologist's Union.

Iowa attracted national attention when two ROSS'S GULLS found their way to the state in December. Both birds were winter plumaged adults and each remained exactly five days. Jim Sinclair discovered the first bird at the Red Rock Reservoir dam on the morning of the 13th, and it drew admiring birders to that location through the 17th. Two weeks later, Loren and Babs Padelford reported a second bird from Lake Manawa at Council Bluffs on the 27th, and until the 31st, when it departed, it was often the only gull on the lake.

An adult BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE was a concurrent attraction with the ROSS'S GULL below the Red Rock dam, and two other adult KITTIWAKES were reported, one on the Cedar River near Cedar Falls December 20-22, and the other on the Mississippi River at Muscatine, February 12-14. Other unusual GULLS on the Mississippi River at the Quad Cities and Muscatine after the first of the year included GREAT BLACK-BACKED, LESSER BLACK-BACKED, CALIFORNIA, MEW, GLAUCOUS, and THAYER'S. The Des Moines River reservoirs also attract GULLS, and this winter was no exception, with LESSER BLACK-BACKED, GLAUCOUS, and THAYER'S at Saylorville, and along with those birds, Red Rock had ICELAND and MEW GULLS.

Very unusual were February reports of a COMMON RAVEN, which was a flyover at lake Manawa on the 5th, and a SPRAGUE'S PIPIT in O'Brien County on the 22nd. EURASIAN COLLARED DOVES, first discovered in the state in August of 1997, continued to be seen at Grinnell all winter, with as many as three birds sometimes present at the country club golf course location. VARIED THRUSHES appeared in January at feeders in West Branch and near Decorah. A large flock of COMMON REDPOLLS at the Red Rock Reservoir in February contained one HOARY REDPOLL, and they were most likely the same birds originally seen there in November.

PRAIRIE FALCONS were reported throughout the winter, with one spending the season harassing pigeons at Sioux City, and others were seen briefly in Wright and Clay Counties.

There was a rash of seven SNOWY OWL sightings from December 24-26, with birds reported from Hamilton, Wright, and Scott Counties, and single observations from Cerro Gordo County on January 25, and Clay County on February 8. A FERRUGINOUS HAWK was seen nearby the SNOWY OWL in Cerro Gordo County January 25.

There had never been a mid-winter record of SUMMER TANAGER in Iowa, but in January and February, one visited the feeder of Mary Noble in Iowa City. A number of semi-hardy birds lingered into the winter with numerous reports of BROWN THRASHER, CATBIRD, and HERMIT THRUSH. BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS were present at Saylorville on December 21 and at Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids on January 2, while a DICKCISSEL was seen north of Burlington on January 18.

All four OLDSQUAW sightings came from the latter half of December on the Mississippi River at Dubuque and Ft. Madison, and at the Red Rock Reservoir and

West Okoboji Lake.

Single SAW-WHET OWLS were detected in much greater numbers than usual from almost every corner of the state throughout the season, but five birds in one small area at Amana was interesting. Similarly, TRUMPETER and MUTE SWANS were widely reported in the state throughout the winter.

Finally, the fall irruption of WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS continued into the winter with flocks widely reported over the state, especially in cemeterys and in hemlock trees. The 150 birds in the Lake View Cemetery in Dickinson County is noteworthy.