

Barbara L Wilson
Rt 1 Box 41
Hastings, Iowa 51540
Winter, 1981-1982

Farm = Wilson farm, NE Mills Co.
Iowa

Weather: December: cold, snow. January: long periods of below normal temperature. Mean temp. 10.2°F , which is 10 degrees below normal. Freezing rain January 22 made ice that stayed for weeks. Jan. 25 - more of it. Cold continues a week or so into February. Then, spring. Everything melted. Record high temperatures. in ~~late teens~~. Then mild.

Jan 23 - a deer came up to the farmyard, + stayed until about Feb. 12. Deer came to a nearby feedlot too. 150 of them! Ate silage from the pit. This is desperation, and the birds were as badly stressed.

- | | # | date | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| - Canada Goose | 3 | Feb. 21 | farm |
| ✓ Snow Goose | ± 320 | Feb 21 | " |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 3 | all winter | " all adults |
| - Rough-legged Hawk | 1 | Dec. 10 | Council Bluffs |
| Marsh Hawk | 1 | Feb. 26 | farm. Flying north along Mud Creek, a typical ^{traditional} if minor, fly way for migration. Gray bird. |
| Kestrel | 7 (maximum 4) | December | Farm to the Omaha - Strips |
| | 7 (maximum 3) | January | " " " 14 trips |
| | 6 (maximum 3) | February | " " " 15 trips |
| | the trip is 35 miles in Iowa. | | |
| Mourning Dove | singles rarely | all winter | S.W. Iowa |
| | 1 | froze to death in a road ditch | ^{under a bush} - a rare cause of death. Usually they die of other things first. |
| ✓ Common (Red-shafted) Flicker | 1 | Feb. 6 | farm |
| | 1 | Feb. 13 | " |
| ✓ Red-headed Woodpecker | - a large fall acorn crop inticed the highest winter population I've seen (in 5 winters) on the farm. All adults, + with good survival through a lousy winter | | |

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 NE Mills County, Iowa

Horned Lark

numerous and in trouble. University of Nebraska ^{at Omaha} received 15 road kills in January, 10 of these from Pottawatomie + Mills County, Iowa. The birds came to the roads when snow covered the fields - ~~went~~ and died. Then ice covered everything, including the road shoulders, + the Horned larks went elsewhere, + presumably died there.

Counts along the 35 miles from farm → Omaha

| # | Date | 23 | December 2 |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| ✓ 250 | Dec. 2 | | |
| 0 | Dec 3 | | |
| 0 | Dec 4 | | |
| 0 | Dec 8 | | |
| 0 | Dec 10 | | |
| 0 | Dec 14 | | |
| 0 | Dec 15 | | |
| 220 | Jan 6 6 | | |
| 130 | Jan 8 8 | | |
| 80 | Jan 9 9 | | |
| present | Jan 11 | | |
| 90 | Jan 12 | | 7 Feb. 11 |
| 50 | Jan 14 Jan 15-ice | | 0 Feb 15 snow going out |
| 26 | Jan 18 | | 0 Feb 17 |
| 0 | Jan 19 | | 0 Feb 18 |
| 0 | Jan 20 | | 1 Feb 22 |
| 5 | Jan. 21 Jan 22-ice | | 0 Feb 23 |
| 0 | Jan 25 | | 0 Feb 24 |
| 24 | Jan 26 | | 0 Feb 25 |
| 0 | Jan 27 | | |
| 11 | Jan 28 | | |
| 0 | Feb. 1 | | |
| 80 | Feb. 2 | | |
| 21 | Feb 3 | | |
| 16 | Feb. 4 | | |
| 39 | Feb. 8 | | |
| 115 | Feb 9 | | |

Horned larks fed in a pasture next to the house (where they never feed).
 January 23 - Feb. 5 (maximum 6).
 More evidence they were under stress!

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| | # | Date | |
|--|-----------------|--------------|---|
| ✓ Tufted Titmouse | 0 | all winter | farm |
| This species has been on a downward trend in winter. Last year I figured that if it declined further there would be none left. Well..... | | | |
| Shrike | 1 | Feb. 1 | N.E. Mills County |
| | 1 | Feb 10 | " |
| House Sparrow | very numerous | | farm. |
| Very concentrated by bad weather? | | | |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 27 | Feb 26 | farm |
| - Rusty Blackbird | 8 | " | " |
| Common Grackle | 2 | " | " |
| Brown-headed Cowbird | 2 | " | " |
| Cardinal | 12 ⁺ | late January | my feeder, farm |
| | 20 ⁺ | " " | corn crib, farm |
| Neighbors report high numbers of Cardinals at feeders, + large numbers are at two food sources at our farm. I expect that virtually all the Cardinals in N.E. Mills County were depending on humans for food after the ice storm, from feeders, feedlots, or corn cribs. | | | |
| ✓ Common Redpoll | 2 | Feb. 5 | farm |
| ✓ Vesper Sparrow | 1 | Dec. 23 | " |
| | 1 | Jan 5 | " |
| | 1 | Jan 7 | " quite likely died in the storm after this date. |
| Tree Sparrow | | | Very low numbers - Christmas bird |
| | | | Count time + all winter, especially on the farm. |
| Junco | | | Somewhat low numbers |
| Snow Bunting | 3 | Jan. 6 | Mills County |
| | 1 | Feb. 9 | " |
| ✓ Eastern Bluebird | ♂, ♀ | Feb. 27 | farm. |

Sorry about the extensive Vesper Sparrow documentation. When I saw it I remembered the "unincorporated" Lincoln's Sparrow at my feeder last winter - for the second year in a row. Take that! editors. three documentations!

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Iowa

Vesper Sparrow - 1 December 23, 1981
5 miles North, 1/2 miles west of Hastings, Iowa Mills County

Description Size: Sparrow-sized.

Face: bill tan, upper + lower mandibles about the same. Conical. White eye ring, no white eye line. Crown grayish. Cheek dark. White line outlines cheek from below + curves up a bit at back of cheek. Dark line at edge of throat. Crown maybe obscurely streaked.

Underparts: Breast streaked, streaks not heavy, they end at the belly. A couple feathers in the center of the breast are a little more heavily marked, and from some angles they look like a faint central breast spot. Belly white, flanks streaked.

Wings: brown with lighter brown wing bars.

Upperparts: hard to see. Obscurely streaked?

Tail: white outer tail feathers. Somewhat long.

Similar species: White outer tail feathers on a streaked Sparrow suggests strongly Vesper Sparrow. Lapland Longspurs have white outer tail feathers, but lack the white eye ring, are streaked on the sides but not, or only faintly, across the breast. Longspurs do not typically sit in trees. Longspurs have short tails, too.

Behavior: flushed from snow-free area on the road
~~to~~ to land in an elm tree by the house.

Flew off into soybean field

Time, light, etc. About 3 minutes beginning 10:30 am.

Sunny, few clouds in blue sky. light wind from west.

Distance about 30 feet at closest. 8.5 x binoculars.

No bird book used until after description written, as it was about 5 minutes after I saw the bird. Bird NNE of me. In ~~the~~ Elm tree by house as I stood by mailbox.

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Rt 1 Box 41

Hastings Iowa 51540

Vesper Sparrow - 1 January 5, 1982
5 miles north + 1½ miles west of Hastings, Mills County, Iowa

Description:

Large, plump sparrow. Brown. Breast darker than belly + perhaps streaked. White outer tail feathers.

Behavior:

Feeding in feedlot + manure piles + other stuff sticking out of snow.

Similar species:

A good-size brown sparrow with white outer tail feathers is likely to be a Vesper Sparrow, except in winter. I probably wouldn't call this one if I hadn't seen it better before + after.

Light, time, etc.

Bright sunlight, mid morning. The bird was often N. + NE of me but circled around. ~~3'~~^{3'} at closest, no binoculars.

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Vesper Sparrow - 1 January 7, 1982
5 miles North, 1½ miles west of Hastings, Iowa. Mills Co.

Description.

Size: Sparrow-sized + distinctly larger than a Junco.

Face: Head grayish. White eye ring. White ~~of~~ outline below + behind cheek. Bill conical, yellowish + not bright.

Underparts: Breast streaked, with a faint central spot. Flanks streaked.

Above: grayish brown

Tail: white outer tail feathers

Behavior

Flew across a field + landed on the road. Flew down to feed on the road with Juncos. Dog flushed them, ~~and~~ and the Sparrow flew into the tree while the Juncos flew into a field. They all flew back to the road.

Similar species: White outer tail feathers + face pattern = Vesper sparrow

Light, time, etc.: About 3 minutes, about 10:33am. Written about 10:45. Sunny, clear sky. Cold (~~at~~ about zero).

Light wind from south. Closest about 50 feet. 8.5 binoculars.

No books. Bird N. of me.

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