

up to 2/15; updated in  
~~201~~ Black

Holm

WINTER 1977-78

The species marked with \* are on the National Audubon Blue List (Am. Birds 30: 1031, 1976), the Iowa Blue List (I.B.L. 45:95, 1975) and-or on Dean Roosa's list of endangered, threatened or declining species in Iowa (I.B.L. 46:40, 1976).

General Comments. Because of the early deadline, the winter has to be described while it is far from over. December temperatures were a little below average, and snowfall slightly above. January was in the mold of last year's, although not quite so extreme. Temperatures averaged 12°F below normal, and snowfall was less than in a typical January, but more disruptive than figures in inches would indicate, because it was, in many places, whipped into deep drifts by the repeated blasts from the Arctic Circle. What has passed of February thus far represents no departure from the January pattern. It is gratifying that numerous reports were received from n.w. Iowa, usually neglected, and more than the standard number from s. counties. On the other hand, some areas generally well covered failed to report by February 15, a deadline I had to adhere to strictly because of the logistics of preparation and publication of this summary. Late arrival of the December issue and fickleness of the postal service may have caught faithful contributors in a squeeze. My apologies to them, and my assurances that observations of regional interest will be passed on to Am. Birds even if they reached me late. This report should be read in conjunction with Dr. W. Ross Silcock's excellent summary of the Christmas Bird Counts, since I shall try to avoid all unnecessary duplication. The leitmotif of the season was, as anticipated, an influx of some northern finch species, with Pine Grosbeak, Com. Redpoll, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting in the limelight, as well as Hoary Redpoll added to the Iowa list.

99.  
80 F  
Below  
Normal

Abbreviations used. CBC = Christmas Bird Count; CoR = Coralville Reservoir and Refuge; HHP = Hickory Hill Park, Iowa City; YRF = Yellow River Forest.

Grebes through Ducks. A Pied-billed Grebe below the Coralville Dam was seen on December 24 and February 7 (NiH). On December 16, a Great Blue Heron was observed near I-29 (IG); on January 29, another occurred below the Saylorville Dam (TK, TSh, NiH). An imm. Mute Swan was seen flying near Bettendorf on December 3-4 (PP).

Kim Eckers thinks, from the description, that it was a Whistling!

A longer note discusses the imm. swan sp., possibly a Trumpeter, encountered on December 18 on the Shenandoah CBC (RS). Flocks of 20-50 Canada Geese in the Davenport area in early December could have been late migrants <sup>(PP)</sup>. A large flock (est. 2-400) flying over Iowa City on January 13 (RD) is harder to explain. Snow Geese were abundant at Riverton (20,000, December 12; RP; still 900, January 7, RS). The singleton at the CoR which added a new species to the Iowa City CBC list was still around on December 18 (RD). As usual, Mallards were the most common wintering ducks, with small numbers occurring all over the state. At Riverton, there were 93,000 on December 12; several hundred stayed near the Saylorville Dam (DM); about 250 on the Mississippi at Davenport were average (PP). Black Ducks were seen on the Mississippi in the n.e. (15 at the Lansing power plant January 2-22, JS) and at Davenport (6-8, PP). A Gadwall was at Riverton on December 12 (RP), a Com. Pintail on the Cherokee River on December 18 (DB), and an Am. Wigeon at Riverton (December 12, RP). In early December, a couple of Wood Ducks were encountered in Dubuque (GC) and one near Davenport (PP). A Redhead was reported from Riverton (December 10, RS). Single male Ring-necked Ducks were seen at Riverton, January 7 (RS) and below the Coralville Dam January 21-22 (NiH). The count of Com. Goldeneyes (75-100) and Com. Mergansers on the Mississippi in the Davenport area was average (PP).

Raptors through Turkeys. A N. Goshawk was briefly seen (January 22) on a farm near Oxford, Johnson Co., where one has resided during some recent winters (EF). There were scattered reports of \*Sharp-shinned Hawks: one near Camanche, January 22 (PP), one in a pine grove w. of Iowa City, January 14 and February 4 (MN et al., TK, TSh), singles December 28-29 in Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties (DK), and one, very conveniently, under my window on January 10. \*Cooper's Hawks were just about as common, all singles: January 3 at Hamburg (IG); at Gene Armstrong's feeder (fide WB); s.w. of New Albin, December 24 (JS); an adult (January 31) and an imm. (February 8) near Stephens Forest, Lucas Co. (G-LC). The consensus is that Red-tailed Hawks were present in good numbers. \*Red-shouldered Hawks were also found: one on December 19 on the Alleman CBC was the first seen in that area by Mosman; a single bird may have been responsible for several sightings on CBCs along the Mississippi (PP). A \*Swainson's Hawk was reported from Hamburg, January 18 (IG). The problems of winter sightings of this species are discussed in Silcock's CBC summary. There is general agreement that Rough-legged Hawks were present in above-average numbers, as far s. as the Shenandoah (RP)-Seymour (ChS)-Burlington (C-JF) line. Two adult Golden Eagles were reported from Allamakee Co., January 22 (JSc) and 29 (DK). The former puzzled Schaufenbuel by feeding on a

Poor description

total: 5

total: 6

+1 Dec 28 Pella (JSt)

uncomb. graded, very dubious

date?

documentation promised (but not yet received) → 2/19 n.w. of CoR MN (Cabalut) etc.

Long-eared Owl (prey? carrion?). Bald Eagles moved to open water as the rivers and lakes froze over: contraction of suitable feeding areas produced locally spectacular numbers, like the 64 adults, 85 imm. counted at Princeton-Camanche on December 3 (PP) (see also the CBCs). Few \*N. Harriers were seen after the CBCs: they stayed in the Elkhart area (DM); at Sidney, January 10, Hamburg, January 20 (IG) and the CoR January 2, singles were seen. A \*Merlin seen on February 7<sup>4</sup> miles n. of Calamus (Bob Bryant fide PP) awaits documentation. Reports of wintering \*Am. Kestrels have come from all over the state, and indicate that their numbers in Iowa were at least average. Little was said about Com. Bobwhites (none outside the CBCs, PP), which could be bad news; among the other gallinaceous birds, Ring-necked Pheasants seem to be doing well, even in the n.w., where they are still recovering from the decimation of 1975, and the numbers of Gray Partridges in the Cherokee area are increasing every year (DB). Four Wild Turkeys reported from the New Albin area in the n.e. (December 24, DK, JS) are overshadowed by the 350-400 in Stephens St. Forest (G-LC), in s. Iowa.

not yet doc.

very well (JV)

Sandpipers through Owls. A leftover from the fall report must be included: an Am. Woodcock with icicles hanging from his feathers was seen on November 27 in Seymour (ChS). Single Com. Snipes were seen near Alburnett, Linn Co., January 7 (LS) and 15 (MN) (the same bird?), and at the edge of Bettendorf, February 12 (PP). Gulls were few after January 1 on the Mississippi, mostly (90%+) Herrings (PP). In view of the cold weather, widespread wintering of Mourning Doves was surprising: flocks of 45 (January 7, Fremont Co. RS) and 24 (February 4, w. Johnson Co., TK, NiH, TSh) were the largest congregations. Com. Screech Owls were considered hard to find by several correspondents. They tend to be reticent in cold weather, but they may have also had problems finding food. One capturing a Eur. Starling in bright sunshine on February 1 (JV) was certainly not behaving typically. In contrast, Great Horned Owls were seen by many, and thought to be numerous. Long-eared Owls were apparently scarce and unevenly distributed (13 of 25 on Iowa CBCs on the Iowa City count!): 4 near the CoR, 12/17 and, 1/14 <sup>and February 18</sup> (MN), and 2 in the Davenport area (PP). Reports of \*Short-eared Owls came from widely scattered localities, without a clear geographic pattern (no more than 4 in any one place). There were these reports of Saw-whet Owls: 2 separate birds in the general area of the CoR, January 21 (LS) and 28 (RT), 1 on December 24 in Petersen's yard, and one in residence e. of Ottumwa (NeH).

+1 w. Snow Co. 2/25 (JV)

Snowy Owls 1 seen miles s. of Knoxville Feb. 5. fide GB; 6 more reported to GB, n.w. Iowa (Calamus? ...)

Kingfishers through Creepers. There were more reports of wintering Belted Kingfishers than last year; for example, counts average to above in Petersen's territory, and 4 in n.e. counties December 24 - January 15 (JS). If this is a trend, it is welcome, since this species has caused some concern. Pileated Woodpeckers were recorded from unusual places, in addition to known haunts such as the woods s. of the Coralville Dam (January 7, TK): 2 in the Amana Woods, January 7 (TK), 1 w. of the CoR along the Iowa River (MN et al., January 14), one near Hills, February 10 (RD, MN), and another s.e. of Cedar Rapids (LS). Throughout the state, \*Red-headed Woodpeckers were scarce or absent, with the n.e. counties the surprising exception (7 on February 11 in Auburn Township, Fayette Co., JS). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a regular at the feeder after the CBC (PP). Horned Larks were much in evidence whenever snow fell, with 800 counted on a trip from Davenport to Decorah, February 3 (PP). There were comments on the sparsity of Am. Crows in the e. away from the Mississippi (PP) and at Marble Rock (PK). A most urgent note on the need to monitor the \*Tufted Titmouse, scarce this winter in n.e. Iowa, was sounded (JS). Although Red-breasted Nuthatches invaded parts s. of Iowa this winter, more were seen here than in most years: 5 at various Des Moines feeders (WB), one on January 29 at the State Nursery, Ames (H-LZ), 2 regular at the feeder (PP), and one each in Cherokee, December 17 (DB), Cedar Rapids, January 8 (LS) and Marble Rock (PK). Brown Creepers were most numerous in the n.e. (JS).

Wrens through Blackbirds. Despite 43 ½ hours of field work in the Crow Creek drainage area (Davenport) since January 1, no Winter Wren was found (PP). This is not a winter to favor Carolina Wrens: nevertheless, one was heard 4 times since January 22 (TK), another on January 17 (TSt), and 2 more throughout January (Knights fide MN) in residential neighborhoods of Iowa City (but none on the Iowa side of the Mississippi around Davenport, PP). A N. Mockingbird wintered in Des Moines, as did a Brown Thrasher (at Mrs. Warters' feeder) (WB). Am. Robins braving the winter were perhaps more foolhardy than half-hardy. Nevertheless, they occurred in remarkably many places, including the uninviting n.e. corner of the state (4 on January 19, JS), and were "abundant" at Riverton in the s.w. corner (RP), where indeed over 200 were counted on January 7 (RS). Flocks of 15 (February 11) w. of Iowa City <sup>(NiH)</sup> and 25 in Ottumwa <sup>(February 12,</sup> Charles and Darlene Ayres fide NeH) may have been early migrants. E. Bluebirds in the deep-freeze of Allamakee Co. (one each on December 29, DK and January 15, JS) were astonishing. A small group (4-5) wintered in the

Varied Thrush, Long Groove  
12/25? - 2/17  
Paul Fexleman doc

"hundreds" Jan. 23  
Turin, Monona Co. (s. Ia.)  
fide 9B

more hospitable climate of Lucas Co. (G-LC), but even the one in Fremont Co. on January 14 was viewed with surprise (RS). A Townsend's Solitaire n.e. of Decorah was seen on December 23 (DK) and January 15 (DK, JS, admirably documented by the latter). Golden-crowned Kinglets were down in the Davenport area (PP), but a few were regular at Lock and Dam 9 and YRF (JS). Single Bohemian Waxwings, in the company of Cedars, were seen in HHP, January 13, and from my front door, January 28 (NiH). ^ Up to 50 Cedar Waxwings were regular in HHP through the period and 25+ from January 4 on in Cherokee (DB); other flocks seen were in St. Lucas (15, February 11, JS), Marble Rock (50, same day, PK) and Ottumwa (38, February 12, C. Ayers fide NeH). This may have been a bit of an echo year for N. Shrikes: a total of 9 from the n.e. (JS, DK), one on the Cedar Rapids CBC, an imm. seen on February 5 s. of Spencer, and well described (DB), one repeatedly seen w. of Iowa City (December 24 - February 26, TK, NiH), and one at Dean Mosman's feeder add up to an above-average count. \*Loggerhead Shrikes were regular in that "pocket" n. of Des Moines (DM) and occasional in Fremont Co. (RP, RS); 5 were seen in Lucas Co. (G-LC). Koenig suggests that N. Shrikes are not uncommon n. of the 42nd parallel, and don't require documentation if observed there. Such a sharp dividing line is not reliable when even moderate incursions occur: for the populous central sector of the state, it is safer to report shrike sp. unless details are observed. Meadowlarks were down, even when snow drove them to the roadsides (PP). Along a Breeding Bird Survey route (W. Liberty to Kalona), 12 meadowlarks sp. were counted on February 10 (MN, RD). All meadowlarks seen in n.e. Iowa were carefully examined and found to be W. (JS). ^ The largest group of Red-winged Blackbirds entirely inside Iowa consisted of 150 individuals (CoR, January 29, MN). A Rusty Blackbird seen by A. J. Boersma in Sioux Center on January 27 (fide JV) was considered unusual there; 5 were at Harpers Ferry on February 5 (DK). ^ There were only isolated reports of Com. Grackles inside Iowa, but there was steady traffic from a large roost by Cordova, Ill. across the river (PP). The highest count of Brown-headed Cowbirds in downtown Iowa City was 35 on January 11 (RD).

doc.

doc.

^ + 8 early  
Febr.  
Madison  
Co. fide  
JB; obs.  
total: x13  
13 (see letter)

Yellow-headed  
^ B.B. 2/26  
Council Bluffs, JB  
doc.

^ Early migrants near Iowa City Febr. 25 (MN)

Finches, Sparrows. Cardinals were scarce in Sioux Center (JV). Evening Grosbeaks staged a massive invasion, reaching s.c. Texas. Only in some places in Iowa did they linger: 5-7 daily at Ruth Phipps' feeder, one for 3 weeks until January 4 (DM), and 4-12 at Davenport area feeders (PP). Good numbers, possibly birds in transit, were recorded in YRF (December 2, 24 on December 24, DK, JS). Late observations (2 on February 10 at Seymour, ChS, 1 at Central City, February 11, LS) may signal the start of a retreat to the n. Purple Finches were widely seen, but not in large

also JB

not an isolated finding:  
others in n. Iowa agree, fide JB

*(Des Moines)*

numbers, and with apparent hiatuses. The highest count seems to have been about 30 in HHP in mid-January (MN). One of the glories of the season was an invasion of Pine Grosbeaks. At least 14 were seen January 7 - February 10 at St. Lucas and W. Union (JS), 10 on December 22 in YRF (DK), 2 e. of Larabee (MB), one at a Des Moines feeder in mid-January (fide RM), 3 in Glendale Cemetery, January 24 (RM, WB et al.; documented), and 5 in HHP and the adjacent cemeteries January 12-February 11 (RD, TK, TSt, TSh; documented), for a new area record. The birds seen on the CBC in Cedar Rapids were probably those that kept showing up on January 27 in a yard not far from Cedar Memorial Cemetery (EO) with such regularity that they could be viewed by virtually all active birders in Cedar Rapids and 2 from Iowa City (TSh, NiH) (up to 6 birds). With a slight departure from the checklist order, let me write first about Com. Redpolls. Having appeared in the n.e. in November, they swept across the state, reaching Shenandoah in mid-January (IG, RP). There were a few flocks of 75-100 birds in weedy fields (w. of Des Moines, WB; CoR, MN, RD), but for the most part the birds came to feeders in towns, in moderate numbers. In Davenport, 59 were banded January 18-February 1 (PP). A relatively large urban group was 50 in HHP and nearby cemeteries on February 5 (RD). Strangely, Com. Redpolls did not appear in n.w. Iowa (Cherokee, Spencer) until well into February (DB, CoS). Perhaps because of the affinity of the redpolls for feeders, the stage was set for the addition of Hoary Redpoll to the state list. See the longer note on the sighting of a female in Marion on January 22 (RT), subsequent confirmation by others, netting and photography. As of February 15, this bird has been seen by numerous observers from the Cedar Rapids area (Weir Nelson, LS), Iowa City (TK, TSh, NiH) and Davenport (PP). Its presence lends plausibility to an earlier sighting under much less favorable conditions (S-SB, see longer note) and several subsequent ones (1 from 20 yards with a 20x scope in Pocahontas Co., February 5, and 2-5 with white rumps or light appearance in a flock of some 80 Com. Redpolls, February 12, Buffalo Creek Conservation Area) (RC). More convincing is a second documented sight record at a feeder, of a male (February 12, PP). Even though the Hoary Redpoll is now a solid addition to the Iowa list, only extremely detailed observations will be considered corroborated, for I.B.L. or Am. Birds! Pine Siskins were also common in the s. part of the state, all the way to Hamburg (IG) and Seymour (ChS). Petersen banded 152 January 18 - February 1. But few were left in the n.e. (5 on December 18, JS). While some northern finches brought glamour to an otherwise tiresome Iowa winter, Red Crossbills were not reported at all. White-winged Crossbills were "common" in the n.e. in early December, but not thereafter (DK) (one on December 24 at YRF, JS); 4 were at Eagle Point in Clinton on December 3, and one at the feeder February 6 (PP);

*2 doc. (Des Moines, Ia. City)*

*Total: 41 or more (+2 in n.e. Iowa, reported 2/17)*

*+ ..... from 6 Counties file GB Total:*

*new state record doc. sent earlier photos should be forthcoming*

*rec'd. bl. & wh. 2/17 - no doubt (photo PP)*

*not doc. or not well enough doc.*

*Re Redpolls, Siskins: see PPs note of banding 1/18-2/26*

+ reports from 9 counties pde 9B

a single female has been a regular at a Cedar Rapids feeder since December 28 (LS). A Rufous-sided Towhee at Hamburg on January 22 was, atypically, of the e. race; later, a member of the w. race appeared (IG). "Many" Harris' Sparrows were at Riverton on January 22 (RP); the 70+ banded at Elkhart are even more remarkable (DM); singletons strayed e. as far as Iowa City (James Fuller feeder, January 14, fide MN) and Cedar Rapids (since January 1, LS). White-crowned Sparrows were also common in the s.w. (RP), with 75 at Riverton on January 7 (RS). White-throated Sparrows away from feeders were reported from the Amana Woods (January 7, TK) and w. of Iowa City (January 29, RD). Two at Riverton (January 7, RS) were considered quite unusual. Fox Sparrows (singles) were found in the Amana Woods (December 31, TK) and at a feeder in Hamburg (January 24, IG). Swamp Sparrows that evidently survived the winter were seen on January 14 (6 at Forney's L., RS) and February 12 (one at Bettendorf, PP). Lapland Longspurs were irregularly common along roadsides, as far s. as Burlington (C-JF); 200 were counted on a trip from Davenport to Decorah, February 3 (PP). Almost unanimously, our correspondents reported abundant Snow Buntings, with penetration to the s. edge of the state, but many left for the n.e. (410 by actual count at Protivin on January 21, JS). The Davenport to Decorah count yielded 800-1000 individuals (PP).

Early migrant Harris' and wh. cr. seen near Iowa City Febr. 25 (TK)

Erratum. Dean Mosman's initials were used in the Fall Report, but his name was inadvertently omitted from the credits.

Contributors. Dick Bierman, Cherokee; \*1 Marion Brewer, Cherokee; Woodward Brown, Des Moines; Sue and Stuart Burns, Des Moines; Marie Carlson, Boone; Gay and Lloyd Crim, Lucas; George Crossley, Dubuque; Raymond Cummins, Pocahontas; Rich De Coster, Iowa City; G. Edgar Folk, Jr., Iowa City; Charles and Jane Fuller, Burlington; Ione Getscher, Hamburg; \*2 Nicholas Halmi (NiH), Iowa City; Nelson Hoskins (NeH), Ottumwa; Thomas Kent, Iowa City; Pearl Knoop, Marble Rock; Darwin Koenig, Decorah; Richard Mooney, Des Moines; Dean Mosman, Elkhart; Mike Newlon, Iowa City; Emma Lou Oldenburger, Cedar Rapids; Peter Petersen, Davenport; Ruth Phipps, Shenandoah; Joe Schaufenbuel, St. Lucas; Conrad Schlemmer (CoS), Spencer; Charlotte Scott, Seymour; Lillian Serbousek, Cedar Rapids; Thomas Shires (TSh), Iowa City; W. Ross Silcock, Malvern; \*3 Tom Staudt (TSt), Iowa City; Fred Thompson, Marion; John Van Dyk, Sioux Center; Hank and Linda Zaletel, Ames. N. S. HALMI, Rte. 6, IOWA CITY, IA 52240.

Reminder. Please send your reports for the Spring Season as soon as possible after its end (May 31), and certainly no later than June 5.

\*1 add: Gladys Black, Pleasantville } case reports with  
 \*3 add: Jon Stravers, Pella (JSt) } some useful ideas  
 \*2 add: Janet Greer, Council Bluffs

Double Space