

Van Dyke

Fall Report

Weather for the period:

Unusually warm and stable weather predominated until November 11. This undoubtedly accounts for some of the late dates listed below. On November 11 the weather pattern changed. Since that date n.w. Iowa has been subjected to rapidly moving weather systems, creating turbulent conditions. Precipitation has been light. Most of the fall was exceptionally dry, dropping the annual rainfall to nearly 2" behind normal. About $\frac{1}{2}$ " snow fell on November 11 and another $3\frac{1}{2}$ " on November 16. A few light flurries have occurred since then, adding no measurable precipitation or accumulation. On the whole, during November cold northern high pressure systems kept the moisture-bearing south-western low pressure systems well to the south of us. Right now there is less than 1" snow cover in Sioux Co. As the weather was above normal before November 11, so it has been below normal since that time. Coldest temperature to date: -3 degrees F. on November 28.

Hérons through Geese:

- An immature Black-crowned Night Heron was present on the extraordinary late dates of November 2 and 3, along a creek next to the Sandy Hollow golf course just east of Sioux Center. According to Brown (Annotated List, 1971) the latest fall date for this species is October 25 (with one exception).
- Geese were migrating in rather small flocks. Many were still coming over by the end of November.

Diurnal Raptors:

- On October 7 I observed three Sharp-shinned Hawks migrating with Red-tailed Hawks through western Sioux Co.
- Cooper's Hawk: none observed.
- Red-tailed Hawks were more plentiful than usual this fall. I cannot recall a season when they were more abundant than this fall.
- A Swainson's Hawk was reported by Gordon Brand, a biology professor at Dordt College. Gordon saw the bird on September 28 in western Sioux Co. The dark breast-band was distinctive, he reported.
- I observed the first Rough-legged Hawk on November 18. Many have been observed since then. They appear to be making a good showing. I see them every time I go out of town.
- N. Harriers were migrating in normal numbers.
- Merlin: One was closely and carefully observed by Gordon Brand on

September 28. Gordon found the bird in the vicinity of Oak Grove State Park in western Sioux Co. He came within 25 feet of the bird, then followed it for half an hour. Gordon -- a good birder -- reported all the field marks: gray back, gray banded tail, falcon-like pointed wings, and vertically streaked breast. Some years ago I myself saw a Merlin at Oak Grove Park.

- Am. Kestrel was present in goodly numbers throughout the period, right up to the end of November. If n.w. Iowa were the sole criterion, there would seem to be little reason for this species to be blue-listed.

Quail through Snipe:

- Bob-white: I strongly suspect that their numbers are declining. I used to see them much more frequently in western Sioux Co. than I do now.
- Ring-necked Pheasant: doing quite well.
- Hungarian Partridge: doing well.
- Wild Turkey: Mr. A.J. Boersma reported seeing two of them in a cornfield on August 27 south-west of Inwood. A number of them occur in extreme western Sioux and Lyon Cos. in wooded areas along the Big Sioux River, and are frequently seen by some of the farmers in the area. Apparently they originate from the self-sustaining colony of Wild Turkeys in Newton Hills, South Dakota, just across the Big Sioux River.
- Common Snipe were still commonly present in the early part of November.

Nighthawk through Woodpeckers:

- Common Nighthawks staged a good fall migration. They came across Sioux Center in numbers in late September and early October.
- The Red-bellied Woodpecker appears to be increasing in n.w. Iowa as I now see it in various places where it was formerly absent.
- Hairy Woodpecker: quite common. Its status in this part of Iowa has remained unchanged over the past years.
- Downy Woodpecker: appears to be more plentiful than ever.

Larks through Starling:

- Horned Lark: For some reason their numbers are down. With fields snow-covered one would normally expect to see them in flocks along roads. Flocks, however, are fewer, and unusually small.
- Blue Jays seem to be increasing in numbers. On birding trips we count more of them than we did formerly.

- Red-breasted Nuthatches are making a good showing. Gordon Brand reported seeing them several times in western Sioux Co., and on November 24 I saw three of them (with Golden-crowned Kinglets) in Sheldon (extreme western O'Brien Co.).
- A flock of about a dozen Golden-crowned Kinglets was present at Sheldon on November 24. The species remains scarce, however.
- We observed a Loggerhead Shrike on November 25 in western Sioux Co. The bird allowed an approach close enough to make a positive identification. No Northern Shrikes as yet.
- The numbers of Eur. Starlings appears to be up. On birding trips in this area we now count more of them than we used to do.

Warblers:

- The warbler migration was, on the whole, quite unspectacular if not downright inconspicuous. No doubt the long period of warm weather allowed them to move south at a leisurely and individualistic pace.
- An Orange-crowned Warbler appeared in the feeder area of our yard in the afternoon of November 23 (Thanksgiving Day). It had been very cold for more than a week (temperatures down to 5 above on November 20 and 21). We observed it for about 5 minutes. Brown says that with one exception October 25 is its latest fall date.

Blackbirds through Sparrows:

- Blackbirds lingered much longer than normal, with good-sized flocks still present by the end of November. Grackles, too, are still moving about in this area, whereas normally at this time in late November and early December they are exceedingly scarce if not absent altogether.
- Cardinals seem to be doing better than they were last winter. Several are present again at their favorite haunts in western Sioux Co. However, in numbers they are still not where they used to be. Apparently the recent cold winters have taken their toll.
- A single female Evening Grosbeak was present in the feeder area of our yard from November 20 until November 26.
- The sparrow migration this fall was spectacular. In early October a number of bushy areas in Sioux Co. were alive with them. On October 7 I observed uncommonly large flocks of White-throated and Lincoln's Sparrows in western Sioux Co., as well as goodly numbers of Savannah, Vesper, and Harris' Sparrows. Many Harris' Sparrows are still present.
- By November 28 good-sized flocks of Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings were present in Sioux Co, often mixed together or with smaller numbers of Horned Larks.

only one
to find
this!

Dr. John Van Dyk
736 E. 1st St.
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250