

Van Dyke

Spring Report

Note: I am submitting this report a bit early, as we are leaving Iowa tomorrow. I will be doing research at Harvard for the next two and half months, so I will not be able to send a summer report. We will be back in Sioux Center in time to begin fall observations.

Weather for the period: Winter lingered long. Temperatures remained below normal for the entire period. March was cold (on March 15 the temperature dropped to 7 below zero). The thermometer climbed to 40 for the first time this year on March 2, and did not rise to 50 until March 27. On March 3 a severe blizzard hit the area; 10 inches of snow fell and was blown into huge drifts. Early April saw some record low temperatures. Precipitation throughout the period was much above normal, causing severe flooding in many parts of N.W. Iowa and significantly delayed spring planting. Heavy rains and flooding in the second week of May may have hurt ground-nesting birds.

Grebes through Herons

- ? how can he tell
- Eared Grebe: Observed one male in western Sioux County on May 12.
 - Western Grebe: Mike Van Dyk and Murray Feenstra, two Dordt College students and avid birders, reported observing one individual on a large (gravel pit) pond in western Sioux Co. on May 8.
 - Am. White Pelican: fine migration in Sioux Co. On April 14 several flocks, each numbering 150-200 individuals, were heading north in the western part of the county. Similar large-sized flocks were reported by Charlie Claus on April 30. An unusual sight: a single Pelican carried across Sioux Center in a blustery north wind on May 18. The bird seemed to be both struggling and lost!
 - Double-crested Cormorant: Exceptionally abundant this spring. They were commonly observed from April 7 till the end of May. On April 14 I counted 105 of these birds in a small pond just inside the Iowa border across from Hudson, S.D.
 - Great Blue Heron: first observed on March 27, but they appear somewhat scarce.
 - Egret: on May 7 I observed an egret flying over Sioux Center. I did not have binoculars with me; however, the bird looked too small to be a Great Egret, and its trailing legs seemed yellowish; it may have been a Cattle Egret, but I cannot be absolutely certain.
 - Black-crowned Night Heron: moving in above average numbers.

Geese and Ducks

- Geese: good migration. The first flocks appeared on March 16. The majority were Snow Geese. A small flock of 12 White-fronted Geese appeared on a pond in western Sioux Co. On the same pond a single Snow Goose (blue morph) was present on May 14. ← Apr 7

- Ducks: excellent duck migration, helped along by extensive flooded areas. Canvasback and Redhead were unusually plentiful. Wood Ducks are also exceptionally plentiful. A female Red-breasted Merganser was present in western Sioux Co. on May 9.

Hawks and Gallinaceous Birds

- N. Harrier: the migration was normal
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: observed only one, on March 24.
- Cooper's Hawk: none observed.
- Red-tailed Hawk: splendid migration, with large numbers moving through in the latter half of March.
- Broad-winged Hawk: Very fine migration during the first week of May. On May 1 there were 16 of them flocked together in a grove along the east side of Sioux Center. People were calling me up inquiring about "all them hawks."
- Rough-legged Hawk: they were present until the end of February.
- details?* - Merlin: observed one on March 24. Two were seen across the Big Sioux River in South Dakota about the same time.
- Am. Kestrel: abundant during the period from March 24 to April 20. On April 14 there was one on nearly every third telephone pole along various roads in Sioux Co.
- Bobwhite: I was pleased to read in a recent issue of IBL that the Bobwhite is doing well south of here. In our area, however, they continue to do lousy. They are scarce or absent where formerly they were common. A number of local people have commented, too, on hearing the familiar call no longer.
- Ring-necked Pheasant: their numbers seem to be down somewhat.
- Gray Partridge: doing fine.

Shorebirds through Terns

- Shorebirds: a disappointing migration, probably because the birds were much more widely scattered through the flooded areas. There were the usual numbers of Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpipers, and peeps. Dunlin were unusually common.
- Herring Gulls were present on April 7. They are uncommon here, at least, in Sioux Co.
- Large numbers of Ring-billed Gulls and Franklin's Gulls were in evidence, especially in the first half of the period.
- Both Forster's Tern and Black Tern were unusually common this spring.

Owls through Woodpeckers

- Long-eared Owl: one was observed in Oak Grove Park on March 31.
- Red-headed Woodpecker: returned in plentiful numbers.
- Hairy Woodpecker: doing fine, and present in good numbers.

Flycatchers through Shrikes

- Great Crested Flycatcher: seems scarce this spring.
- Say's Phoebe: one observed on May 7. See attached documentation.
- Empidonax: not as spectacular a migration as last year, but quite good. Many Least Flycatchers were singing (?) in Oak Grove Park in latter half of May.
- Swallows: all species back in goodly numbers; no Cliff Swallows observed.
- House Wren: superabundant!
- Brown Thrasher & Gray Catbird: both species arrived in large numbers.
- Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrush: their migration was nothing less than spectacular! They were all over. They were a little later than normal in arriving, but once they came they came in numbers larger than I ever saw before.
- Veery: also good migration.
- Eastern Bluebird: their numbers are up a bit over the last few years. I observed the first one on March 24.
- Mountain Bluebird: observed on April 7. See enclosed documentation.
- Loggerhead Shrike: one seen on April 8.

Vireos and Warblers

- compared to last year, the migration was much improved. Most species came later than normal but in larger numbers.
- Bell's Vireo: a male was singing in Oak Grove Park on May 24.
- *not elsewhere* Philadelphia Vireo: migrated in noticeably larger numbers.
- Black + White Warbler: numbers were definitely up
- Tennessee Warbler: very late, not until third week of May, but then in goodly numbers.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler: superabundant on May 7.
- Yellow Warbler: present in normal numbers. To me they do not seem to be in any kind of trouble.
- Blackburnian Warbler: observed again, confirming that they are regular this far west.
- Palm Warbler: observed 2 on May 12. I think they are quite uncommon this far West.
- Wilson's Warbler: present in surprisingly large numbers. We observed dozens of them on May 14. It is my judgment that the Wilson's, like the Blackburnian Warbler, is quite regular in this part of Iowa.

Blackbirds through Sparrows

- Red-winged Blackbird: arrived very late. They were not here until late March.
- Orchard Oriole: several observed on May 13 and May 18 in western Sioux County. A pair present on May 18.
- Brewer's Blackbird: a small number were present in western Sioux Co. on April 14.
- Common Grackle: noticeably late arrival.
- N. Cardinal: doing splendidly. Many males singing in many parts of western Sioux Co.
- Dickcissel: one of the few to arrive ahead of their usual time.
- Pine Siskin: a small flock of about half a dozen was present in Sioux Center on May 15, feeding in Elm trees.
- Vesper Sparrow: noticeably late in arriving.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: normally this bird is common here in migration; this time it was close to abundant! Their distinctive buzzing song could be heard in many localities in Sioux Co. At least a dozen were singing in Oak Grove Park on May 6. There were 3 in our backyard on May 15.
- White-crowned Sparrow: present in small numbers.
- Lapland Longspur: on March 24 huge flocks, numbering in the hundreds were migrating northward about 6 miles west of Sioux Center. Many were in splendid breeding plumage.
- Snow Bunting: remained until end of February.

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