

Spring 1986 Report

Weather for the period:

March: March came in like a lamb, with sunny and mild conditions, temperatures in the low 50's. On March 7 a quick arctic high dropped the early morning temperature to 1 above zero. Warm weather arrived on March 27-29, with temperatures into the lower 80's.

April: The first two weeks of April were warm and dry. A sudden blizzard hit on April 14: temperatures dropped to 23 degrees, and we received an inch of snow. But spring quickly returned. The remainder of April was cool and rather wet. Tornadoes were in the area on April 26 (creating much damage, e.g, at Rock Rapids and killing a 4-year old girl there).

May: The beginning of May saw some unsettled weather. On May 8 a severe thunderstorm, packing winds in excess of 70 miles per hour, hit Sioux Center causing considerable damage (to bird nests as well!). The month was generally cool and dry, except for the final week when light rain fell five days in a row. Warmest day of the year, 85 degrees, occurred on May 31.

Observations --

General comment: Except as noted below, on the whole the spring migration was a ho-hum, lackluster affair. Particularly the shorebird and warbler migrations were dull. Both the numbers of species and number of individuals were down, as compared to what we experience in an average year. Generally steady weather patterns appear to have contributed to the protracted character of the migration.

- Pied-billed Grebe: first migrants appeared on April 13.
- Eared grebe: first migrant observed on April 19.
- American White Pelican: Many flocks, some of them of up to 100 individuals, filled the skies of western Sioux Co. on April 19, a beautiful sight of all these magnificent birds soaring in a blue sky. Flocks continued to migrate through the area during the remainder of April.
- Double-crested Cormorant: several individuals were in South Dakota just across the Iowa border on the early date of March 24. They were present at Rock Valley, Iowa, on March 29. Good migration in April.
- Great Blue Heron: arrived in western Sioux Co. on March 29.

- Common Egret: very much in evidence in first two weeks of April. At least three individuals were in different locations in Sioux Co.
- Greater White-fronted Goose: a flock of 25 was heading north along the western Sioux Co. border on March 28. Three individuals lingered at the lagoons (just south of Sioux Center) until May 8.
- Snow Goose: two individuals lingered near Sioux Center from April 25 to May 8.
- Green-winged Teal: appeared to be quite scarce this spring.
- Blue-winged Teal: some rather early migrants were present on March 26.
- Northern Shoveler: present in goodly numbers throughout Sioux Co. by March 25.
- Gadwall: many individuals present in Sioux Co. by March 25.
- Canvasback: excellent migration during last week of March.
- Redhead: excellent migration during last week of March.
- Ring-necked Duck: normal migration, beginning mid-March.
- Lesser Scaup: normal migration beginning mid-March.
- Bufflehead: according to Dinsmore e.a., this species is supposed to be an uncommon migrant. But here in northwest Iowa it surely is a common migrant. Many individuals came through the area in second half of March.
- Common Merganser: arrived in western Sioux Co. on March 1. Excellent migration, with many in evidence throughout March.
- Ruddy Duck: migrants arrived on March 26.
- Turkey Vulture: this species is never common in extreme northwest Iowa. One was present in western Sioux Co. on May 2, another over Sioux Center on May 10.
- Osprey: one individual was in the Hawarden area on May 2.
- Northern Harrier: moderate to good migration in last week of March.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: one was in Sioux Center on April 25.
- Cooper's Hawk: one was observed in Orange City on April 24.

- Broad-winged Hawk: rather poor migration, beginning on April 24.
- Red-tailed Hawk: excellent migration in last week of March.
Dozens were present in western Sioux Co. on March 26.
- Rough-legged Hawk: a rather late migrant was present over Lake Pahoja in Lyon Co. on March 29.
- American Kestrel: Excellent migration in latter half of March.
- Wild Turkey: their numbers are increasing in Oak Grove Park, judging by the various gobblings in the area in April.
- Northern Bobwhite: several individuals were calling in western Sioux Co. on May 2 and regularly thereafter.
- Lesser Golden Plover: on April 24 Gordon Brand observed a flock of 17, west of Orange City.
- Greater Yellowlegs: made their first appearance in the area on April 19.
- Lesser Yellowlegs: appeared rather late this season, on May 2.
- Upland Sandpiper: one was near Sioux Center on May 23.
- Peeps: scarce this spring.
- Pectoral Sandpiper: first migrants arrived on May 2.
- Franklin's Gull: outstanding migration with many flocks observed in April.
- Terns: very poor showing this spring.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: one female was at an Orange City feeder May 24-27.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: this usually common migrant was not observed this spring.
- Empidonax: average migration.
- Western Kingbird: Gordon Brand observed one individual a few miles southwest of Sioux Center on May 8.
- Purple Martin: two "scouting" individuals were reported in Sioux Center on March 28. Mr. A. J. Boersma, who does much work providing nesting opportunities for Martins, reports that their numbers are sharply down from last year.
- Tree Swallow: arrived in Sioux Co. on March 29.

- Sedge Wren: Very much in evidence in Sioux Center outskirts. I observed one at close range in a shrubby area on the east side of Sioux Center on April 29, another one on May 13, and a third one on May 16. Gordon Brand found a pair nesting near Orange City on May 18.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: rather poor migration. This usually abundant migrant was observed only sporadically.
- Eastern Bluebird: a pair was present in a farmyard at the edge of Sioux Center on March 9. Several pairs were observed in western Sioux Co. in the last week of March. Several breeding pairs were observed in April and May.
- Veery: not observed.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: good migration, vastly outnumbering Swainson's Thrush. A late Gray-cheek was in Sioux Center on May 30.
- Hermit Thrush: moderate to poor migration in mid-April.
- American Robin: arrived early this year: the first migrant appeared in Sioux Center on March 4.
- Wood Thrush: judging by the number singing, their population in northwest Iowa has declined.
- Northern Shrike: Gordon Brand found one at Oak Grove Park on March 1.
- Loggerhead Shrike: Mr. A.J. Boersma reports seeing one on March 24 in western Sioux Co. as he was putting up bluebird nest boxes. He reported the bird as being distinctly smaller than a Robin (unlike the presumably Northern Shrike he observed last December). I myself observed a Loggerhead Shrike in western Sioux Co. on May 31.
- Vireos & Warblers: generally a poor migration. Only the following species (in very low numbers) were observed:

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| - Warbling Vireo | - Bay-breasted Warbler |
| - Philadelphia Vireo | - Blackpoll Warbler |
| - Red-eyed Vireo | - American Redstart |
| - Tennessee Warbler | - Ovenbird |
| - Orange-crowned Warbler | - Northern Waterthrush |
| - Nashville Warbler | - Mourning Warbler (on the |
| - Yellow Warbler | late date of May 30) |
| - Chestnut-sided Warbler | - Common Yellowthroat |
| - Magnolia Warbler | - Wilson's Warbler |
| - Yellow-rumped Warbler | - Canada Warbler |
- Scarlet Tanager: a pair in Sioux Center in mid-May.

- Dickcissel: arrived at the relatively early date of May 12. Once again abundant in western Sioux Co. by late May.
- American Tree Sparrow: many were singing and migrating through Sioux Co. in last week of March.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: good migration, as usual, beginning on April 19.
- Vesper Sparrow: arrived in Sioux Co. on March 29.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: doing very well with many nesting birds in various areas of Sioux Co.
- Fox Sparrow: strangely, none observed.
- White-crowned Sparrow: good migration. In the Sioux Center area they outnumbered the White-throated Sparrow.
- Harris' Sparrow: after a virtual absence this past winter singing migrants appeared in last week of March.
- Dark-eyed Junco: large numbers migrating through the area in last week of March. A few individuals were still present in the third week of April, despite the early spring weather.
- Lapland Longspur: large flocks were present in western Sioux Co. on March 1. One of the flocks contained an estimated 400+ birds, and another approximately 200 individuals.
- Bobolink: they seem to be more common than usual. E.g., in a field close to Sioux Center, where they had been completely absent for some years, three pairs are now breeding.
- Orchard Oriole: first migrants appeared on May 10.
- Purple Finch: last one was observed in Orange City on March 6.
- Common Redpoll: 5 were present in Orange City on March 5; the last individual was observed there on March 9.
- Pine Siskin: after a virtual absence this winter, individuals began to appear at feeders in Sioux Center in the last two weeks of March, and continued sporadically through April.

Note: Since I will be away from Iowa for much of the summer, Gordon Brand of Orange City will submit the summer report.

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