

Spring 1987 Report

Note: As I will be out of the country for most of the summer, I will be unable to submit an adequate summer report.

Weather for the period:

March: March came in like a lamb, with sunny and mild conditions. On February 28 the temperature was in the 70's. On March 13 it reached 67 in Sioux Center. From mid to late March there was heavy precipitation (up to 4 inches total). A ferocious spring storm hit the area on March 28. Winds up to 50 mph, temps down into the mid-teens, and four inches snow (heaviest snowfall, however, south of us).

April: Early April saw warm and sunny spring weather. Rest of April rather normal.

May: Generally warm and dry, with a number of record-setting high temperatures (in the low 90's) and below normal precipitation. During the first half of the month drought conditions began to prevail. Welcome rains arrived in the third week of May and continued off and on through the remainder of the month. Virtually no severe weather experienced. The only tornado watch posted for our area occurred on May 25.

Observations --

- Pied-billed Grebe: good migration, beginning in mid-March.
- Eared Grebe: scarce.
- American White Pelican: first migrants observed on May 9.
- Double-crested Cormorant: a flock of 6 individuals flew low over Dordt College in Sioux Center on May 14.
- Great Blue Heron: the first one observed was near Hospers, Sioux Co., on March 21.
- Great Egret: none observed.
- Cattle Egret: one individual was present in western Sioux Co. on May 1.
- Geese: flocks were much fewer and farther between than normal. Many folks around here commented on the virtual absence of geese this spring.

- Snow Goose: one individual still present on Rush Lake (Osceola Co.) on May 9.
- Green-winged Teal: the first migrants observed in Sioux Co. on March 27. Otherwise scarce.
- Blue-winged Teal: arrived early this spring in last week of March.
- Northern Shoveler: present in goodly numbers throughout Sioux Co. by March 14, somewhat earlier than usual.
- Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Lesser Scaup arrived on time in normal numbers.
- 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 beginning on March 14. One individual still present at Rush Lake (Osceola Co.) on rather late date of May 9.
- Common Merganser: normal migration, with early birds arriving on March 1 and individuals passing through into early April.
- Red-breasted Merganser: a pair was at Rock Valley on March 27.
- Ruddy Duck: a single individual (still in winter plumage) was at Rock Valley on March 27. Individuals could be seen at various places in Sioux, Lyon, and Osceola Cos. into the summer.
- Turkey Vulture: they appeared more plentiful this spring, with at least half a dozen observed in the last half of April. They are often scarce in NW Iowa.
- Osprey: none observed in Sioux Co.
- Northern Harrier: rather poor migration beginning in second week of March (first observed on March 14). Relatively few birds were observed.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: an early migrant was in Sioux Co. on March 14. Several others observed in second half of March and early April.
- Cooper's Hawk: none observed.
- Broad-winged Hawk: this usually abundant migrant was virtually absent in Sioux Co. this spring.
- Red-tailed Hawk: present in goodly numbers throughout late winter. Numbers picked up somewhat in March. A pair bred in early April at a traditional site in Oak Grove Park (western Sioux Co.).

- American Kestrel: Excellent migration beginning in first week of March. At least three nesting pairs were found in western half of Sioux Co. in late April.
- Merlin: a female was present 4 miles west of Sioux Center on March 27. See enclosed documentation for details.
- Wild Turkey: their numbers are increasing in Oak Grove Park. A flock of 5 were near a parking lot on March 14.
- Northern Bobwhite: at least five individuals were calling in western Sioux Co. on May 2.
- Sora: a crippled Sora was present at Sandy Hollow, three miles east of Sioux Center, on May 6. It appeared to have a broken leg.
- Lesser Golden Plover: good migration. Several flocks from 10-30 individuals observed in Osceola Co. on May 9 and in Sioux Co. on May 11.
- Semipalmated Plover: perhaps only an impression, but it appears to me that this species is migrating in increasing numbers through our part of Iowa. I saw about a dozen of them in western Sioux Co. on April 26, sporadically here and there in early May, and several dozen at Rush Lake (Osceola Co.) on May 9.
- Killdeer: arrived early on February 26.
- Greater Yellowlegs: first migrants arrived in Sioux Co. on March 30.
- Lesser Yellowlegs: normal migration.
- Solitary Sandpiper: good migration in spite of dry conditions. One of our commonest migrant shorebirds.
- Upland Sandpiper: first one appeared in Sioux Co. on May 7. By mid-May at least half a dozen individuals were present in the county.
- Hudsonian Godwit: a flock of about a dozen birds was present at Rush Lake (Osceola Co.) on May 16.
- Peeps: rather poor showing because of dry conditions.
- Long-billed Dowitcher: 4 individuals were present at Rush Lake (Osceola Co.) on May 9. The underparts of these birds were quite cinnamon in color with clearly barred, rather than spotted, sides of the breast.
- American Woodcock: one was in Oak Grove Park on April 10.

- Franklin's Gull: a scarce migrant this spring. A large flock of about 50 birds was present near Rock Valley on April 23.
- Terns: both Forster's Terns and Black Terns were present in normal numbers by early May.
- Black-billed Cuckoo: apparently good migration, beginning on May 30: on this day I saw three individuals just in our neighbor's yard.
- Common Nighthawk: a rather scattered migration beginning on May 12. On May 29 a nest with eggs was discovered on the roof of the student union building of Dordt College in Sioux Center.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: for a bizarre story, see enclosed documentation.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: several migrants in Sioux Center in mid-April.
- Empidonax: numbers were sharply down as compared to previous years.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: one individual was in Sioux Center on May 14, and another on the rather late date of May 30.
- Western Kingbird: none observed in western Sioux Co. (the usual pair is breeding once again at the Sioux Falls airport, just across the border in South Dakota).
- Purple Martin: doing well in Sioux Center, making good use of many martin houses in the town. Arrived on April 16, somewhat later than normal, in spite of good weather conditions.
- Tree Swallow: arrived in Sioux Co. on March 29.
- Bank Swallow: are their numbers declining in Iowa? It seems to me I used to see them much more frequently than I do now.
- Sedge Wren: none observed.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: very poor migration with numbers sharply down. At times they were even hard to find!
- Eastern Bluebird: first migrant in Sioux Co. observed on March 14. Making a very good show in NW Iowa this year, with at least half a dozen pairs breeding in western Sioux Co. Tree Swallows are becoming an interfering pest as they occupy many of the boxes intended for the Bluebirds
- Veery: none observed.

- Gray-cheeked Thrush: excellent migration in first half of May. Literally dozens were present in Oak Grove Park on May 11.
- Swainson's Thrush: excellent migration. Literally dozens present in Oak Grove Park on May 11. Some stragglers still coming through Sioux Center as late as May 28.
- Hermit Thrush: scarce. Only 2 individuals observed in Sioux Center in mid-April (April 13 & 16).
- American Robin: arrived early this year: the first migrants appeared in Sioux Center at end of February.
- Wood Thrush: appears to be declining in NW Iowa.
- Northern Shrike: none observed.
- Loggerhead Shrike: one pair was present in western Sioux Co. on April 18.
- Vireos & Warblers: good migration, both in numbers and species. Solitary, Warbling, and Red-eyed Vireos were common. Philadelphia Vireo, usually a common migrant, not observed. Both vireos and warblers were difficult to see because of the early leafing out of trees. The following species of warbler were observed: Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Yellow-rumped (abundant in late April), Palm (at least 6 individuals observed in first week of May, more than usual), Blackpoll, Black + White, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Mourning, Yellowthroat, Wilson's (excellent migration with over a dozen sightings in second week of May). This spring we missed, probably because of early leafing, the following regular migrants: Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, and Canada Warblers.
- Scarlet Tanager: none observed.
- Dickcissel: arrived on time on May 9. But their numbers appear down somewhat from their abundance last summer.
- American Tree Sparrow: large numbers migrating during last week of March.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: excellent migration. This species is a regular and even abundant migrant in Sioux Co. On May 2, for example, several dozen were present in Oak Grove Park.
- Vesper Sparrow: arriving on time and doing very well. It is one of our most common breeding sparrows.

- Grasshopper Sparrow: arrived on time, but numbers seem down, especially in western Sioux Co, where in some regular areas they are absent this spring.
- Fox Sparrow: arrived in Sioux Co. in third week of March. But their numbers were down (about 6 observed in various places).
- Lincoln's + White-throated + White-crowned Sparrows: good migration.
- Harris' Sparrow: excellent migration. A straggler was still present in Sioux Center on May 25.
- Dark-eyed Junco: large numbers migrating during last week of March.
- Lapland Longspur: hard to find in early spring, due to lack of snow cover.
- Bobolink: continues to breed in goodly numbers throughout the county.
- Orchard Oriole: none observed (unusual!).
- Purple Finch: several individuals remained in Sioux Center area during the first two weeks of March.
- Pine Siskin: very scarce this past winter; one individual visited a feeder in Sioux Center on March 28. But a flock of some 20 individuals arrived in Sioux Center in the first week of May, and stayed for about a week (exact arrival and departure dates unknown) to feed on elm seeds.

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June 1, 1987

Ruby-throated Hummingbird -- Documentation

On the unusually early date of April 7 my wife and her sister (who happened to be visiting us) observed a hummingbird flying along the road by our house (the temperature was in the upper 70's). The bird had difficulty flying, and alighted on the lawn. My wife and her sister approached the bird, which then flew off a little way, alighted in the middle of the street. It took off once again, and as it was erratically flying away, it was caught in mid-air by a Grackle and carried off.

I interrogated my wife and her sister closely to make sure they had indeed seen a hummingbird. Both were 100% sure. Both my wife and her sister grew up in California, and thus are quite familiar with hummingbirds. Though not a fanatic, my wife is a fairly experienced, and careful and reliable birder, and in my opinion it is extremely unlikely that she would have confused this sighting with something else (such as a sphinx moth, with which all of us are very familiar). My sister-in-law, too, has spent a good deal of time birding with us in various parts of the country and Canada. My wife and sister-in-law did not realize that seeing a hummingbird in Sioux Center so early in April would constitute an exceptionally unusual occurrence.

To make matters more interesting, a day later (April 8) my brother-in-law reported glimpsing another hummingbird in our yard. However, I am not as confident about this report as I am about the one submitted by my wife and sister-in-law.

Normally we do not see hummingbirds until early May.

I submit this bizarre story to you for your consideration.

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April 10, 1987