

Thomas H. Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52246

Van Dyke

Spring 1993 Report

Weather for the period:

Three words describe this spring: slow, wet, and cool.

March: March began with about a foot of snow on the ground. Arctic air masses slowed the melt-down. On March 13 the low was -6, -1 on the 14th, and -2 on the 17th. By mid-March much of the snow that fell in February was still on the ground, and although there were some open spots, most of the water remained frozen until the third week of March. On the weekend of the 20th we received 12 inches of snow! Most of this snow melted in the next week, causing the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers to flood and creating ponds and lakes in the fields, encouraging the duck migration. Meanwhile, temperatures remained much below normal until March 26, when the thermometer rose above 50 for the first time since November 16! March 27 and 28 saw our highest temperatures for the month: 57 degrees. March went out like a lion: on the 31st heavy rain turned to ice and sleet and left an inch of frozen snow on the ground.

April: The first few days continued the flooding along the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers, attracting impressive concentrations of ducks. Cool, wet and cloudy most of month. One-half inch of snow on April 14. On April 7 Rush Lake in Osceola Co. was still frozen. On April 10 Lake Pahoja in Lyon Co. still partly frozen.

May: Mostly below normal temperatures and lots of rain. The leaves were slow coming out, aiding the observation of warblers. Heavy rains to the north of us on May 7 caused some of the most severe flooding of the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers on record.

Observations:

- White Pelican: Good migration. Flocks of 50 to 100 were coming over western Sioux Co. in early May.
- ✓ - Double-crested Cormorant: The first migrants were at Hawarden in western Sioux County on April 2.
- Great Blue Heron: Arrived in Sioux Co. on March 29.
- ✓ - Great Egret: Two individuals were relatively early on April 2 at Hawarden in western Sioux County.
- Canada Goose: On March 12 a flock of about 60 geese were sitting on the ice surrounding the (artificially kept) open water at Winterfeld in Rock Valley. Honkers were migrating at a good pace in mid-March.

- Snow Goose: They bypassed or overflowed northwest Iowa, possibly because of the late thaw. For example, normally in late March good concentrations of geese are on Lake Pahoja in Lyon Co. or on Rush Lake near Ocheyedan in Osceola Co. But on April 10 these areas were still mostly covered with ice. There was not a goose to be seen.
- Wood Duck: They were plentiful by the end of March.
- Northern Shoveler: The first migrants arrived at Rock Valley on March 26.
- Gadwall: Beat the trend by arriving on time -- one was at Rock Valley on March 20.
- American Wigeon: Arrived on time. First observed on March 26.
- Canvasback: Quite conspicuous in flooded fields throughout Sioux County on March 27.
- Redhead: First observed at Hawarden on April 2.
- Lesser Scaup: Again an excellent migration. They reached their peak on April 2: at least 1000 individuals were on various ponds and flooded fields in Sioux County.
- Common Goldeneye: One finally arrived at Winterfeld Park in Rock Valley on March 19. During the following week there were lots of them along the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers in western Sioux Co.
- Bufflehead: Arrived in Sioux County on March 26.
- Ruddy Duck: First observed in western Sioux Co. on April 2.
- Hooded Merganser: Very conspicuous this spring! Six (three pair) were in the Big Sioux River on March 26, single males were at Hawarden on March 27 and west of Sioux Center on March 31, and another 4 at Hawarden on April 2. They were still at Lake Pahoja in Lyon Co. on April 10.
- Common Merganser: Much delayed. I did not see them in Sioux Co. until March 20. From then on they were the dominant waterfowl species in Sioux Co. until mid-April.
- Red-breasted Merganser: A pair was quite early at Hawarden on April 2 (on this date all three species of mergansers were at Hawarden). They were common by April 10.
- Turkey Vulture: One was at Hawarden on the (for this area) very early date of March 27. In April and May they were quite plentiful. I have the distinct impression that Turkey Vultures (like Bald Eagles) are much more common today than they were 15 years ago.

- Bald Eagle: Impressive migration. An adult, probably an early migrant, was in western Sioux County on March 3. By March 12 the migration was under way: a group of five (3a, 2i) were together in a tree along the Big Sioux River in western Sioux Co. Two more were in Oak Grove on March 20, and 12 were reported at Oak Grove on March 27. One was over Sioux Center on March 28, and still another at Hawarden on April 2.
- Northern Harrier: Very much in evidence this spring, with the migration starting on March 26.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: First migrant observed over Sioux Center on March 28.
- Red-Tailed Hawk: Good migration. Their numbers began to increase in mid-March. On March 28 several dozen came over our house in the span of an hour and a half. On April 2 just about every mile of road had about 2 Red-tails.
- Broad-winged Hawk: Virtually absent this spring.
- ✓ - Swainson's Hawk: One was over Sioux Center on April 23.
- American Kestrel: During the first two weeks of March their numbers began to increase in Sioux Co. On April 2, on average, one Kestrel could be seen along every mile of road. They reached their peak on April 13, when their numbers increased to, on average, two per mile of road.
- ✓ - Merlin: One was four miles west of Sioux Center on March 19. The bird flew low across the road right in front of me, allowing excellent observation of its fieldmarks: conspicuously banded tail, dusky brown upperparts, and relatively unmarked head. As I have reported on numerous occasions, the Merlin is a regular migrant and occasional winter visitor in northwest Iowa.
- Northern Bobwhite: Vigorously calling at their accustomed haunts in western Sioux Co. in mid-May.
- Wild Turkey: Turkeys were gobbling in Oak Grove Park on March 4.
- American Coot: A relatively early migrant arrived at Rock Valley on March 26.
- Killdeer: We usually hear its cheery call around the first of March. This year, however, we did not see them until March 26, more than three weeks late.
- ✓ - Lesser Golden Plover: A flock of about 50 was three miles northwest of Sioux Center on May 19. Some were still present the next day.
- Other shorebirds: Meager migration.

- ✓ - Franklin's Gull: A first-winter plumaged bird was early at Hawarden on April 2.
- Mourning Dove: Very late. First migrants observed on April 1.
- Cuckoos: Very hard to find this spring.
- Chimney Swift: Arrived somewhat late on April 23.
- ✓ - Northern Flicker: April 2 was peak migration day. While traveling about 50 miles in two hours in Sioux Co. I counted about 150 individuals.
- ✓ - Olive-sided Flycatcher: One was at Oak Grove Park on May 13. They are more numerous in the fall than in the spring.
- Empidonax: Arrived late on May 5. Good migration thereafter.
- ✓ - Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: One was in my yard on May 17.
- Eastern Phoebe: First observed on the relatively late date of April 20.
- ✓ - Western Kingbird: The first migrant was early on May 5 just southeast of Hawarden.
- Purple Martin: Arrived in Sioux Center on the late date of April 19. Goodly numbers are now present in Sioux Center.
- ✓ - Winter Wren: One was in my yard on April 3.
- ✓ - Golden-crowned Kinglet: A wave of migrants came through Sioux Center on March 28.
- ✓ - Ruby-crowned Kinglet: An exceptionally early migrant was in my yard on March 28. See attached documentation. The regular migration began about April 10.
- Eastern Bluebird: First observed in Sioux Co. on April 3.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: Sparse migration this year. Vastly outnumbered by Swainson's Thrush.
- ✓ - Swainson's Thrush: Good migration, especially in late May. Their migration was very protracted. Two were still in my yard on the very late date of May 29.
- Hermit Thrush: First observed in Sioux Center on April 10.
- Wood Thrush: The usual number arrived at their stations in woody areas along the Big Sioux River on May 13. This year their number is definitely larger than in previous years: I hear them sing in places where I have not heard them before.

- American Robin: Arrived very late -- the first migrants arrived in Sioux County on March 20.
- Loggerhead Shrike: One was in western Sioux Co. on April 21.
- Vireos and Warblers: One the whole, a fairly normal migration. The following deserve special mention:
 - Cape May Warbler: One was at Oak Grove Park on May 13, and another one in Sioux Center on May 17 and 18. This species is rare in this area.
 - Yellow-Rumped Warbler: Numbers of this normally abundant warbler were sharply down this spring.
 - Black-throated Green Warbler: One was in Sioux Center on May 18. This species is uncommon here.
 - Mourning Warbler: Appeared in my yard on May 21. This late migrant is uncommon but regular in northwest Iowa.
 - Yellow-breasted Chat: One was in my yard on May 8 and 9. This species is very uncommon in our area.
- Scarlet Tanager: A male was at Oak Grove Park on May 12 and 13.
- Northern Cardinal: Continues to flourish along the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers in western Sioux Co. A pair appeared in Sioux Center (where they are usually absent) in the third week of May.
- Dickcissel: Arrived on the early date of May 5.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: Unusually scarce this spring. Normally this species is a common migrant in our area.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: Present in what seems ever lower numbers.
- Fox Sparrow: The first migrant observed was at Hawarden on March 27. Very good migration of this species.
- White-throated Sparrow: Excellent migration! Some lingered until May 29.
- White-crowned Sparrow: Normal numbers migrated right along with the much more numerous White-throated Sparrows.
- Harris' Sparrow: Wintering birds (probably) were quite conspicuous in western Sioux Co. through the first half of March, then augmented by numerous migrants. Two were still in my yard on the very late date of May 25.
- Dark-eyed Junco: Last ones observed in Sioux Co. on April 13.

- Lapland Longspur: Several flocks of about 100 each were in Sioux County on March 26. One flock was circling (and pestering) a hovering (and undoubtedly annoyed) Kestrel. Another flock of about 100 was west of Sioux Center on April 2.
- Red-winged Blackbird: The first major migrating flock (200+ individuals) did not arrive in Sioux Co. until March 17.
- Rusty Blackbird: First migrants observed at Hawarden on March 27.
- Brown-headed Cowbird: First observed in Sioux County on March 27.
- Common Grackle: The first migrants arrived in Sioux Center on the late date of March 18. However, not until March 26 did they become common in the Sioux Center area.
- Orchard Oriole: There were lots of them this spring. Especially remarkable was their invasion into the town of Sioux Center. Pairs were observed in various parts of town beginning on May 13.
- Purple Finch: One was observed in Sioux Center on April 20.
- House Finch: Lots of them in March and increasing as the spring wore on. As reported on an earlier occasion: Their cheery song constitutes a welcome addition to the sounds of spring!
- Pine Siskin: Still present in goodly numbers in March and April. Last ones observed on May 17.

John Van Dyk

736 East 1st Street
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

June 1, 1993

712-722-1572