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Van Dyle -

Fall 1991 Report

Weather for the Period:

August, September, and October: generally warm and dry. Several records highs were set in September. On October 16 we set a record high of 84 in Sioux Center. There were few strong stormy fronts, which may account for the lacklustre warbler fall migration in this part of the state. On October 31 winter set in: a powerful storm dropped 9 inches of snow (14 inches at Sheldon) and ushered in arctic cold. Early November set several low temperature records (e.g. -6 on November 4, -9 on November 7, -2 on November 8). As a result of the cold weather, most of the open water was frozen over during the first week of November. In the second half of the month temperatures returned to normal; the snow melted and most of the water was open again by the end of the month. The snow storm that hit central and eastern Iowa in the third week of November missed us completely. But on November 29 another major winter storm crossed our area, with lots of freezing rain and four inches of snow. The ice storm with the subsequent cold weather undoubtedly created serious hardship for numerous birds, as much of their normal food became inaccessible and remained so for an extended period of time.

- Pied-billed Grebe: Last one observed at Rock Valley on November 13. ✓
- Double-crested Cormorant: In October flocks of 20 were present at Hawarden. Last one observed on November 13 at Rock Valley. ✓
- Great Blue Heron: Latest observation: October 18 at Hawarden.
- Great Egret: Two were at Hawarden on October 18. ✓
- Green-winged Teal: One was walking over the ice at Rock Valley on November 9.
- Common Goldeneye: A pair was early at Rock Valley on November 9.
- Common Merganser: A pair was at Rock Valley on November 9.
- Hooded Merganser: Three individuals were at Rock Valley on November 9 and remained until November 13.
- Osprey: One was at Hawarden on October 23. ✓

- Bald Eagle: An adult was over Oak Grove Park in western Sioux County on October 23.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: One of these hawks (apparently an immature) terrorized the birds on our feeders for several days at the end of October and early November.
- Rough-legged Hawk: First observed in western Sioux Co. on November 6. Various individuals were in the County through November. On November 21 I observed an all-black-phased bird about five miles south of Rock Valley.
- American Kestrel: Remained quite plentiful throughout the period. We see two or three for every ten miles of road.
- Merlin: A single bird visited Sioux Center on the early date of September 13. The bird spent the day in a neighbor's yard and was observed chasing birds throughout the day. I observed the bird from fewer than 100 yards. As I have frequently reported, the Merlin is a regular spring and fall migrant (and, last year, a winter resident) in this part of Iowa. Another individual appeared in Sioux Center on November 1 and remained in the area through the month. Finally, still another Merlin was very cooperative (= easy to view) about two miles north of Hawarden on November 27. ✓
- Prairie Falcon: Two reports --
 - (a) I observed what I take to be a Prairie Falcon near the grain elevators of Sioux Center on October 31. As the bird flew by, I could see its large size and pointed wings. I did not have an opportunity to see its underwings, so I cannot absolutely rule out an immature Peregrine. However, I judged the bird to be a Prairie Falcon on the grounds that (1) its color was light sandy brown (unlike the darker brown of immature Peregrines) and (2) it appeared at a time when Prairie Falcons are more likely than Peregrines. ✓
 - (b) On November 16 I positively identified a Prairie Falcon about four miles southeast of Sioux Center. The bird was sitting in a lone cottonwood tree. As it flew off, I noted its large size, pointed wings, brownish color, and its black "armpits." The sun was behind me, so I had an excellent view. I followed the flying bird in my binoculars until it disappeared over the horizon. Over the past half dozen years or so the Prairie Falcon has become a very regular visitor to northwest Iowa. I now see several of them every year in this area. ✓
- Greater Yellowlegs: Five individuals were at Hawarden on October 23. ✓

- Lesser Yellowlegs: One individual was present among Greater Yellowlegs at Hawarden on October 23. ✓
- Lesser Golden Plover: A flock of about 40 individuals were along the banks of a large pond in western Sioux Co. on October 18. This species is a rare migrant in the fall. ✓
- Northern Saw-whet Owl: On November 27 we found one of these "cute" little owls in an evergreen shrub at Oak Grove Park in western Sioux County. I called several other birders to come see it. A number of photographs were taken. ✓
- Common Nighthawk: Excellent migration. In late August and early September we frequently saw flocks of up to 50 individuals flying over Sioux Center.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: Last one observed in Sioux Center on October 1. ✓
- Red-breasted Nuthatch: The first one appeared on my feeders on November 20 and remained for the period. ✓
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: Appeared at the tail-end of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet migration. In mid-November they were quite plentiful in Sioux Center. Any walk through town would reveal their thin calls.
- Brown Creeper: Good migration in late October and well into November. They were observed both at Oak Grove Park (where some of them winter) and in Sioux Center.
- Eastern Bluebird: Two individuals were "shivering" in the snow at Oak Grove Park on November 6. ✓
- American Robin: Individuals lingered until November 20.
- Warblers: Again a very poor season. Maybe the hot weather had something to do with the lacklustre migration. No unusual sightings to report. Yellow-rumped Warblers and Orange-crowned Warblers steadily migrated through Sioux Center until mid-October.
- Rufous-sided Towhee: Last one observed on October 5. ✓
- Northern Cardinal: Several males arrived at the feeders in my yard in mid-October and remained for the period. As I have reported on earlier occasions, Cardinals are quite common along the major rivers in western Sioux County, but are very rare in towns.
- Sparrow migration: Very good. Throughout the first three weeks of October my yard was alive with White-throated Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Lincoln Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, and

Harris' Sparrows. On October 18 I counted more than 30 sparrows of five species in my yard alone!

Specifics:

- Fox Sparrow: Last one observed on November 15.
- White-crowned Sparrow: Last one observed at my feeders on November 3.
- White-Throated Sparrow: Lingered at my feeders until November 17.
- Harris' Sparrow: Exceptionally plentiful at my feeders this fall. Several times dozens crowded my platform feeders, aggressively (and pugnaciously) driving off the House Sparrows! As soon as the early November snow melted they began to disappear. They were scarce after November 20.
- Lapland Longspur: Arrived in western Sioux Co. on November 6. ✓
- Brown-headed Cowbird: A late straggler (a male) was at my feeders in Sioux Center on November 10. Another one was in Sioux Co. on November 13. ✓
- Common Grackle: Lingered until the end of the period.
- House Finch: Now a permanent resident of Sioux County.
- Common Redpoll: A small flock arrived in Sioux Center on November 7. But they were not seen again. ✓
- Pine Siskin: First appeared on our feeders on November 8. Remained scarce throughout the period. ✓
- Dark-eyed Junco: Arrived early, on September 23, in Sioux Center. On October 30 several clear examples of the Oregon race appeared in Sioux Center. ✓
- Purple Finch: First observed in Sioux Center on October 18. Several were present from that time through the period. They were certainly not abundant! ✓

Reported by John Van Dyk

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