

Winter 1967-68

AFN - notes

IOWA

Rural Route 1 Box 261
Eureka, Illinois 61530
March 11, 1968

Peter C. Petersen, Jr.
235 E. McClellan
Davenport, Iowa 52803

Dear Mr. Petersen:

I found this to be a very disappointing winter. It was a very open winter with one major snowstorm in the middle of January. If last year was poor for finches, this year was terrible. I did not find a single Red-breasted Nuthatch anywhere. Dr. W. C. Starret of the Illinois Natural History Survey reported that although he saw Red breasted Nuthatches and other winter finches near Bath, Illinois, in an excellent stand of Virginia Pine last winter, he saw none at all this winter. Ninety Pine Siskins were found on the Chillicothe Christmas Bird Count by the compiler, Dr. L. H. Princen, but I did not see these.

The Whistling Swans which I mentioned in my fall report were still in the East Peoria area on December 17, and one was found on the Peoria count a week later.

A surprising sighting was 17 Blue Geese flying over Eureka headed west on January 31. Mallards continued up in the Eureka area, and these high numbers were also born out by the Chillicothe count.

Rough legged Hawks were up near Eureka, and this species as well as Red tailed and Sparrow Hawks were increased on our Christmas counts.

No unusually species of gulls were in the Peoria area.

Bobwhites were increased around Eureka, but Mourning Doves were normal.

I feel that more Great Horned Owls could be found on our Christmas counts, as I heard 2 in the morning and 1 in the evening, and only a total of three were found on the Chillicothe count, simply because I was out later than anyone else. Short eared Owls appeared on Dec. 18 near Washington, Illinois, which is normal, as only 2 were seen. I have not seen larger numbers for several years. Snowy Owls gave the best showing. A friend of mine reported one in mid November about 5 miles southwest of my home. From November on a few scattered records drifted in, which included some in the count periods of both our Peoria and Chillicothe counts. I found one Snowy at a cornfield near my home from Dec. 14 to 18. I later found the same or a different bird from Feb. 22 to 24 at almost the same area, although there were none around in these fields in mid winter.

Yellow shafted Flickers were migrating into January, so there were more than usual around Eureka and Peoria in December. Red headed Woodpeckers were also much more numerous on our Christmas counts.

The northern subspecies of the Horned Lark was around Eureka from Jan, 15 to 24 when deep snow was on the ground. All during February Horned Larks acted territorially, and migrants were seen on Feb. 24 and 27.

Carolina Wrens were increased on our Christmas counts.

According to Frank Bellrose, none of the northern subspecies of Robin appeared at Havana this winter as they usually do.

I found no Oregon Juncoes around Eureka this winter, although one was found in Peoria by Dr. L.H. Princen.

Song Sparrows seemed to be more abundant than usual along the fencerows of croplands. This is born out by increases on our two Christmas counts.

Lapland Longspurs were more abundant in my area this winter. In past years they have not stayed all winter. This may be due to the presence of more cornstalks which were not plowed. Chandler Robbins told me last weekend when I saw him that this may also be due to the longspurs merely roaming into my area more this winter.

Eastern Meadowlarks, Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds, Mallards, and Canada Geese are all moving north by March 11, but I will include more details in my spring report.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Guth

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A. F. N. Winter 1967-68, Des Moines.

Other than the first half of January which was unusually cold, the winter has been mild and very open. There have been only two snowfalls of consequence, and the heavier was the dry type. This has been practically a drouth area since last June.

It is generally agreed this has been a most uninteresting winter with none of the more interesting visitors. I've heard of no Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Redpoll, or Grosbeak.

Killdeer - one on the census - unusual. Snipe - 4 or 5 wintered.

Doves - few stayed.

Flickers and Red-headed - scarce.

Jays - mostly left.

Kinglets - few, if any.

Cardinals thought not nearly as many as usual by many.

Purple Finch were very scarce. I saw only 1 all winter.

Juncos and Tree Sparrows at least usual numbers.

Wintering sparrows were few, even Song Sparrows.

Snow Buntings. There was a flock of 30-50 late in November for the only report. It is seldom we see these.

W. H. Brown

2 April, 1968

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FIELD REPORTS

There is almost complete agreement that the bird population this winter is extremely low with a minimum, or complete lack, of most of the northern species. Also, there are fewer than usual of the summer residents remaining. Last year was unusually dry in much of the state, and this may have caused a scarcity of food for wintering birds. These are some of the comments:

"Poorest report I have ever completed" (Mrs. Hanna), "Populations much below average except Juncos and Tree Sparrows which are normal" (Fred Kent),

"Winter the poorest I can ever remember" (Russell Hays), "Most birds unusually scarce since 1 December" (Milford Keeler). The following should be considered in addition to the Christmas census reports.

Geese, Ducks. There were not as many geese as usual, according to Bill Felton (DH), but a flock of 3,000, composed of 50 Blues and the rest Snows, was flying south on 21 January (EG). Duck population peaked on 2 November at 31,000 of which 20,800 were Mallards. The last were seen on 24 December (PF). Mallards have been few along the Missouri but may be scattered due to the river being open (DH). A Canvasback was wintering at Lock 14 (PP), while 3 were at the Des Moines Res. Golden-eyes numbered only about 25 instead of the usual 200 (DH). There were several reports of Surf Scoters at Davenport; 1 sighting being of 4 (PP).

Hawks. All hawks have been scarce (EB). A Goshawk was reported to have been at the feeder of Mrs. Johnson in Cedar Falls, and a Cooper's was seen by Dr. Burk on 2 December (RH). A Sharp-shinned was seen on 10 January (HM). Red-tailed: a good count with one carrying nesting material on 24 January (EB); scarce (JK). Red-shouldered: 1 on 22 November (RH); 1 on 6 January for only his second record (DG); and 1 on the Des Moines census (HP). A pair in the Russell area are evidently permanent residents (HM). Rough-legged: scarce (DG), but, more common and mostly the dark phase (JK). Golden Eagle: 1 found by Lewis Blevins on 18 November had been recently shot; 1 was included in the Muscatine census, and 1 was seen 14 January on Credit Island (PP). Bald Eagles: 6 were seen at Marquette by Glenn Bloomfield on 20 January (RH); 1 at Coralville seen by Dick Thoren on 25 November, and 1 in the same area on 22 December (FK); 1 at Union Slough on 12-13 December (PF). Those at Burlington were late in arriving (PL), and 1 at Brown Slough was late for that area (HM). Marsh Hawks; scarce with only 2 observations (DG); 4 on 21 January (FK); and 1 on 10 January was thought unusual for that date (HM).

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~~Grouse XXXXXXXXXX~~. Bobwhites, Pheasants, Chukars. Bobwhites were thought few (EB), but abundant (DG). Pheasants are down (EB), and abundant (JK), but hunting poor (DH). The Union Slough population was estimated at 1200 (PF). Chukars were seen in two places, one sighting being of a flock of 12 of which some were young. These are in the neighborhood of a former game farm (GB).

Shorebirds, Gulls. Two late Golden Plover were seen on 13-14 November (DG). Killdeers were found on several censuses and were present the first two weeks in December (FK). A "great number" of Snipe were at Big Marsh in November according to Glenn Bloomfield (RH) with others wintering at Davenport (PP) and 2 seen by Nick Osness on 22 November (RH). An estimated 800 Herring and 1200 Ring-billed Gulls were seen on 23 December but moved out on the 31st (PP).

A Black-legged Kittiwake observation is described in a separate note.

Doves, Owls. Mourning Doves are few (GB), and not as many as usual at Des Moines with a flock of 50 at Waterloo on 21 January (RH). Snowy Owls are reported from three areas: 10 December north of Davenport by Fred Lorenzen (PP); 1 in mid-December by Jack McLane (PL); and 3 within 8 miles of Iowa City by 2 near Ames found by John Faaborg and Nick Osness (RH); reliable observers (FK). Long-eared: 2 at the Refuge (PF); and 12 at Coralville on 28 January (FK). Short-eared are scarce with only three observations where 3 were seen on 14 January (HM); they are usually seen daily (DG); only a few records (JK); and only 1 on 19 December (FK). Saw-whet: 4 near Ames in November by Faaborg and Osness (RH); 1 on 24 December and 28 January (FK); and 1 near Readlyn on 21 November by Nick Osness (RH).

Woodpeckers, Horned Larks. The Yellow-shafted Flicker is the most abundant woodpecker (JK); seen occasionally (DH); not many in Des Moines, and only 1 wintering (GB). A Red-shafted Flicker on the Ames campus on 25 November was seen by a cousin of Annette Haffner (RH). A Pileated remains on Credit Island (PP), and one was a "first" for the Cedar Rapids census. Redheaded are "spotty" (PP), with only a few around Des Moines. Ralph Silvers reports two Sapsucker observations (DG), and several are reported at Des Moines feeders. The Hairy has been scarce (DG), and it and the Downy have been missing at some feeders (DH).

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Except for two large flocks seen on 4 November (RH), Horned Larks seemed scarce: only one place reporting (GB); fair number when snow on the ground (PP); very scarce or absent in latter December, small numbers in January where usually several hundred to the mile are seen (DG); very few, only small flocks, and only three reports (DH); and scarce in Polk Co; observed regularly at Union Slough but no numbers given.

Blue Jays, Crows, Chickadees, ~~Titmice~~. Blue Jays, which usually winter at Wallingford, all left late in September (CW), and the winter population around Des Moines seems low. Crows are seldom seen (DH). Chickadees: none all winter with similar reports from other feeders (MK); never more than one at a time (GB); fewer (DH).

Nuthatches, Creepers, Wrens. White-breasted Nuthatches: fewer (DH), and at an all-time low (GB). Brown Creepers: none (DH), and generally scarce. No reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches or Winter Wrens. Carolina Wrens may be making a come-back: 1 all winter (EG); wintered again (PL); back at Credit Island (PP); and seen on 25 November and 30 December (DH).

Mimics, Thrushes. A Mockingbird wintered as usual (PL). Brown Thrashers are reported wintering (HP, PP, RH). Robins are not staying in numbers as there are only scattered reports with only 1 or 2 being seen. There are "a few" Bluebirds according to Bill Felton (DH).

Kinglets, Shrikes, Starlings. To judge from reports, Golden-crowned Kinglets are not numerous, and but one Ruby-crowned was mentioned (DH). Northern Shrikes were seen: 19 November, (GB); 12 December by Glenn Bloomfield (RH); 19 December (FK); 21 January (RH). No mention made of wintering Loggerheads. Starlings are "everpresent" but seem fewer (DH).

Icterids. Meadowlarks: scarce (DG, DH, GB, WHB); a fair number when snow covered the ground (PP). Rusty Blackbirds: 6 on 1 January, Mrs. Hewitt (RH); 20 on 29 January (HM); in Des Moines, 19 November, Mary E. Warters, 14 January, A. Berkowitz. Grackles: a few until the first week in December (MK); 30-50 wintering (PL); 1 occasionally (GB). Cowbird: 1 on 21 December was a winter "first" (MK).

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Finches. Cardinals: fewer than any recent year (DG); same, or up a little (DH); more than usual (EG); many more than usual (PL). Evening Grosbeak was reported but ~~once~~, Ruth Holliday saw 1 in Waterloo on 14 January (RH). Purple Finches have been generally scarce: Mrs. Niemann had a few at feeders (PL); 1 record of 5 on 24 December (FK); a small flock early and only stragglers since (HP). Goldfinches: more than usual (EB); spotty (PP); few (DH); many at some Des Moines feeders and none at many other locations. Juncos and Tree Sparrows have only one good report; seem abundant (JK). The others are negative: few at feeders (GB); few on the only field trip (PK); fewer than usual (PP); much smaller numbers (DG); very few (RH); and way down (DH). A few Harris' are around: 3 banded in January (GB); seen occasionally (JK); one report of 6-8 (DH). Lapland Longspurs: only few seen - difficult to see unless snow brings them to roads. Flocks of several hundred in the first half of November, none since (DG). Snow Buntings: from 6-30, often 13 seen from the first of November through January at Coralville Res. (FK); a flock observed near Des Moines on Thanksgiving and for a week subsequently with numbers from 30-50.

Contributors. Mrs. Gladys Black, Pleasantville; Eldon Bryant, Akron; Paul Ferguson, Union Slough; Mrs. Edwin A. Getscher, Hamburg; Donald Gillaspey; Lamoni; Mrs. Darrell Hanna, Sioux City; Russell Hays, Waterloo; Milford Keeler; Mason City; Jim Keenan, Ogden; Fred W. Kent, Iowa City; Pearl Knoop, Marble Rock; Peter Lowther, Burlington; Howard McKinley, Russell; Mrs. Harold Peasley, Des Moines; Peter C. Petersen, Jr., Davenport; C. F. Wolden, Wallingford.

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