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Fall 1994 Report

Note: I was out of the country July and August. I returned to Sioux Center at the end of August. My report, therefore, reflects observations in September, October, and November.

Weather for the Period:

General summary: an unusually mild and dry fall.

September: Early September felt like fall: cool and dry conditions. The second and third weeks were dry and hot, with temperatures regularly rising into the 90's accompanied by strong south winds. During the first three weeks of September Sioux Center was often the hot spot in Iowa's northwest. On September 15 a cool front sharply lowered the humidity, but temperatures remained high until September 21 (on the 20th it was still 88). On September 22 a cold front moved through along with rain and temperatures in the 40's and 50's. This front certainly set the birds moving again.

October: Cool and rainy during the first week. From then on a beautiful fall: dry and warm. It was still 73 degrees on October 27, and 72 on October 28. The first frost of the season did not occur until October 25 (25 degrees) and October 26 (22 degrees).

November: The mild fall continued into November. On November 7 the thermometer climbed to 68 degrees! Cool fronts moved through, but did not bring wintery weather until the 19th, when we saw the first trace of snow. But it warmed up again, so that around Thanksgiving we still had temps of 48 degrees. On Sunday, November 27, the first major snowstorm moved through northwest Iowa. We received 7-8" of snow, but more fell just west and north (10" in Hawarden and Rock Rapids). Although the sun returned the next day, the temperatures dropped to our lowest point of the season: 9 degrees on November 30. The colder weather during the last week of November quickly covered many of the Sioux and Lyon county ponds with ice.

- Common Loon: On November 11 one was in a pond about 5 miles south of Sioux Center.

- Pied-billed Grebe: September 24 appeared to be the high point of their migration. Almost every pond and lake in Sioux Co. had this species. On this day there were 10 of them together on a pond near Hawarden. A few migrants continued to move through the area until November 18.

- Eared Grebe: One was in western Sioux Co. on September 2.
- Double-crested Cormorant: Last seen at Hawarden on November 11.
- Great Blue Heron: Once again a very good migration. During most of September and October they were common along most of the ponds and rivers in Sioux and Lyon counties. Last one observed near Rock Valley on November 25.
- Great Egret: A single individual was at Doon (Lyon Co., at the border of Sioux Co.) during the first two weeks of September. Last seen on September 10.
- Geese and ducks: They more or less "overflowed" our area. Even though there are a number of relatively large ponds in the area, there were very few geese and ducks this fall. In general, we see a lot more waterfowl in the spring than in the fall in Sioux County. Most of the Snow Geese we observed this season flew over in late November, after the November 27 snowstorm.
- Canada Goose: The first migrants arrived in Sioux Co. on October 21.
- Wood Duck: Last one observed at Hawarden on November 11.
- Green-winged Teal: Last ones (three individuals) at Rock Valley on November 18.
- Mallard: By the end of November several hundred were congregating at Rock Valley for their customary wintering at Wintersfeld park.
- Northern Pintail: Three individuals (one male and two females) were still at Rock Valley on November 30.
- Northern Shoveler: About a half dozen of them were still at Rock Valley on November 18.
- Gadwall: First migrants arrived at Hawarden on October 19. Several dozen were still present at Rock Valley and Doon on November 18.
- Ring-necked Duck: Still present at Rock Valley on November 18.
- Lesser Scaup: Very few observed. They preferred to pass over Sioux County.
- Bufflehead: An early individual was at Hawarden on October 19.
- Osprey: One was at Hawarden on September 7, September 24, and October 19. On October 21 there were two at Hawarden.

- Bald Eagle: The migration began in earnest on November 11. From then on they could be easily observed in western Sioux County. For most of November every time out in the field yielded one or two of these birds.
- Northern Harrier: First migrant observed near Rock Valley on September 14. Last one seen on November 18.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: The first migrants (two of them) were at Rock Valley on September 14. Last one observed in western Sioux County on November 18.
- Cooper's Hawk: None observed.
- Broad-winged Hawk: A flock of about 35 was over Sioux Center on September 17.
- Red-tailed Hawk: Outstanding migration. The birds were common throughout September, October and November.
 - A fine example of the Krider's Hawk was about 7 miles southwest of Sioux Center on October 21. Except for its wings and some marking around the head, the entire bird was a brilliant white.
- Rough-legged Hawk: None observed.
- American Kestrel: Their migration began on September 14, when suddenly Kestrels seemed to be everywhere in Sioux Co. In October, however, their numbers sharply declined, and by the end of October and into November they were relatively uncommon.
- Merlin: An adult male was at Hawarden (Sioux Co.) on the early date of September 7. A female (or immature) was at Rock Valley on September 21, and still another one (female or immature) in western Sioux Co. on September 24. The Merlin has become quite regular in northwest Iowa; consequently, in previous reports I have argued that this species no longer requires documentation. However, because of the early arrival dates of these birds, I enclose complete documentation.
- Grey Partridge: There can be no doubt that this species has drastically declined in northwest Iowa. They are now exceedingly difficult to find. In the past, when birders from elsewhere would come here to see them, there would be no problem. No longer! Right now I would not know where to look.
- Northern Bobwhite: None observed. This year the bird seems to be completely absent from Sioux Co.
- American Coot: Last one observed at Rock Valley on November 11.
- Killdeer: Last migrants were in Sioux Co. on November 4.

- Lesser Yellowlegs: A flock of six of these birds was still at Doon (in Lyon Co., just north of the Sioux Co. border) on the very late date of November 4.
- Pectoral Sandpiper: Last one observed at Doon on September 30.
- Mourning Dove: Somewhat unusual was the sight of about 60 doves tucked together in two small bare trees in western Sioux Co. on September 24. Reminded me of "butterfly trees." By mid-October most Mourning Doves had left. A late bird was at Hawarden on November 18.
- Common Nighthawk: As usual, a good migration. The first flock of about 40 individuals came over Sioux Center on September 4. Since that date, smaller numbers migrated every night in more protracted fashion. At midday on September 14 -- a hot and windy day -- a single Nighthawk was perched on a telephone wire near Rock Valley. Last observed (two individuals) on September 25.
- Chimney Swift: Last one observed on September 15.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: The last one in Sioux Center was observed on the (for us) very late date of October 15.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: First migrants arrived in Sioux Center on September 24. Three were in my yard on the 25th.
- Northern Flicker: Their migration began to peak in the third and fourth weeks of September. On September 24 Flickers were everywhere in Sioux Co. It was difficult to travel one mile without seeing at least half a dozen. In October their numbers sharply declined, and in November they had become very uncommon.
- Olive-sided Flycatcher: Last one observed on September 14.
- Eastern Wood-Pewee: Last one was observed on September 7.
- Empidonax: Peak of the migration appeared to have been on September 10, when I observed 6 flycatchers within 100 yards near Rock Valley.
- Eastern Phoebe: Scarce this fall. Last one was observed on September 2.
- Great Crested Flycatcher: Last one was a bird in my yard on the (for us) relatively late date of September 19.
- Eastern Kingbird: Protracted migration. On September 14 there were still a half dozen of them in the Rock Valley area.
- Swallow Migration: Once again, very good. Sizable flocks (of 100+ birds) of various swallow species moved through Sioux County during the first half of September.

- Red-breasted Nuthatch: Arrived early, on September 19 (there were two in Sioux Center). One was reported in Sioux Center during the first week of September (no precise date available). However, unlike last year, this species did not stage a major invasion. They remained very scarce throughout the period.
- Brown Creeper: First migrants arrived in Sioux Center on September 28.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Their migration began on September 24. Apparently the hot September weather kept them back.
- Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher: One was in my yard on September 11. This species is extremely uncommon in northwest Iowa. This bird was only the second I have seen in Sioux County, and the first time in my yard (no. 123 for my yard list).
- Swainson's Thrush: A drawn-out fall migration. Much more conspicuous than usual in the fall. One was in my yard on September 15, another one on September 21, and several on September 24 and 25. Last one observed on September 28.
- American Robin: By mid-November most of our Robins had left. Last one observed in Sioux County on November 28.
- Grey Catbird: Last one observed in Sioux Center on October 13.
- Brown Thrasher: Last one seen in Sioux Center on September 30.
- Northern Shrike: First one was along the Rock River near Rock Valley on November 30.
- Vireos and Warblers:
 - Good wave of vireos and warblers on Labor Day (September 5). Little movement during heat waves in September.
 - Vireos peaked on September 24-25. Waves (consisting of flocks of 6-12 birds) of Warbling, Philadelphia, and Red-eyed Vireos came through Sioux Center.
 - The September 5 wave consisted of Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Blackpoll, and Wilson's Warblers.
 - Ovenbird: Last one in Sioux Center on September 24.
 - Northern Waterthrush: Last seen in Sioux Center on September 25.
 - Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers: still present in early November (November 4).

- Northern Cardinal: Apparently this bird nested successfully in Sioux Center. As I have previously reported, the Cardinal is common along the rivers, but somehow does not like northwest Iowa towns. But this summer and fall they were regularly in my yard. On October 21 there were four Cardinals in my yard at the same time. By the end of November they frequented feeders on a daily basis. It was delightful to hear Cardinals sing in town in late November.
- American Tree Sparrow: Arrived in early October in splendid numbers. The abundant wild food crop helps make the Tree Sparrow a much more common bird than last year (when flooding prevented weeds from going to seed).
- Vesper and Savannah Sparrows peaked on September 21. Last Savannah Sparrow observed in Sioux County on (late date of) October 28.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: Last one observed in western Sioux County on (for us) a very late date of October 21.
- White-throated Sparrow: They lingered in my yard until November 18.
- Harris' Sparrow: Abundant during the last weeks of October. At both Rock Valley and in Oak Grove Park there were numerous flocks of 50+ birds (some flocks an estimated 100+ birds). By mid-November most of them were gone. A few lingered until the end of the period (still several in my yard on November 30).
- Dark-eyed Junco: First observed in Sioux Center on September 25. On November 27 several splendid examples of the Oregon race appeared in Sioux Center.
- Lapland Longspur: First flocks observed in Sioux County on November 30.
- Snow Bunting: Not yet observed by end of period.
- Rusty Blackbird: A small flock of about 20 individuals was at Hawarden on November 9. About a 100 were along the Rock River at Doon on November 11. Small flocks could be seen here and there until the end of the period.
- Common Grackle: In Mid-October the number of roosting black-birds (Grackles, Red-wings, and Starlings) had increased to more than 5000 individuals. Probably there were as many as 10,000 in our town alone! By early November most of the birds had (thankfully!) departed. A half dozen or so Grackles remained in Sioux Center through November 30.
- Purple Finch: First observed in Sioux Center on November 9. However, they were not seen again for the remainder of the period.

- Pine Siskin: Arrived in Sioux Center on November 9. For a week or so after this date they were not seen. During the last week of November they began to frequent feeders on a regular, daily basis.

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