

Halmi

March 20, 1973

Dear Vern:

I hope Gladys Black accepts and does a good job. She has had an article in just about every issue of the Sunday Des Moines Register recently (about stray Clark's nutcrackers and less exotic things). I see where Petersen counted Bald Eagles on Feb. 17 from a plane. We saw 4a, 1i around Davenport. The count of almost 1000, with 30% i, is good news.

No, I don't know Ben Shepherd. One of our pharmacologists, Jim Spratt, has been eyeing an associate deanship at SIU. All the psychiatrists at Springfield are from Iowa City - but I guess birding is a socially acceptable form of nuttiness.

On to my winter summary. Birds with * are those listed as rare in the IOU check list. Blue-listed species one would expect in winter will be mentioned even if negative.

No Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawk all winter (they are always unusual). In addition to the goshawk* sightings reported earlier, I saw one very clearly on Feb. 25 when trying out a new owl tape in the late P.M. (about 4) some 12 miles west of here. This could have been the same seen by Fred Kent and Bob Vane 3 miles to the N of the place on Dec. 23. Caught a glimpse of another in a stand of tall timber 10-12 miles N-NE of here on March 4. From the distribution of the sightings (6 in all), there were probably at least 2 and possibly 4 goshawks in the area this winter. As I mentioned, this is S of their normal range for Iowa. If our situation is typical, the Marsh Hawk is in trouble. We saw only 3 all winter (in fact, since last May), and none where they were predictably present in the past. The CBC

figures vs. 1971/72 tell the story: then 17, this year 2. I guess I have had more luck with Sparrow Hawks than others. I saw some on at least 4 occasions in December, January and February, and 2, 30 miles apart, on March 16. This is about par.

Locally, the many dead elms seem to have helped the Red-headed Woodpecker. The CBC count was up from 25 to 47 (not corrected for increased party hours). After the bitter cold in November, they withdrew into the woods, but have been predictably present in their known hideouts, with no decrease in numbers obvious.

Of the northern birds, Red-breasted Nuthatches stayed between the start of the period and Febr. 22 around the hospital (2 ♂, 1 ♀). Since then, one has been eating Fred Kent's suet. Last year they were very scarce.

Evening Grosbeaks* were first seen in the area in October. They settled down (a flock of 16, 5 adult ♂, the rest immature males and females) around our and the neighbors' feeder Dec. 3. I last saw them on March 18, but they have been less faithful since spring arrived, and are probably still around. We are on the fringe for Evening Grosbeaks, and never saw any since we moved into our house in 1967. From reports, I get the impression they staged a minor "invasion" (by our standards). Pine Siskins and Red-crowns* settled in the hemlocks around the hospital back in October, flocks of each totaling 25. They denuded the trees of cones, and were easy to keep track of from my office window. I last saw 3 Red-crowns March 3. They have spread to feeders, and have since been seen by others at close range. Same for the flock of siskins. I last saw one at our feeder March 16.

Of migrant sparrows, only White-throated were seen on two days in December (22-23) west of here in open country. Fox Sparrows arrived at our feeder (scratching below it) March 13, on the early side. They are still here every evening. We saw several Swamp Sparrows by the

Conestoga Marsh, 20 miles to the S, on March 16. I think I am the only one to see Snow Buntings* this winter (none here in the last 2 years): 2 pairs on December 22, two close enough to show rusty streak forming the incomplete collar, & large white wing patches, and broad white edges of tail when finally flushed. On another one crossed my path on February 15, when I drove back over county roads from the Cedar Rapids airport after learning that my plane was snowbound in Chicago. This one was close to some thorned lakes, on the road, and its smaller size and fluttering flight pattern as well as white wing patch and white tail edges were very clear as it flew into a field.

Aside from such sporadic goodies, the goshawks, and the pleasure of the resident grosbeaks, this has been an unexciting winter. The weather may explain much of the dullness. Heavy frost and snow in November drove most migrants south. Then the roads glazed over and trips into the field became impossible. Also, access to some of the better birding areas was denied by blocked roads or washed-out bridges. In mid-January, the snow melted and everything disappeared in the fields. The rapid thaw also made all but the paved roads impassable. This is just beginning to improve as the subsoil also thaws out. All this frustrates us but is a disaster to the farmers, some of whose crops were never harvested last fall.

So, off to Sanibel. Woody Brown was ^{there} ~~not~~, but must have driven, for he was more enthusiastic about the Spotted-breasted Oriole and Red-whiskered Tattler seen S. of Miami and all the Limpkins near Tallahassee. We are flying, and will have to stay within driving range. My expectations

are not too high. a Swallow-tailed Kite would exceed my fondest hope for new species.

Sincerely
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