

Halmi Iowa Trip to N.Z.

Dear Vern:

The summer started very wet, with the reservoir flooding unprecedented expanses of land, and usual haunts of shorebirds under water. Most observations were made on a couple of little ponds in a meadow, since dried up. During the summer the familiar pattern was weekend rain. Since mid-July, we have had a drought. The reservoir has receded, leaving mudflats and shallow ponds (many of which dried up fast). These have been quite accessible and supported an early influx of a variety of shorebirds. Most of this is confined to an area NW of Iowa City - extensive similar habitat elsewhere has been completely devoid of fauna.

Great Blue Herons were at a premium until August 1. Since then, as many as 27 at a time were counted in the area mentioned above.

Gadwalls lingered, northbound, until June 14 in the area;

Pintails until June 17.

A ♀ Hooded Merganser was seen June 7-8.

Hawks etc have been very scarce: an occasional Turkey Vulture since August 1, no accipiters, single Red-tailed Hawks and Sparrow Hawks this month (the flood must have drowned many rodents).

An unusually large wave of Semipalmated Plovers passed through August 1-2: over 50 were seen in the muddy fields. In the same place, an Am. Golden Plover on August 1, in breeding plumage, was apparently the earliest fall observation for Iowa (there aren't many fall records for this species).

The sandpiper migration was more varied than in spring and started July 28. Curiously, none of us saw Pectorals this spring: now they predominate, Semi-

palmed being second; also other common ones like Least, Solitary, Lesser Yellowlegs. But there have been quite a few uncommon to rare species, some in remarkably good numbers: a Willet (not usually seen in fall) on August 1, some Greater Yellowlegs (one with a breast so darkly scaled as to remind one of a molting Spotted Redshank), at least 5 Dunlin's in fall plumage on July 28, one Dowitcher sp. August 16, a surprising number of Stilt Sandpipers, closely observed, all fieldmarks (over 12 in a small pond August 4, also August 1, 9 and 16 — a rare migrant here), 2 Westerns, also considered rare, seen close up, long droopy bill and all, August 9 and 16, very early Sanderlings, conveniently next to Semipalmated, and showing white wing stripe well when flushed, August 1 and 16. (1 on each day), and 2 Wilson's Phalaropes August 1 and 2. If more exciting species come, the habitat is there.

The rest of the summer story is completely routine. In September I will stretch a meeting in Seattle into a drive around Puget sounds, hoping for all sorts of alcids. In October, I have been invited to give a talk in Dunedin, New Zealand, so I am reading up on a very strange avifauna indeed (except for the European imports which I still remember from when I was a child).

Sincerely  
Nick Halimi

Nov. 30, 193

Dear Vern:



This fall would have been close to a total loss if I hadn't spent two weeks in the Pacific Northwest and two in New Zealand, where birds aren't very numerous but of fascinating kinds (penguins and parrots' range overlaps by 1000 miles). Everybody tells me that I didn't miss a thing locally.

The outstanding feature of the fall has been poor, almost imperceptible migration of raptors, diving ducks, warblers and sparrows. Only a few specimens of the ordinarily common species - easily the worst fall in years! We now have an estimated 8000 ducks in the refuge portion of the Corralville Reservoir - 80% mallards, say the wildlife people. I saw some Pintails and Am. Wigeons among them today. Canada geese flew over early (first half of October) - none since.

The shorebird migration started late July and extended into early September. Then the puddles and mudflats dried up. The numbers were good as was the variety: several species regarded as rare in Iowa were repeatedly present. For example, 1-2 Willets Aug. 24-25 and again Sept. 15-16 (few fall records for Iowa); 4-5 Sibley Sandpipers, in groups of 5 and more, on 4 occasions Aug. 24 - Sept. 6; 1-2 Sanderlings Aug. 26 - Sept. 6; 2 Western Sandpipers Aug. 16. All this confined to a limited fringe of the receding reservoir.

While Red-tailed Hawks and Am. Kestrels were hard to find, we had an Osprey over nearby ponds Sept. 25, 26 and Oct. 5.

The only terns were 1 on ~~the~~ Caspian on Oct. 3 and  
2 Oct. 14.

After an abundance of Red-headed Woodpeckers  
all summer and large concentrations of Com.  
Flickers in September, I haven't seen one all  
November!

In this season of negatives, 1 Winter Wren on  
Sept. 28 was noted.

Four Bobolinks Aug. 24 were rather late for  
this area.

Others have seen Purple Finches - not I. I  
don't expect crossbills - there are few cones. No  
siskins yet. Tree Sparrows just showing up, but  
juncos rather abundant all November. As a  
comment on the sparrow migration: 1 Harris's  
Nov. 8 was the one and only for 1973 - a  
species usually counted out for the annual  
list. With everything so dead and un-  
winterlike, a flock of 15 Snow Buntings  
well ahead of any snow on Nov. 22 was  
about the best thing of the late fall.

With the roads still in bad shape and gas  
rationing around the corner, I can't be too  
optimistic about the winter. I hope things  
are livelier in Illinois.

Sincerely  
Mick