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Spring 1994 Report

Note: I am increasingly concerned about the apparent decline of a number of formerly common migrants and residents. Examples are Black-billed Cuckoo, Palm Warbler, Bobolink, Dickcissel, and Grasshopper Sparrow. We may expect, of course, fluctuations in populations. It does seem to me, however, that in the case of these and other species there is cause for alarm. In order to distinguish between truth and speculation, might it be appropriate and useful to organize and conduct annual "spring counts" (somewhat analogous to Christmas counts) in order to obtain a better understanding of population trends?

Weather for the period:

March: March both came in and went out like a lamb! After a long cold winter the 50 degree temperatures in the first week of March made everyone smile! Highest temperature in March: 56 on March 10; 61 on March 14; 71 on March 19. In all, the mild temperatures and absence of rainfall allowed the snow to melt in orderly fashion and alleviated flooding problems. There were only two cold nights: 16 on March 25, and 15 on March 30. Except for some flurries and an occasional trace of snow, there was no precipitation during the entire month, thus making the month of March one of the driest on record.

April: A study in contrast! It came in with 70-degrees temperatures. Throughout the month great variation between highs and lows. On the 4th we had a 4 inch snowfall. A week later the thermometer climbed in the 80's and 90's. The first (and only) severe weather (tornadoes in the area) of the season arrived on the 27th. On the 28th we received 3 inches of heavy wet snow (which stayed on the ground for more than a day), and that night the temperature plunged to 23 degrees! It stayed cold (below 40) for several days, putting the martins, swallows, and swifts in jeopardy.

May: Cool during the first week, then dry and warm. In our area May was the third driest on record.

Observations:

- American White Pelican: Flocks were overhead in Sioux Co. on April 20.
- Double-crested Cormorant: Arrived somewhat later than usual, on April 16.

- Great Blue Heron: Arrived on March 25 (exactly the same date as last year).
- Great Egret: Four were at Hawarden on April 30, somewhat later than usual.
- Cattle Egret: One was at Hawarden at the somewhat early date of April 16. In early May Cattle Egrets were conspicuous in wet fields in South Dakota, just across the Iowa border.
- Green-backed Heron: Arrived on April 30.
- Black-crowned Night-Heron: Not observed until May 5.
- Snow Goose: Unlike last year, the migration of Snow Geese was excellent. Flocks began to fly over in the first week of March, and were plentiful in the second week. The mild March weather, which rapidly provided lots of open water, contributed to the fine migration.
- Canada Goose: First migrating flocks observed on March 9.
- Wood Duck: First migrants observed at Oak Grove Park on the early date of March 18.
- Green-winged Teal: Lingered at Hawarden until the end of April.
- Blue-winged Teal: Arrived early in Sioux Co. On March 21 they were at both Hawarden and Rock Valley.
- Northern Shoveler: The first migrants were a bit early at Hawarden on March 18.
- Gadwall: In Sioux County in normal numbers by mid-March.
- American Wigeon: Arrived on time. First observed on March 23.
- Canvasback: The first flock of about 25 observed at Hawarden on March 18.
- Redhead: First observed on March 21.
- Lesser Scaup: Much less conspicuous than last year. Arrived on March 18 and small numbers remained until mid-May.
- Common Goldeneye: Rather late. Arrived at Hawarden on March 18.
- Bufflehead: Arrived a bit early in Sioux County on March 18.
- Hooded Merganser: Three individuals (one male and two females) were at Hawarden on March 23, and another male at Rock Valley on March 29.

- Common Merganser: Arrived later than usual. About 100 were at Hawarden on March 18.
- Red-breasted Merganser: Small numbers were early on March 23 south of Sioux Center and at Hawarden.
- Ruddy Duck: First observed in Sioux Co. on April 1. They were quite uncommon.
- Osprey: One was at Rock Valley on April 30.
- Bald Eagle: First adult of the spring migration observed in western Sioux Co. on March 18. An immature was at Rock Valley on March 29.
- Northern Harrier: First observed on March 23.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: First migrant observed in Sioux County on March 23.
- Broad-winged Hawk: Once again very scarce. First observed at Hawarden on April 30.
- Swainson's Hawk: One was at Doon (Lyon Co.) on May 3, and another over Sioux Center on May 4.
- Red-Tailed Hawk: Good migration. Their numbers began to increase in mid-March. In early April about every mile of road had its Red-tail.
- Rough-legged Hawk: One was at Hawarden on March 18. They were absent during the winter season.
- American Kestrel: Good migration in late March and early April, although their numbers seemed down, compared to last year.
- Merlin: Not observed this spring.
- Gray Partridge: What is happening to this species up here in the northwest? In the winter they were virtually absent, and this spring they were very hard to find.
- Wild Turkey: They continue to spread along the Big Sioux and Rock River. On April 30 they were gobbling along the river in the Hawarden area.
- Northern Bobwhite: Their total absence this spring is alarming. For the first time in several years I did not hear their familiar call in their usual haunts.
- American Coot: A relatively early migrant arrived at Rock Valley on March 21.
- Lesser Golden Plover: Not observed this spring.

- Killdeer: Once again arrived later than usual, on March 18.
- Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs: Both species arrived on April 16.
- Upland Sandpiper: A pair was 6 miles southwest of Sioux Center on April 30.
- Western Sandpiper: A small flock of a half dozen were in western Sioux Co. on May 23.
- White-rumped Sandpiper: Quite common this spring during the last two weeks of May. Flocks of up to 20 were at Doon and at Akron.
- Dowitcher sp.: Two Dowitchers were at Doon (Lyon Co.) on May 23. I observed the birds through a scope from about 30 yards. They looked like Long-bills to me: no patchy white on underparts, and the sides of the breast showed bars rather than spots. But Dowitchers always give me difficulty, so I cannot claim to be absolutely sure. If they were indeed Long-bills, they would be very late (much later than late date reported in Dinsmore e.a., Iowa Birds).
- Franklin's Gull: Two adults were exceptionally early at Lake Pahoja (Lyon Co.) on March 23.
- Mourning Dove: The first migrants were early on March 22.
- Common Nighthawk: Arrived a bit late on May 20.
- Chimney Swift: Arrived somewhat late on April 25.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: First observed in Sioux Center on May 12.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Migrants were moving through Oak Grove Park on April 16.
- Eastern Wood-Pewee: Early in Sioux Center on May 13.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: One was in Sioux Center on May 22.
- Other Empidonax: An ordinary migration, it seemed. Least Flycatchers remained until the end of May.
- Purple Martin: Arrived in Sioux Center on April 17. Cold weather in late April and early May may have affected them.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch: One was still in Sioux Center on May 3.
- Brown Creeper: Migrants arrived in Sioux Center on March 25.
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: Arrived late on April 17.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Their numbers seemed to be way down, as compared to last year.

- Veery: One was in my yard on May 26. The Veery is the least common of our regular thrushes.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: As last year, a sparse migration. Vastly outnumbered by Swainson's Thrush.
- Swainson's Thrush: Good migration, especially in late May. They lingered until the end of May.
- Hermit Thrush: Very scarce this spring. First observed on April 9.
- Wood Thrush: This bird appears to be doing well in our area. My report on this species is virtually the same as that of last year: "This year their number is definitely larger than in previous years: I hear them sing in places where I have not heard them before."
- American Robin: Small flocks wintering in Sioux County were augmented by numerous migrants as early as March 2.
- Vireos and Warblers: One the whole, a so-so migration. No unusual observations. Numbers of both species and individuals seemed down this year.
- Northern Cardinal: Continues to flourish along the Big Sioux and Rock Rivers in western Sioux Co. This spring they entered Sioux Center, and several pairs were in town in April and May.
- Blue Grosbeak: This bird appears to be doing well. On May 23 I counted 6 individuals in Sioux Co.
- Dickcissel: Arrived somewhat late on May 20.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: First observed on April 30. Good migration during the first week of May.
- Vesper Sparrow: An abundant bird this spring. Easily the most common grassland sparrow in our area.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: Very scarce this spring.
- Le Conte's Sparrow: One was at Hawarden on April 30.
- Fox Sparrow: The bird which wintered in my yard since January 1 (described in my winter report to Silcock) disappeared on the first day of March. Migrants were observed in mid-March.
- Song Sparrow: Migrants arrived in Sioux Center (where they were absent during the winter) on March 12.
- Harris' Sparrow: This otherwise common migrant was very scarce in March, a time when we normally encounter plenty of them.

- Dark-eyed Junco: Last ones observed in Sioux Co. on April 22.
- Red-winged Blackbird: First migrant flocks were in Sioux County on March 9.
- Rusty Blackbird^b: A flock of about 200 (close to another flock of 400+ Redwings) was at Alvord (Lyon Co) on March 23.
- Common Grackle: The first migrants arrived in Sioux Center on March 15.
- Orchard Oriole: Unlike last year, very scarce.
- Purple Finch: A few were present throughout March. Last one observed on April 13.
- House Finch: Nesting in many different places in Sioux Center.
- Pine Siskin: Lingered into May. Last ones observed on May 3.
- Common Redpoll: Last one observed in Sioux Center on March 18.

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