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Fall 1997 Report

Weather for the period:

The first week of August presented dry and pleasant conditions (compared to the heat waves in July). On the 10th and 11th a strong cold front came through, dropping temperatures by 20 degrees below average for the following week. The remainder of August was normal to cool.

September, too, brought average temperatures, the occasional cold front, and precipitation somewhat below normal.

Early October saw temperatures much above normal, even record highs (in the 90's). The immediate Sioux Center area remained frostfree until October 13, when we experienced temperatures slightly below freezing. Killing frosts and wintry weather did not occur, however, until the last week of October (about the time the time changed). The snow storm that hit, e.g., Omaha and Des Moines missed us completely. On October 27 we had a record low of 17 degrees.

November 2 brought howling northwest winds and the first snow accumulation (and treacherous roads) of the season. On November 4 we received one inch of fresh snow that melted within a day or two. On November 12 the temperature dropped to the low teens: much of the shallow still water froze. On November 14 we received 2 inches of snow. On the 16th the low dropped to near zero degrees F. In general, the first third of November was 20 degrees below normal. By the third week of November, most of the still water (ponds, quarries and pits) were frozen over. The final week of November, however, unexpectedly provided us with mild conditions and above normal temperatures. On Thanksgiving Day (November 27) the temperature in Sioux Center reached 57 degrees. By the end of the month some of the frozen still water was beginning to open up again! The mild weather and good wild food crops caused the birds at our feeders to dwindle and disperse during the final week of the period.

Observations:

- ✓ - Common Loon: One was at Hawarden on October 31.
- ✓ - Horned Grebe: One was at the North Pits in Hawarden on November 7. This species is very uncommon in Sioux county.
- Pied-billed Grebe: One was at Doon (Lyon county, just north of the border with Sioux county) on August 11. Half a dozen were at the same location on September 12. At least a dozen were on water in quarries in western Sioux county on October 17. About 25 or so were scattered in ponds and lakes around Hawarden on November 7. Last one observed was at Rock Valley on November 21.
- Great Blue Heron: Became very conspicuous during the first half of August, when one to several were present in just about every pond or lake in Sioux and Lyon county. Last one observed in a creek in western Sioux county on November 21 (the bird was virtually standing in ice, devouring a yummy frog).
- Wood Duck: Very plentiful in August, after a successful nesting season.
- Mallard: By November 21 most of the still water was frozen, so Mallards began their traditional trek to Winterfeld in Rock Valley, where the water is artificially kept open. On November 21 there were some 300 Mallards at this place.
- ✓ - Northern Shoveler: Last ones observed were six at Hawarden on November 14.
- ✓ - Lesser Scaup: The last one was at Rock Valley on November 21.
- ✓ - Common Merganser: One was at Hawarden on November 7.
- ✓ - Hooded Merganser: Two females were at Hawarden on November 14.
- Turkey Vulture: In August and early September several individuals could be seen on any birding trip through western Sioux county.

- Osprey: Two were at Fairview access (northwest Sioux county) on August 23, another at Hawarden on September 5, still another one at Hawarden on September 24, and still another one 5 miles south of Sioux Center on October 3.
- ✓ - Bald Eagle: The first fall migrant (an immature) was at Hawarden on October 31. Three were at Hawarden on November 26.
- Northern Harrier: Last ones observed in Sioux county were a male and a female east of Sioux Center on November 1.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: One was south of Rock Valley on September 10. One was in my yard, terrorizing the feeder customers, on November 15.
- Cooper's Hawk: One was just west of Sioux Center on September 10. Another two were within a mile of each other south of Sioux Center on September 12.
- Red-tailed Hawk: Krider's Hawks were much in evidence: One was with two other Red-tails five miles south of Sioux Center on September 12. Another Krider was just west of Sioux Center on October 1, and still another one west of Sioux Center on October 30. On October 17 Red-tails were in Sioux county everywhere, on average one every two miles or so.
- Rough-legged Hawk: On November 1 I saw one in Webster county and one in Story county. None observed in Sioux county.
- ✓ - American Kestrel: As a result of a good nesting season they were plentiful, even abundant, in August. On August 11 we counted about 20 individuals in a five-mile stretch in western Sioux county. Good migration through the early days of November. By mid-November they were hard to find.
- Merlin: On October 17 I found one sitting on a fence post about five miles south of Sioux Center. One was reported in Sioux Center on October 23, and again on November 2. Another one was at the wildlife area just west of Rock Valley on October 29. Still another one was at Hawarden on November 19. I trust that in view of its regular status, documentation of this bird is no longer required.

- ✓ - Gray Partridge: They seem to be doing better again (at least in the early fall), compared to the past few years when they had become scarce.
- American Golden Plover: A flock of about 25 was at a quarry five miles south of Sioux Center on October 3. Another flock of some 20 birds was in Pocahontas county on October 25.
- Semipalmated Plover: Several lingered at Hawarden during the first week of August after their arrival in July.
- ✓ - Killdeer: The last ones seen were two at Hawarden on November 14.
- ✓ - Greater Yellowlegs: Last one observed was at Hawarden on November 14.
- ✓ - Lesser Yellowlegs: Last one observed was at Hawarden on October 31.
- Solitary Sandpiper: Unusually easy to find in August and September, after they arrived in goodly numbers in July.
- Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers: Common at Hawarden and Doon throughout August and the first half of September.
- ✓ - Baird's Sandpiper: Two were in a slough near Sioux Center on August 11. Another two were at Doon on September 12.
- ✓ - Pectoral Sandpiper: Along with Least and Semipalmated, the most common sandpiper in Sioux county in August and September. The last one observed was at Doon on October 31. ✓
- ✓ - Common Snipe: Several were at Hawarden on October 31.
- Mourning Dove: Last one reported in Sioux Center on November 27.
- ✓ - Eastern Screech Owl: A very light-phased bird (*Otus asio maxwelliae?*) delighted a number of my Dordt College colleagues by roosting in a conspicuous place near the campus during the first two weeks of November.
- Common Nighthawk. Scarce all summer. Compared to previous years, a very poor migration.

- Red-bellied Woodpecker: Continues to do well, both as a riparian and in-town species.
- ✓ - Olive-sided Flycatcher: I found three individuals on August 11: One at Hawarden, one at Oak Grove Park, and one in Sioux Center.
- ✓ - Willow Flycatcher: One was in the Oak Grove Park area on August 11.
- Horned Lark: They were flocking by September 12. But in November they were rather scarce (outnumbered by Longspurs).
- ✓ - Purple Martin: They were congregating over Sioux Center in early August. Last ones observed on August 15.
- Cliff Swallow: Flocks of 50+ birds were gathering in several places in Sioux county beginning on August 11 and continuing into September.
- Barn Swallow: Still good-sized flocks migrating on October 3.
- American Crow: Their numbers are certainly not declining!
- ✓ - Red-breasted Nuthatch: Arrived in Sioux Center on September 3, and very conspicuous throughout the county thereafter.
- ✓ - Brown Creeper: The first migrant was at Sioux Center on October 6.
- ✓ - Sedge Wren: Still singing in a number of appropriate places in Sioux county by August 11.
- ✓ - Ruby-crowned Kinglet: An early migrant was in Sioux Center on September 10. A late individual was in my yard on November 8.
- ✓ - Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher: One was in my yard (and elsewhere observed in Sioux Center) on September 6.
- Eastern Bluebird: I estimate only moderate breeding success in Sioux county, judging by the number of individuals present in early August.
- ✓ - Swainson's Thrush: One was in my yard on September 6.

- ✓ - Northern Mockingbird: One lonesome and lost individual was in Oak Grove Park on November 7. I first saw the bird fly; then it alighted at the edge of a small bush, not 20 feet away. This proximity allowed easy elimination of possible (though unlikely) confusion with shrike or solitaire (languid flight, long thrasher-like tail, large white wing patches, thrasher-like bill, no shrike-like mask, and so on).

[Note to Tom Kent: Is the map on page 275 of your recent book *Birds in Iowa* accurate?]

- ✓ - Northern Shrike: The first one of the season was at Hawarden on November 26.

- ✓ - Philadelphia Vireo: Last one observed at Hawarden on September 24.

- ✓ - Warblers: No unusual observations. Last Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers were in my yard on October 18.

- Northern Cardinal: This in our area riparian species came into town this fall. A female was a regular visitor at my feeders during the second half of October and most of November.

- ✓ - Blue Grosbeak: One of the best summers ever for this species. They were literally all over Sioux county in August.

- ✓ - Dickcissel: Still singing lustily by mid-August. Last one observed on August 22.

- ✓ - American Tree Sparrow: First observed in Sioux Center on October 28.

- Field Sparrow: Still feeding young on August 11.

- ✓ - Vesper Sparrow: Large flocks of 100+ individuals were migrating through Sioux county on September 12, many of them accompanied by Horned Larks. Last ones observed on October 17.

- ✓ - Grasshopper Sparrow: Still feeding young on August 11.

- Fox Sparrow: Several were in my yard October 30 through November 8.
- White-throated Sparrow: They peaked in the week of October 26. On November 8 another wave (of mostly adults) came through my yard. Several remained in my yard through the end of the period (still present on November 30).
- White-crowned Sparrow: One (immature) stayed at my feeders for several days, October 28-November 1.
- ✓ - Harris's Sparrow: They had returned to Sioux county by October 17. Many individuals (as many as a dozen at a time) frequented the feeders in my yard during the final week of October and the first three weeks of November.
- ✓ - Dark-eyed Junco: They had arrived by October 12. Abundant in Sioux Center during the final week of October and for the rest of the season.
- ✓ - Lapland Longspur: The first flock observed was in western Sioux county on October 31. On November 21 there were flocks of 30+ birds scattered throughout Sioux county.
- Western Meadowlark: By the end of October this species has all but disappeared from Sioux county. For example, on October 31 I spent several hours checking out the western regions of the county, tallied 43 species of birds, but did not see a single Meadowlark
- Grackles and blackbirds: Began to gather in large flocks to roost in Sioux Center at the end of August and through September, much earlier than normal, and much to the annoyance and chagrin of residents with large leafy trees in their yards. Most of them departed in the last week of October. A few scattered Grackles remained through November.
- ✓ - Rusty Blackbird: A flock of some 25 individuals was at Rock Valley on October 29 and again on November 5.
- ✓ - Baltimore Oriole: A late migrant was observed in Sioux Center on October 12.

- ✓ - Purple Finch: The first ones (females) arrived at the feeders in my yard in Sioux Center on October 19. Males arrived about a week later. They were frequent at my feeders throughout November.
- ✓ - House Finch: I continue to receive reports of diseased individuals, especially of birds with eye problems.
- ✓ - Common Redpoll: First one was at a feeder in the town of George (Lyon county) on November 13.
- ✓ - Pine Siskin: Flocks of a dozen or so individuals arrived at my feeders in Sioux Center on October 22. They were frequent at feeders since then.
- ✓ - Evening Grosbeak: A single individual was at the feeders in my yard on November 3. It was not observed again.

[Erratum re Bohemian Waxwing: The map on page 279 of the recent book *Birds in Iowa* suggests that this species has not been found in Sioux county. However, on December 14, 1988, I observed four individuals within a quarter mile of my home (they were seen by at least one other competent observer). See *Iowa Bird Life* field reports, Vol 59, No. 2, page 53.]

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December 1, 1997