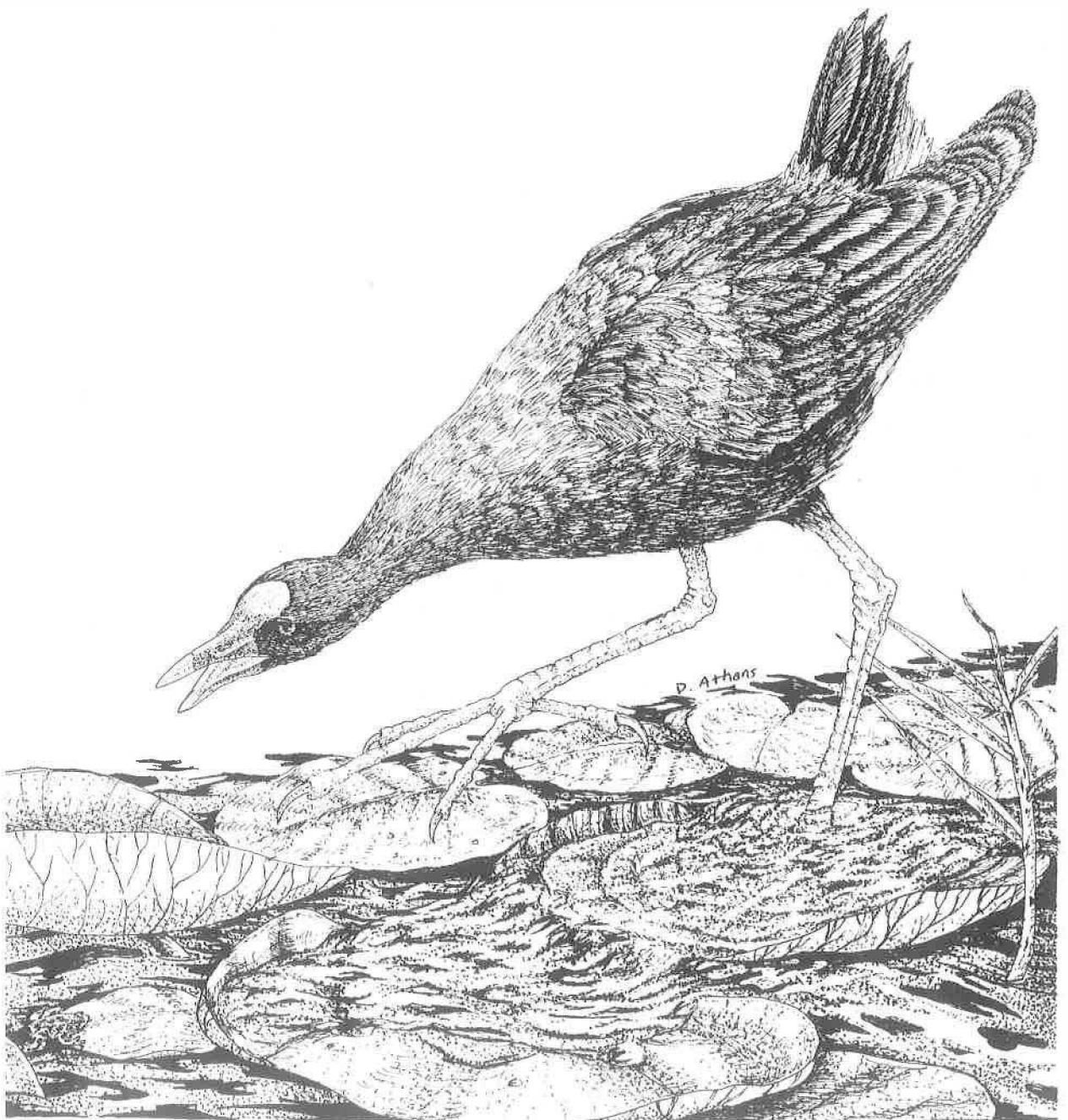


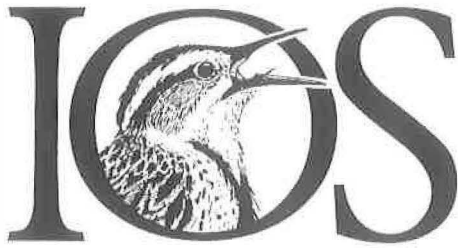
# Meadowlark

A JOURNAL OF ILLINOIS BIRDS

Volume 8, Number 1

1999





# Illinois Ornithological Society

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## **Letter from Editor**

### *Playing favoritism*

Birders who know me well, also know my two favorite Illinois birds (if it is really possible to choose!). Here's why I'm attracted to these two particular species.

The first time I saw the Black-Throated Blue Warbler was at Ryerson Woods over ten years ago. I had been listening to bird song tapes that spring. I was alone. The bird was alone. It sang. And it was glorious. I felt as if I had been transported into another dimension. There was something immensely satisfying in having an auditory recollection emerge from my brain just before the most interesting pattern of black, blue, and white emerged from a shrub.

What is it about this bird that has since captured my passion? Perhaps it is the fact that we see fewer of them during migration than we see of other more common warblers like the Yellow-rumped, Palm, or Black-throated Green Warblers, or even Blackburnians and Bay-breasted. I'm sort of an individualist and a free-thinker in this world, and I look upon the Black-throated Blue Warbler that way as well. Although I have observed the Black-throated Blue Warbler at Ryerson Woods on May 10 every year for the past eight years; last year, I nearly missed seeing my favorite warbler at all. That same year my birding colleagues were exclaiming they were seeing higher than normal numbers of the black and blue beauty — which only proves how fickle life can be. Another life lesson learned from a bird!

When the Black-throated Blue Warbler flies north to breed, my other favorite Illinois bird remains, the Yellow-headed Blackbird. My first encounter with this bird was at McDonald Woods in Lake County. What a sound that bird made! What a spectacular golden-yellow color on its head! What freedom it seemed to have flying over my head and back into the wetlands! What really solidified this species as a favorite was when I was doing the breeding bird atlas years ago and learned the call of the young from their nest. The same season I luckily confirmed them breeding in two different places in my atlas block in Lake County.

The sorrows and joys of life balance each other. One of the Yellow-headed Blackbird nesting sites was at a gun club. The next year, the club decided to expand its shooting range to include the wetland where the birds bred. I never could find them after that. Another breeding spot for these birds was at a marsh at the end of a subdivision. The residents built a duck blind, allowed purple loosestrife to take over, and, well, you know the rest of the story.

Breeding bird habitat is tenuous, and so is life. That's why both are so precious.

To learn the favorite birds of other Illinoisans, see the article beginning on page 24.

*Sheryl DeVore*

# MEADOWLARK

*A Journal of Illinois Birds*

Volume 8, Number 1 - 1999

ISSN 1065-2043

## President's Message

It's difficult to think nesting season when "we northern folks" are still waiting for the migrants that we saw in southern Illinois during our annual meeting to make their way north. By all accounts the meeting, held the last weekend in April, was a great success; more than 200 Illinois Audubon Society (IAS) and IOS members attended. The weather was great and the field trips were superb. We enjoyed many migratory birds and wild flowers as well as excellent presentations. A successful meeting does not happen all by itself and requires lots of hard work by a group of people and those individuals need to be recognized. Organizing this joint meeting was Joe Suchecki for IOS and Marilyn Campbell of IAS. Marilyn and her office staff did a super job of handling registration, and Keith McMullen and his committee did an equally superb job organizing the field trips. The facilities at the Rend Lake Resort were great and the staff and caterers were most helpful.

Many others contributed to the success of the meeting that need to be recognized. Thanks to all of you who helped. A complete report on the meeting may be found in the newsletter.

If you haven't visited one of our fine state park lodges and resorts, you should plan to do so soon. Also mark your calendars for our Year 2000 Annual Meeting the third weeked in May at Illinios Beach State Park, where we northerners are planning to show the southerners a great time and some specialty birds of our own. In the meantime, don't forget to bird during breeding season. You'll find as many surprises during June, July and August, as you do during migration periods; it just requires more effort.

Until next time --- good birding.

*Bob Montgomery*

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Vol. 8, No. 1

## About Our Cover:

Purple Gallinule illustration by David J. Athans. See Frank Bennett's Mermet Lake nesting story on page 11.

# The Status of the Monk Parakeet in Illinois:

*with comments on its native habitat and habits*

by Jason South

Upon arriving at the University of Chicago in autumn 1996, I was greatly surprised by repeat sightings of Ovenbirds and Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers on the quadrangles. However, little could prepare me for the green and blue explosion I witnessed one fall day. Bright, startling color had emerged from a tree ripe with red crabapples, only to quickly disappear amid the dark branches. Later I learned I had seen the gregarious Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*), after a taxi driver alerted me to the huge twig constructions dripping from a green ash tree at 53rd Street and Lake Shore Drive. An opportunity now presented itself to employ the vast knowledge of the science libraries.

What I found, unfortunately, is that the ecology of the Monk Parakeet, also called Quaker Parakeet by the pet trade, is poorly understood in the United States. In the early 1970s, interest in this species peaked due to its reputation as a pest species in South America and its recent appearance in several urban areas. In 1967, free-flying Monk Parakeets had been reported in the New York City area, and three years later nests were already present. Over the next five years these parakeets appeared in the wild in over a dozen states, including the first sighting in Chicagoland in 1973. Perhaps these now-feral parrots shouldn't have



*Monk Parakeets love crabapples, which are plentiful in Hyde Park as they ripen in late summer. The parakeets manipulate food and nesting material with their claws and beak. Photos taken in the Summer of 1998 in Hyde Park by Jason South.*



been a surprise: from 1968 to 1970 over 30,000 Monk Parakeets were imported into the United States from the southern portions of South America (Neidermyer & Hickey, 1977).

Most of these small groups of parakeets throughout the United States disappeared as quickly as they had come, presumably from natural causes. In the spring of 1973 several states including New York and California initiated eradication campaigns. Shooting was the preferred retrieval method. Two separate counts estimated that 44% of the U. S. Monk Parakeet population was destroyed. Monk Parakeets have persisted in the Northeast until today, whereas the State of California completely eliminated Monk Parakeets through vigorous eradication policies. Birds are often destroyed at the state border, and when small colonies appear, they are quickly eliminated. Seventeen states besides California restrict Monk Parakeet ownership in some way, but Illinois is not one of them.

After 1973, interest in Monk Parakeets in the scientific community dwindled. One should find this lack of interest surprising, as the little data collected suggest the Monk Parakeet population in the United States has increased dramatically since then. One study analyzed Christmas Bird Count (CBC) records in which observers



reported 1,186 birds from 76 localities in 15 states in 1994-95, while they had reported a mere 33 birds in 1975-76. Most of the Monk Parakeet (1,463 or 80.6%) sightings in 1994-95 came from two states, Florida and Texas. These data fit the standard equation of exponential growth (Van Bael & Pruett-Jones 1996).

### Chicago population

The winter of 1998, I counted 48 nests in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, and the summer of 1998, I noticed many new nests as well as previously existing nests that had grown. There were 83 active chambers in these nests, but the number is certainly larger now. Since Monk Parakeets are monogamous and roost in their stick nests year-round (Forshaw 1989), a fair estimate of the Hyde Park population the winter of 1998 would be 170 Monk Parakeets (although one or two young often stay

in the chamber with the parents until the next spring). However, several large nests were removed from utility poles in late October and early November. One of these nests contained at least 20 nesting chambers and rivaled a large appliance in size. These nests could have harbored from 60-90 more individuals, bringing the total population of Monk Parakeets in Hyde Park closer to 240.

While Monk Parakeets have bred continuously in Hyde Park for almost 20 years, they have also appeared in several other Chicagoland locations. Nesting has been confirmed in 1998 in Carol Stream (although nests have repeatedly been removed by the electric company), Bensenville, Berwyn, North Riverside, Calumet Park, and Burnham. Most nesting colonies outside of Hyde Park contain only one or two nests, but in Burnham there are at least seven (unpub. data, pers. comm. from Chicago-area birders). It is not

known whether the parakeets in Hyde Park are a source population for these other sites.

I suspect that there has been more than one escape or release, as one study in Argentina documented a median dispersal from natal nest to first breeding location as only 1,230 meters (Martin & Bucher 1993). At least two locations are obvious points of introduction: O'Hare Airport and Hyde Park. Additionally Monk Parakeets have been observed in free-flight in Addison, at Fermi Laboratory (DuPage County), in Zion (Lake County) where they nested, in Blue Island, and in downtown Grant Park.

Clearly the Monk Parakeet has established itself in Chicago. Only a vigorous, sustained effort could dislodge this species; that is, if you could win the sympathies of the general public that adores its parakeets. When the U. S. Department of Agriculture announced plans to eradicate the



*Monk Parakeets roosting in a tree in Hyde Park on an extremely cold afternoon. Photo taken by Jason South on 9 March 1998 when the temperature was 17 degrees F.*

Hyde Park birds in the late 1980s, a citizen group calling themselves the Harold Washington Memorial Parakeet Defense Fund, thwarted the effort with threats of a lawsuit (Chicago Tribune 1988). The late Mayor Washington was very fond of the birds that nested outside his apartment, and compared their experience to the plight of African-Americans in this city. University of Chicago students have also often seen the parakeets as representative of their status in Hyde Park, sometimes suggesting that the Monk Parakeet should become the school mascot.

Lately the Monk Parakeet has generated more negative attention, but not from any government agency. Commonwealth Edison, which supplies electrical power to Chicago, has found the parakeets to be a major nuisance. Monk Parakeets tend to nest in tall trees with few lower branches, or in the last century, utility poles. They favor the introduced eucalyptus in South America and the date palm in Florida, both tall trees with limited hiding spaces for predators (Spreyer & Bucher 1998). Utility poles are also very tall and have no obstructions between the nest and the ground. Furthermore, the lattice of supports, wires, and transformers at the top of utility poles provides an ideal nesting substrate, and it has been surmised that the electrical power running through the wires may provide some heat. It is perhaps a testament to the incredible building skills of the Monk Parakeet that their nests are such great insulators that they can cause the transformers to overheat. In the summer of 1997 one such fire broke out, damaging thousands of dollars worth of equipment and cutting off power to

residents. These nests have been removed three times now, but the birds continue to rebuild. The electrical equipment has been updated to eliminate many of the lattices that offer such great support for the huge stick



*In winter, Monk Parakeets rely heavily on bird feeders for sustenance. Photo taken in the Winter of 1998 in Chicago by Jason South.*

nests, but the parakeets have already rebuilt several of their removed nests.

In the winter of 1998, only 15% of the 48 Hyde Park nests were on utility poles; most were in trees in local parks. Most residents I have spoken with enjoy having the parakeets in their neighborhood. The only common complaint is the incessant noise, which can be oppressive if one lives near a large group of nests. A few residents also complain of the fallen sticks they must remove and of the pilfering of apples from backyard trees. On one occasion I have observed parakeets taking bites out of backyard tomatoes. Such observations force us to question whether the Monk Parakeet poses a real threat to Illinois agriculture, regardless of its charm. This hardy species reproduces quickly, but seems to be highly local-

ized. The nest offers shelter during the winter, but the parakeets may survive the coldest months solely on bird seed provided by man (Hyman & Pruett-Jones 1995). In that case they would not survive in large numbers in primarily rural agricultural areas and would not seem to pose a significant danger.

The scientific literature provides conflicting views of the threat posed by Monk Parakeets. One study in Brazil found that in a colony of Monk Parakeets nesting closely to agricultural fields, cultivated corn and wheat made up 54% and 10.3% of their diet, respectively (Dahlem 1994). In Florida, Monk Parakeets feed on agricultural crops of exotic fruit that include lychee, longan, mango, and black sapote (vanDoorn pers. comm.). However, the actual damage to crops in South America by parrots, especially Monk Parakeets, is often overstated. Government assistance is often at stake, and it is much easier to see bright green birds foraging on the crops than small insects. Poor agricultural practices may also lead to the most serious damage (Bucher 1992).

Competition with other species is another concern for the ecological and birding communities. Monk Parakeet populations have largely remained localized in residential areas, but in Florida and Puerto Rico the opportunity for parakeets to occur near agricultural fields may be high. This species does not compete for nesting chambers in trees, but little is known of its diet in North America.

So far the Monk Parakeet has not emerged as the next European Starling. It has been more of a local oddity, like the rare white deer from China that roam the grounds of

Argonne National Laboratory. The population growth of Monk Parakeets should be monitored closely, and more research on the most basic aspects of their natural history in North America should be undertaken. We shouldn't encourage the growth of this species through deliberate releases, but at the same time it seems unnecessary to utilize sparse resources to control the population at this time.

### How to see the parakeets

The best time of the year to view Monk Parakeets is in spring. They repair their bulky stick nests all year round, but in spring, construction is an obsession. Loud, chattering para-

keets fly from tree to nest all day, tearing off fresh twigs and weaving them into the nest structure with agile beak and feet. Plan a morning trip to Jackson Park in spring during peak warbler migration. Just south of Bobolink Meadow is a driving range where five or six nests are built on stadium lights. A short journey farther south will bring you to the Jackson Park Golf Course.

Just west of Hole 1 are another five or six nests woven into the branches of several tall trees. If you can't see the birds, you should hear them.

You might also look for the 27 seven nests in Washington Park, a short drive away. About half of those

are in the park at 54th Street and Cottage Grove, in between a playground and a National Guard Armory. You can stand in the middle of a grove of trees and literally be surrounded by Monk Parakeets and their nests. Another 10 or 11 nests are behind the armory, near the northwest corner.

Finally, there's Harold Washington Park at 53rd Street and Lake Shore Drive. At one time nine nests were in one green ash tree. Now there are only three, but one large nest is one of the most impressive in Hyde Park.

The Hyde Park parakeets are also online, at <http://student-www.uchicago.edu/users/jmsouth/>

**Editor's Note:** *The Illinois Ornithological Records Committee, in 1999, officially placed the Monk Parakeet on the Illinois State Checklist of Birds. The committee used this paper to help in its decision.*

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# Illinois' Second Confirmed Breeding Osprey

by Craig Thayer

Recently, Bergman Slough, part of the hodgepodge John J. Duffy Preserve in southwest Cook County, was nearly unknown to birders. This small body of water was notable only for the occasional observation of raptors (including Bald Eagle and Osprey) during migration.

In June 1996 the notoriety of this location changed. An Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) had been observed there in early June and on 20 June 1996, I visited the site in the



*Osprey in flight (1) and on nest (2) on 7 May 1997 at the John J. Duffy Forest Preserve in Cook County. The Osprey nest failed that year, but in 1998, a pair returned and successfully raised young in 1998. Photos by Eric Walters. See Field Notes for a photo of two Osprey juveniles taken in 1998.*

unlikely event the bird might still be present. Amazingly I observed an Osprey gathering freshly mowed grass from a field 0.3 miles southeast of the slough; it deposited this material in a dead tree at the edge of the slough. A thorough search for a definitive nest over the next few days was non-productive but on 11 July another noteworthy event occurred. On that date a pair of adult Ospreys was observed constructing a bulky stick nest at the exact location where the grass had been placed three weeks earlier. The pair remained in the vicinity until at least 11 August (and one of them was present until as late as 6 September), but there was never any sign of incubation. Two-year-old Ospreys may construct a nest, but not lay eggs (they begin breeding at 3 years of age or older), and this may be what occurred in 1996 (Ewins 1994).

In 1997, a pair of Ospreys was seen on 17 April. Utilizing the nest constructed the previous summer, the Ospreys apparently began incubating eggs by 9 May. Unfortunately by 22 June, the nest was abandoned without evidence of offspring. To add insult to injury, the nest was destroyed in a thunderstorm on 16 August. However the resourceful birds immediately constructed a new nest in a different tree before departing for fall migration. This was to serve as the 1998 home for three young Ospreys,



On 12 April 1998, Ospreys were first observed at Bergman Slough. By 26 April, incubation had apparently begun as the female persistently sat on the nest after this date. As

early as 8 June, behavior suggesting that young might be present was observed; the female reached down into the nest as if she might be feeding young (since the large stick structure was about 100 yards from the observation point and about 40 feet above the ground, direct observation wasn't possible). This coincides with the Osprey's average incubation period of about 40 days (Ewins 1984). On 21 June 1998, two young Ospreys, their heads barely protruding above the nest rim, were identified, and four days later a third one was seen. The young fledged by 5 August (consistent with the average fledging time of about 55 days after hatching). All three juveniles, easily distinguished from adults by pale feather edgings on their backs and upperwing coverts, were still present as late as 5 September and one was there until at least 3 October 1998.

The 1998 nest was downed in a thunderstorm, but not until 25 August after the young had fledged.

This is only the second confirmed occurrence of successful breeding by Ospreys in Illinois in the 20th century. The other one occurred at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in 1952 (Bohlen 1989).

Meadowlark



Bergman Slough meets the main breeding-site requirements for Ospreys. It contains shallow water with nearby trees suitable for nest construction. The Osprey's diet consists almost exclusively of fish, which it captures near the water's surface (Johnsgard 1990). Although adults will leave the nest if excessively disturbed by humans (leaving the nestlings vulnerable to predation), they can usually tolerate humans and will readily accept artificial nest platforms. For example in Wisconsin in 1992 two-thirds of nests were on manmade structures (Ewins 1994).

The Cook County Forest Preserve District erected an Osprey nesting platform at Bergman Slough the first week of April in 1999 and is considering erecting another in south-

west Cook County.

Ospreys are monogamous and exhibit strong site fidelity to their eyrie (Johnsgard 1990). Adult mortality averages 10-15% per year. More importantly young Ospreys usually return to within 30 miles of their natal site to breed (Ewins 1994). They remain in Central or South America as 1-year-olds. As 2-year-olds, about 30-50% of Ospreys return to the vicinity of their birth, but do not breed. Breeding first occurs between 3 and 5 years of age.

#### Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to Wes Serafin who greatly helped monitor this landmark event in 1998. Others whose observations helped contribute to this report are Eric Walters and Ken Wysocki.

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## Mississippi Kite Breeds in Calhoun County

by John N. McCall

Every outing of our Saturday birding group leads to some natural wonder. Led by Helen Wuestenfield, from Jerseyville, Illinois, we explore a wide range of habitats from Pere Marquette State Park to the lower reaches of the Illinois River and the nearby Mississippi River. In July 1998, one of our group, Lou Hanes, took us to see a Mississippi Kite's nest (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) near his home in Calhoun County. He had found this nest while tracking adult kites in the area.

The nest was one mile east of Red's Landing on the Mississippi River and due west of Hardin, Illinois. It was in a mile-long strip of bottomland forest by the edge of a bayou. We watched from the oppo-



*The Mississippi Kite breeds in southern Illinois. It occasionally wanders north after the breeding season. Daniel T. Williams took this photo of the Mississippi Kite at Rock Cut State Park in Winnebago County (northern Illinois) on 1 August 1998. See Field Notes for two more photos.*

site bank, about 50 yards away. The nest was a tangle of small sticks about 45 feet high in a cottonwood tree. Lou spotted the well-hidden nest while watching the parents fly in to feed the single chick. One adult, before delivering its prey, slammed it against a limb with its beak. Apparently, this was to kill or soften the small animal for the chick to eat. (Lou said "marinate.")

The adults sometimes sat in a nearby dead tree to rest or preen. All three birds were quiet except during one later visit, when one adult moved to a distant tree in plain view and gave a 2-note whistle. This behavior seemed more like a distraction display than an alarm call.

At our first sighting of this nest, the chick sported an all-white downy coat, plus a dark eye-ring. Two weeks later, on 25 July 1998, the chick had gained most of its first-year, heavily streaked plumage. We noticed the parents remained close by even though they did not feed it.

I have not seen much evidence of this species north of St. Louis. Most of its nests are in floodplain habitat and it feeds mostly on insects as well as amphibians and small snakes. I have sometimes seen flocks of 20 gleaning large insects from the air. With noticeable skill, the kites skim grassy meadows, glide along tree tops, or circle high in the sky. Mississippi Kites also feed on annual cicadas, grasshoppers, and dragonflies (See Bohlen 1989 and Bent 1937).

The species has been seen well north of its breeding range in Illinois, especially during years of 13-year and 17-year periodical cicada (*Magicala sp.*) outbreaks. These overmigrants or wanderers are usually first-year birds in juvenile plumage and are usually seen during late spring or summer (Bohlen 1989).

The famous naturalist, John J. Audubon, observed the Mississippi Kite while living in Louisiana. He admired its grace and flying skill. Seeing an adult who was guarding its half-grown offspring, Audubon shot them both. Another time, he instructed a boy to climb a tall tree to collect its eggs, then destroy the nest.

Habitat destruction through the years has severely reduced this species' numbers.

The Mississippi Kite winters in Central and northern South America but returns by late April or early May to breed. Its range extends widely across the southern states, from the Carolinas to Texas and Oklahoma, in parts of Kansas and Arizona, and northward through the central Mississippi Valley. Occasional nest sightings occur to eastern Kansas and

north of St. Louis.

It nests in tall trees such as cottonwoods, which are often found in mature bottomland forests close to water. Most nests are placed 40 to 60 feet high in a fork, somewhat hidden from view. The crude collection of sticks and twigs, sometimes with leaves attached, resembles the nests of crows or Red-tail Hawks. Incubation for the two to three eggs takes about 31 days. Fledglings leave the nest in another 30 days. (See Hardin et al 1977 for a thorough description of this species' nesting habits in Union County, Illinois.) Mississippi Kites migrate south by the end of August. Some immatures lag for several weeks more.

### Finding Mississippi Kites in Illinois

The Mississippi Kite is best found during its nesting season, early May through July. Single individuals or pairs can be seen rather commonly at isolated nesting sites along the Mississippi River, from Cairo to St. Louis. Included are St. Louis suburbs including Webster Groves and University City (Webster Groves Nature Study Society 1998). (Remember, though, if you see the kite in St. Louis, you can't count it on your Illinois list.) One reliable nesting site is at

Fort Kaskaskia State Park, nine miles north of Chester, off Highway 3.

The largest population of nesting Mississippi Kites in Illinois is along the levee road on the Union County Conservation Area (De Vore in press), as well as fewer numbers in a few other areas in Union, Alexander, and Jackson counties (Robinson 1996).

After nesting, individual adults or immatures might be seen elsewhere along the major rivers and streams until late August, when the species migrates toward Texas.

Observers in open country near major streams should look for a slender, falcon-like bird, about 14 inches long with a 36-inch wing span. At a distance, its light gray head and underparts look almost white. Its shoulders and back are medium-gray, while its dark primaries and indented tail are almost black. The dark eye-ring and blood-red eye are definitive if seen at close range. The immature Mississippi Kite is heavily streaked over most of its body and its dark tail has three light bands.

This kite is often missed because it sometimes catches insects at very high elevations. Look high in the sky for the whitish head and dark back, wingtips, or tail. You will admire its aerial skills and distinctive looks.

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# Breeding Bewick's Wren in Western Illinois: A Birder's Perspective

by James L. Funk

*In most parts of southern Illinois ... and even in localities where the true House Wren occurs, Bewick's Wren is far the more numerous of the two.*

-- Robert Ridgway 1889.

The presence of nesting Bewick's Wrens (*Thryomanes bewickii*) in west-central Illinois the summer of 1998 generated a fair amount of interest from birders. The species was found at three locations in Adams and Pike counties during the nesting season and at least one of those spots produced fledged young. How has the abundance of Bewick's Wrens changed over the past 40 years in this particular area? If you missed the birds this year, what are your chances in 1999? Does having a gas

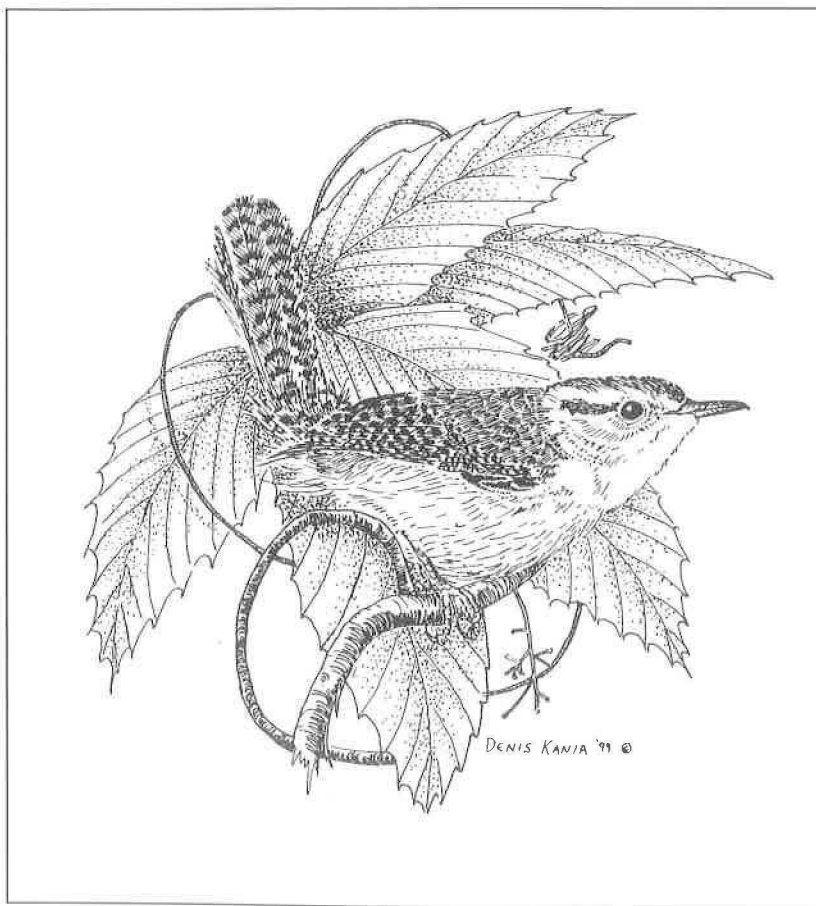
grill in your backyard really increase your chances of success? Inquiring minds....

To answer the first question, I checked the "first arrival" records and some daily lists kept by my parents, Loraine and Eunice Funk, beginning in 1947. Early arrival dates for the years 1947-1975 average about 28 March for Bewick's, with the earliest being 10 March in 1950 and the latest being 3 May in 1952. (Perhaps we were especially busy farming that spring?)

These dates correspond with those found in Bohlen (1989) for the rest of the state and give a good indication as to when to expect this wren's infrequent occurrence elsewhere in Illinois.

Daily lists during the spring season of those years (1947-1975) included Bewick's Wrens about half the time, but the species became more difficult to find after 1968 and was not seen at all during 1974. My own lists show that I heard one individual singing at the south end of Meredosia Bay in Morgan County in April of 1971 and that this was the first I had seen or heard since 1968.

After the mid-1970s, Bewick's Wrens were scarce enough in our area that any sighting merited attention. Probably the most attention given one individual bird was in April of 1977 or 1978 when a Bewick's landed on the railing of our small-town church during Sunday services and burst into song. A fair portion of the church congregation headed for the door! Knowing our family's reputation for the unusual, the rest of the congregation didn't seem to mind.



*Drawing of Bewick's Wren by Denis Kania.*

(Well, it "was" during the church school hour, not in mid-sermon....)

From the late 1970s until 1997, at least one Bewick's Wren has occurred around Beverly, in southeast Adams County almost every year. Nesting has occurred on at least six occasions, once in a wren box, once in a garage, twice in a barn, once in a dryer vent, and once in a gas grill. Other observers have noticed this wren's propensity for choosing unusual nest sites. See Ridgway (1889), Bohlen (1989), Robinson (1996), and Kennedy (1997).

In 1998, our first record of a Bewick's Wren was an individual

heard on Spring Court Day in Pike County, about 3 miles east of El Dara. The bird was singing near an abandoned house and outbuilding. No attempt was made that day to look for a nest, and the bird could not be located at the end of May. Another bird sang persistently from early May until almost the end of the month 1.5 miles south of Beverly near a barn. While successful nesting had taken place at this location in prior years, no nest was found in 1998 and no young were seen.

The successful nest in the area in 1998 was near the ranger's house at Siloam Springs State Park in eastern

Adams County, about ten miles from Beverly. This pair raised two broods; the first nest was in a gas grill and the second was in a nearby barn.

The ranger and his family were good enough to tolerate a steady stream of birders during late June and early July, and most who sought the birds found them. The available evidence would suggest that at least one Bewick's Wren could nest in the Beverly area in 1999. If we can put out enough gas grills for nesting boxes, perhaps the population will increase and you can all add it to your Illinois lists!

**Editor's Note:** *Funk's careful note-taking, as well as that of other members of his family, contributes to the knowledge of Illinois' ornithological history. At the time that these notes on the Bewick's Wren were being collected, the species was more common than it is now in the state. This species' numbers have dwindled drastically. Only one or two nesting pairs have been documented anywhere in the state within the past few years, and the species is now on the state-endangered list.*

*Although Robinson (1997) doubts the decline of this species is related to competition with House Wrens, Ridgway (1889) and, more recently, several other ornithologists (Kennedy and White 1996, Bartgis 1986, and Wilcove 1990) have felt otherwise. Other possible reasons for this species' decline in Illinois and elsewhere include use of pesticides and competition with other cavity-nesting species including House Sparrows, European Starlings, and Carolina Wrens. See Kennedy and White (1997) for more on this species' distribution.*

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# Purple Gallinules Hatch Young at Mermet Lake

by Frank K. Bennett

On 11 July 1998, I was taking my wife, Myra, for a morning drive around Mermet Lake in extreme southern Illinois to see the American lotus in full bloom, when I decided to stop at the second pull-off to snip a flower. As I began driving away, Myra, a non-birding spouse by her own admission, commented that she saw a "black bird with an orange beak and legs" jump off the top of some of the lotus pads near some buttonbush. She then demonstrated how the bird walked.

"Could it be?" I thought as I raced back. To my amazement, it was a Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryula martinica*) — and a life bird for me! Not a bad trade — one lotus flower for one life bird.

On 12 July, I arrived at 6:30 a.m. to enjoy an adult gallinule in breeding plumage making short flights from the buttonbush to the lotus. About 30 minutes later, my father arrived and we watched the gallinule land on top of the lotus pads. We also heard another gallinule clucking. I returned at 6 p.m. that day to meet with co-worker and fellow birder, Lester Barger and his wife. For 15 minutes, we saw no gallinule. We then played a tape of three gallinule clucks, and the bird instantly appeared. Another gallinule then emerged from the buttonbush. Lester and I then discovered there was a nest in the buttonbush. We also heard two different gallinules calling from farther out in the lake.

We enjoyed watching the brilliantly intense green, blue, yellow, and red colors of the adult, wondering how it camouflaged itself so well in the wetlands.

On 13 July, we noticed four chicks, which appeared to be about one-half the size of the adults, in the nest. On 14 July, we saw one gallinule sitting on

the nest while another flew back and forth into the lotus returning with food in its bill for the young. The chicks were fed approximately every five minutes.

On 15 July, Lester Barger and I saw two solid black downy chicks. Each had a bill that was red near the face, black in the middle, and then white at the tip. The legs appeared black, although the poor lighting made it difficult to determine the color.

We found two chicks still in the nest on 16 July, and two more in the buttonbush branches. The adults were nearby making soft clucks. The next day, I arrived to find the nest empty, but saw no chicks.

By this time, the word had gotten out across the state that the Purple Gallinule had successfully hatched young in southern Illinois. On 18 July, birders from Urbana and Chicago and arrived to glimpse the Purple Gallinules; everyone who came got at least one decent look.

I continued making trips after that to check on the status of the gallinules. Some hot evenings, I did not see the birds. Sometimes in the early morning, I heard the gallinules clucking and kicking in the breeding area.

One of my last views of the gallinules that summer was on 26 July 1998 from 8 to 9 a.m. when it was raining lightly. I saw three plain dark-backed chicks emerge from the buttonbush with an adult following them.

Another pair of Purple Gallinules successfully hatched young in 1998 as well.

Also, an adult Purple Gallinule was found injured in Jersey County on 28 June 1998. It died on 30 June (fide Frank Holmes) and since has been deposited at the Illinois State Museum (fide Vernon Kleen).

Bohlen (1989) lists the Purple Gallinule as a rare vagrant and very rare summer resident in southern Illinois. In 1989, two-thirds of the state records were for spring and most were found in marshes and at lakes, although some were seen in backyards. A dead Purple Gallinule was found in Lake County on 10 April 1997 at a forest preserve district golf course (Hurley 1997).

The only breeding records for this bird in the state of Illinois exist at Mermet Lake, which provides a shallow lake border habitat with emergent and floating vegetation, including the American lotus upon which the birds walk. Two downy young Purple Gallinules found at Mermet Lake in 1964 represent the first nesting evidence of this species for Illinois. A nest with eight eggs was found at Mermet Lake on 19 June 1973 (Bohlen).

The Purple Gallinule was on the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board's list of endangered birds from 1978 to 1994, but then was removed in 1994 on the basis that its breeding status in Illinois appears to be that of a vagrant, with Illinois occurring substantially north of its typical breeding range (Herkert 1995).

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# Successful Breeding Common Terns in Illinois:

## *With A Summary of Common Tern Nesting Occurrences in Illinois*

by Donald R. Dann



*Common Tern in flight near its nesting grounds in Lake County, 25 May 1995. Photo by Eric Walters.*

When I decided to pursue a second career in conservation, one of the first requests I received was from Amy Horstmann of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. "How would you like to monitor what is probably the only breeding colony of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) in the state?" she asked. In the early spring of 1997, Horstmann and I met at the Commonwealth Edison Waukegan coal-fired power plant, where the birds had previously nested.

Joining us from ComEd was Tom Platt, the compliance specialist. Tom took us to the "fly-ash ponds", on the property's south end. Here, ash from the burned coal is slurred into two large ponds for settling and eventual dredging and disposal. In the center of both ponds is a narrow peninsula at the end of which is a circular island, approximately 15 meters in diameter. It was on these islands where the terns, which are endangered in Illinois, had nested, with mixed success, in prior years. See Appendix for de-

tails. Since the ponds are dredged in alternate years, our focus (and hopefully the terns?) was the island in the pond fully surrounded by water where no dredging activity occurred.

ComEd helped creating suitable conditions for the birds by building a 1.5-meter electrified cyclone fence around the periphery of each island. ComEd also created a surface of crushed stone to simulate the sandy or rock substrate of the tern's preferred nesting habitat (Ehrlich, et al), and left some sparse vegetation, which terns like to provide shade for the chicks.

On 16 May 1997, I counted 22 birds and observed classic tern nesting behavior; males prancing about with their struts and waddles, flying in from the lake carrying minnows and ritually feeding females, and competing with other males attempting to do the same. Birds were seen hunkered down (apparently females), on what appeared to be their scrape nests. Some nesting attempts seemed to be

occurring on the stone just outside the enclosure, which at the time made me more than a little nervous. (Events proved my anxiety well-justified). I made similar observations over the next few weeks, counting as many as 27 birds on one occasion.

Then disaster struck. The third week of June, I found the island empty. Every tern was gone, nowhere to be seen. What happened? Horstmann and I conjectured several possibilities. Perhaps the electric fence was not working, or maybe a raccoon had dug underneath it to reach the birds. Or perhaps a predator had struck a nesting bird outside the fence, which caused the entire colony to abandon the island.

The following April, 1998, Horstmann and I again met with Tom Platt, who helped improve the fence's security, and extend fencing material underground at an angle to deter predators. The contour of the land outside the fence was configured to deter nesting there. Plastic matting was installed under the stone with holes in only a few places to allow the right amount of plant material to grow.

On my first observation, 15 May 1998, I found no birds. On 22 May 1998, I found 2 Common Terns, one on an apparent nest inside the fence and the other flying in from the east carrying food. On 27 May 1998, I found 7 birds, and on 7 June, I saw 12 Common Terns!

As the weeks progressed the numbers continued to increase but so did the difficulty of getting an exact count. I did my studies with a scope from a road running along the south end of the pond, at least 100 meters from



*Common Tern eggs at Waukegan breeding site in Lake County. May 1998. Photo by Amy Horstmann.*



*Two Common Tern chicks at Waukegan breeding site in Lake County. 13 July 1998. Photo by Amy Horstmann.*

### **Appendix: A**

#### Summary of Common Tern Nesting Occurrences in Illinois

\* From a 3 June 1977 record of a phone conversation between Jim Neal and Richard Thom: In 1976, Jim Neal found two nests in the Johns-Manville tailing area north of Waukegan. Eight pair attempted to nest on the Commonwealth Edison property near there. He found the nests, but they were all destroyed during the season. Terns are nesting this year (1977) in the rolling tailing piles on the Waukegan lakefront west of the Black-crowned Night-Heron colony.

\* From nest record cards for the 1980 nesting season: On 9 June, C.N. Becker reported a total of 29 Common Tern nests at Waukegan on the ash pond dike. This included 1 nest with 1 egg, 5 nests with 2 eggs, 22 nests with 3 eggs, and 1 nest with 2 eggs and 1 young. On 22 June 22, D. Johnson reported the entire colony abandoned.

\* From a 6 August 1983 memo from Randy Heidorn to Mike Sweet: A July 8 survey found 32 nests with 19 chicks and 8 eggs. Two young birds were found dead. Heidorn estimated that 21-28 birds had fledged by the time of this survey.

\* From a 15 August 1983 report by Mike Sweet on the 1983 nesting season based on five surveys of the Waukegan colony:

- 2 June: 24 nests, 65 eggs, 0 chicks, 0 fledglings
- 10 June: 28 nests, 70 eggs, 9 chicks, 0 fledglings
- 14 June: 32 nests, 74 eggs, 13 chicks, 0 fledglings
- 8 July: 8 eggs, 19 chicks, 21 fledglings (This appears to vary somewhat from Randy Heidorn's memo cited above.)
- 11 August: 0 nests, 0 eggs, 0 chicks, 0 fledglings

\* From a 15 May 1985 report by Mike Sweet on the 1984 nesting season: He recorded three surveys of the Waukegan colony:

- 4 June: 15 nests, 39 eggs, 0 chicks, 0 fledglings, 22 adults
- 23 June: 2 nests, 2 eggs, 2 chicks, 0 fledglings, 9 adults
- 27 July: 0 nests, 0 eggs, 0 chicks, 0 fledglings, 0 adults

- Glen Kruse

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the island. Moreover vegetation was growing on the outer perimeter of the fence, largely obscuring my sight lines of birds on nests. Once I climbed atop the roof of my car to try to look down into the enclosure. This seemed to raise the ire of the entire colony as, en masse, they took off and headed straight for me, screaming their high-pitched "tee-arr-r-r" calls. I was more than a little concerned, as they are known to release feces at an attacker at the low point of these aggressive dives.

On 13 July 1998, Horstmann, I, and a ComEd employee donned hard hats and walked the peninsula to the enclosure. Ignoring the protesting and attacking adults we used the insulated gate handle and went inside. We saw six down-covered tern chicks, hiding behind vegetation or scurrying around to avoid us. Horstmann photographed several. The total number of young birds for the season, either in the enclosure or flying, turned out to be seven, seen the following week. We had confirmation of successful nesting of this Illinois endangered species.

**Author's Note:** *In my first survey at this site, in May of 1999, I saw approximately 24 Common Terns preening, mate-feeding, and defending territory.*

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# An Intimate View: The Ring-Billed Gull Life Cycle in the new Waukegan Colony

by Eric Walters

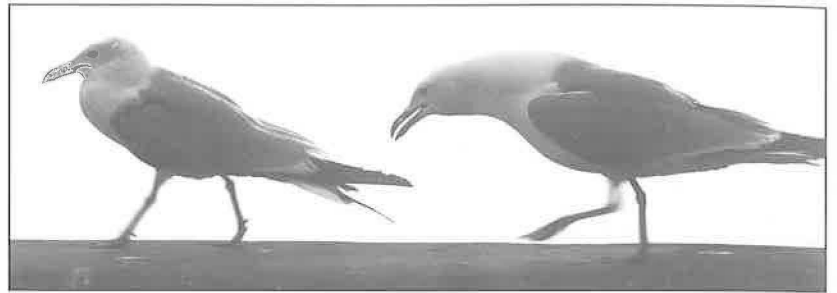
On 3 May 1996, I was birding Waukegan Beach on Lake Michigan in Lake County, Illinois, when a large commotion of gulls about 100 yards west of the beach caught my eye. I walked toward the site to discover an undisturbed area of private property encircled by a protected fence. An enormous flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) appeared to be staging in this open and flat area. As I walked closer, I saw hundreds of gulls sitting on vegetation. It appeared that a new gull colony had started in Illinois.

Actually, people who worked near the area had seen similar activity at this location in the spring and summer of 1995. Between 1981 and 1988, observers had also recorded a few gull nests near this colony.

I counted at least 740 nests that day in May. Since I only counted from the east side of the fence, more nests could have present elsewhere that I did not see. I didn't make another nest count that summer. However, I counted 1,460 nests there on 14 May 1997, nearly twice the 1996 total. This count included views from the southwest section, made by gaining access to the private parking lot just south of the colony.

## Nest Cycle

Courtship dance and copulation begins the Ring-billed Gull cycle. I have seen Ring-billeds copulating a number of times in April to early May along the Evanston lakefront and at Chicago's Montrose Harbor. These sites are 23 and 20 miles respectively



*This Ring-billed Gull is using the long-call display to deter its opponent. Photo taken on 11 June 1997 at Montrose Beach, Chicago, Cook Co. by Eric Walters.*

from the nearest colony. I have also seen a subadult pair copulating as late as 22 May in Evanston. These observations suggest the initial stages of the breeding cycle need not occur near the colony.

Ring-billed Gulls express territorial defense and dominance in specific ways. Two common expressions are the "long calls" and "open-wing charges" (Ryder 1993). The "long calls" display starts with a gull slowly bowing its head down towards its feet and then slowly raising it back up to shoulder level. Extended call notes occur during this whole sequence, hence the name, "long call". Bowing of the head doesn't indicate subservience; rather the dominant gull performs this behavior. Its eyes are always on the bird to which it is displaying aggression. If the weaker gull doesn't move away in response to a "long call", the calling gull will often walk slowly in the direction of its opponent. This usually is enough to move the weaker one away. However, if this still doesn't work, then a gull might use an "open-winged charge".

An "open-wing charge" can occur over food disputes, prime roosting locations, and territorial claims. But it is in colonies where it can be seen most frequently. There, gulls are less tolerant to invasion of nesting space. An "open-wing charge" starts with the gull extending its wings perpendicular to its opponent followed by a mad rush with its bill wide open. No calling occurs during this display despite its bill being fully open. This display really looks fearsome and it consistently works.

Ring-billeds are single-brooded, and display a large range of nest dates. For example, peak egg-laying in a southern Ontario colony was from mid-April to July (Ryder 1993). "Birds show strong fidelity to colony site and specific area in colony"; older individuals begin egg laying up to two weeks earlier than young birds; younger birds (second years) breed regularly; two to four eggs are laid. Three is the most common number (Ryder 1993).

My 1997 nest count consisted mainly of full adults. Later in May or



June, younger birds appeared at the site. Those arriving later in the season were not the dominant adults and therefore had to settle for less desirable nesting sites toward the colony fringe. This also applies to settling for sites such as dense herbaceous and/or shrub cover, a location Ring-billeds avoid (Ryder 1993).

Most data from the three Illinois colonies, Dresden/Heidecke Lake, Lake Calumet, and now Waukegan, correlate with national average of about three eggs per nest. At all sites, the onset of nesting occurred in late April, with nest count peak around mid-May.

Incubation averages 26 days. The young stay in the nest for about 10 days prior to fledging (i.e. juveniles leaving the nest but staying within a 50 yard radius). About four days after fledging, the young leave the nest site, but remain no more than about 40 meters away. The young depart the colony 11 days after fledging (Ryder 1993). The young at the Waukegan colony had fledged by the first week of June 1997.

At the other colonies in northeast Illinois, fledging has been observed weeks later with mid-June being the earliest, but this could be a function of lack of consistent observation. At

**Table 1.** Ring-billed Gull Life Cycle

	Onset	Peak	Ending
Copulation & courtship	April 8	May 5*	July 5
Egg laying & nesting	April 15	May 10*	July 10
Maximum nest count	na	May 25	na
Hatching	May 10	June 5*	August 5
Fledging	May 20	June 15*	August 15
Leave colony grounds <sup>^^</sup>	May 31	June 25	August 25
Juveniles depart area	June 28#	July 19#	September 5
Adults depart area	July 25	August 25	September 25

Lake Calumet in 1991, hatched young were seen on 25 May (fide Walter Marcisz), which would put fledging no later than 5 June, consistent with Waukegan's 1997 results. This June fledging would coincide with egg laying occurring in the last week of April.

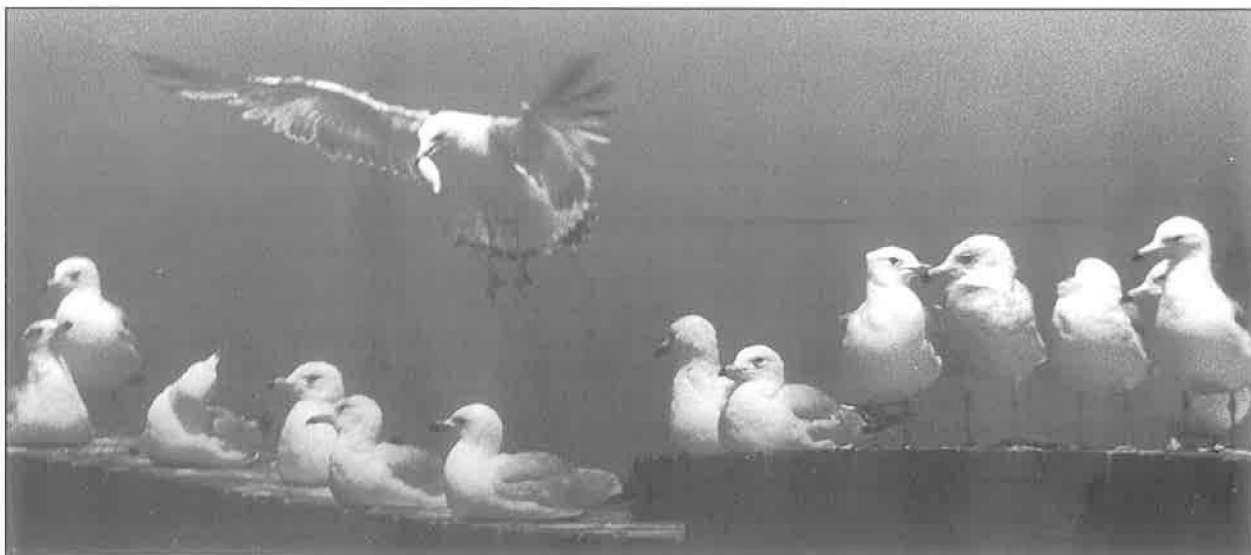
Table 1 summarizes the Illinois data published from the three gull colonies, other published research, and my data. This chart refers only to birds from the breeding colonies. The dates provide a general estimated time frame likely accurate within a week in Illinois for the onset and peak categories. The "Ending" column relies heavily on published data from outside Illinois colonies (Ryder 1993).

For example, the ending of the "Adults depart area" line is an estimate based solely on the fact that the

adults would have finished their body molt by then and would be moving. I have recorded their fall migration during October to mid-November, which supports this estimated departure date. The line, "Juveniles depart area" for the "Onset" and "Peak" refer to eight years of personal data. More research would certainly be of interest, especially since Illinois is at the southern end of this species' breeding range and should have earlier averages than sites further north.

\* Peak egg-laying and nesting activity appears to occur consistently between 20 April and 25 May. These dates reflect the approximate median date in the cycle for each category.

<sup>^^</sup> This refers to juveniles more than 50 yards, but within a mile of the colony site.



*Ring-Billed gulls, Dempster Street Beach, Evanston IL, 20 May 1997. Photo by Tony Kelly.*

# These two statistics were compiled from eight years of data collected at Evanston (north Cook County). It refers to the average arrival date or peak count of juveniles at that location. Evanston is 27 miles (and 23) from the Calumet (and Waukegan) colonies. The earliest juvenile arrival was on 22 June 1990 while the maximum peaks were about 700 juveniles on 13 July 1990 and 400 on 14 July 1993, respectively.



*The young started hatching in early June at the Waukegan Colony. Photo taken 6 June 1997 in Waukegan, Lake Co. by Eric Walters.*

### Fledglings / Successes and Dangers

After hatching, the need for food increases. Ring-billed Gulls mainly eat fish and insects. One parent does 95% of the foraging at the peak of hatching. The other parent defends the nest site. This foraging activity occurs during the first two and last two hours of the day (Ryder 1993).

With so many gulls hatching and fledging, competition for food likely drives gulls to new areas. Pressure to find new food sources is what may have driven adults into flooded fields during the early June of 1993 (fide Joe Milosevich) or into suburban alleyways in nearby towns during the last two spring and summers (fide Walter Marcisz). Juveniles can't compete with adults for food sites near the colony, so they leave the area sooner than adults to find food.

The need for food and the search in outlying areas from the colony site can lead to disaster for the young birds. Large-scale death from starvation was documented in 1997. Over 600 juveniles were found dead in outlying southern Cook County suburban locations (11 July TV news report, fide Walter Marcisz). I found numerous dead juveniles in the summer of 1997 near the Waukegan colony site as well as in the Evanston area.

Fledging is a time in which numerous territorial skirmishes occur.

Adults attack other chicks who cross into their territory, and will peck them to death (Ryder 1993). I saw one chick who apparently lost track of its parents and who went up to numerous other adults, only to be attacked on its neck. The gull was bitten so badly that its neck was bloodied with an exposed wound.

Young gulls can also become "road kill." Their lack of experience with fast-moving cars and slow reaction times to dangerous situations leave many dead. One recent summer day, 75 were found dead along Stony Island Avenue very near the Lake Calumet colony (fide Walter Marcisz). I found numerous casualties the summer of 1997 along McCormick Boulevard in Skokie and Evanston.

Weakness from lack of food and foraging in garbage dumps or other unhealthful areas could introduce bacteria or viruses into a young gull's system, which could ultimately cause death. Accounts of botulism have been reported, and probably took the lives of 600 gulls between 1959 and 1964 (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986).

Other factors contribute to the deaths of young gulls. Mammals such as coyotes, raccoons, skunks, or even rats invade colonies. The failure of the 1993 Grundy and Will County colony was probably due to repeated coyote predation (fide Joe Milosevich). One study from 1965

found that adults deserted eggs when a raccoon came by at night. That resulted in the deaths of 32 to 87 embryos, which had cooled below the temperature required for incubation (Emlen et al. 1966).

Human intrusion has impacted the colony's reproduction success. This intrusion causes an interruption of nesting activity, which leads to the eggs being exposed to low or ambient temperatures. This disturbance can result in a 16 to 31 percent desertion of nests (Vermeer 1970 & Southern and Southern 1981). In the spring of 1994, dredging activity and the resulting truck traffic at Lake Calumet disturbed nesting gulls. The use of a cannon to create loud noises frightened away the gulls (fide Walter Marcisz). These disturbances may have caused a 25 percent drop in nest numbers from the annual estimate of about 10,000 nests. That means some 5000 less young fledged that summer.

Typically, 90 percent of adults and 40 percent of chicks return to same colony to nest (Ryder 1993).



*This Ring-billed Gull fledged several days before Eric Walters took the photo on 11 July 1997 at the Waukegan Colony, Lake Co.*

Yet, in 1995, the Lake Calumet gull colony population dropped to an all-time 1990s low of 4,000 to 5,000 nests. That was the same year the Waukegan colony originated, and also when the Grundy/Will colony had the highest nesting totals. Perhaps the Lake Calumet birds were displaced to these other sites.

The Waukegan colony caused significant problems for the city and nearby businesses. Low-flying gulls and wandering juveniles regularly collided with cars.

At the nearby public beach, gulls congregated in large masses. When flushed into flight by humans, the gulls often deposited excrement on the beach and into the water. Unsafe levels of bacteria believed to be caused by the gulls' excrement was blamed for the record number of days the Waukegan beach was closed during the summer of 1997 (fide Chicago Tribune). Thin filament wire has been placed on the sand mound in the middle of the colony to prevent the gulls from landing and considering using the dune for nesting.

In 1997, an estimated 16,500 Ring-billed Gull nests were found in the southwestern Lake Michigan basin (Lake Calumet 10,000+; northwest Indiana about 5,000; Waukegan about 1,500; Will/Grundy counties none). This corresponds to 33,000 breeding adults present during the onset of nesting. A significant number of non-breeders would have been present as well. A conservative estimate from this region would be at least 5,000 non-breeders (the vast majority are in subadult, 2nd year plumage).

The total Ring-billed population prior to fledging was estimated at 38,000 for 1997. This number represents about 1 percent of the world's Ring-billed population based on 1993 numbers (Ryder 1993).

The Ring-billed population is poised for a significant population growth in the near future. Using estimates based on Ryder (1993), we will have an estimate of 48,000 gulls returning in 1998 with the potential to breed. This includes almost 35,000



*These two Ring-billed Gulls, approximately 15 days old, have left the confines of the colony and now begin life on their own. Photo taken on 11 July 1997 at the Waukegan colony, Lake Co. by Eric Walters.*

adults (including the 5,000 subadults now mature) and 13,000 young birds. This number represents a one-year 15 percent growth rate.

While the Ring-billed hasn't nested south of the Great Lakes in the Midwest until the Heidecke Lake/Dresden Lake locations, the expected future population explosion would appear to be the factor that could create new colonies to the south.

The Waukegan colony has established a foothold in the area and appears to be growing rapidly. What the effects of this population or the predicted future explosion of numbers will have on humans will likely become the subject of much interest. Until then, the lower Lake Michigan will continue to offer itself as an excellent summer home for the Ring-billed Gull.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Ken Brock, John Castrale, Walter Marcisz, and Joe Milosevich for their comments.

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*Eric Walters*

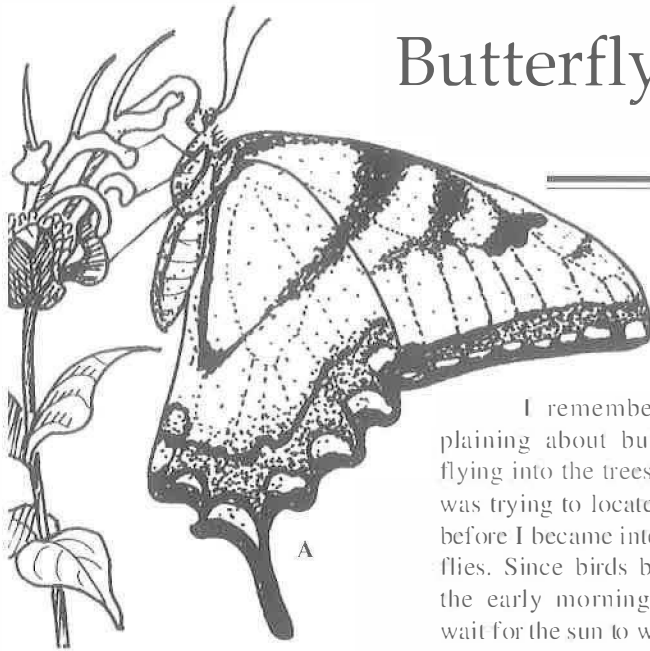
7714 N. Marshfield Avenue, #2  
Chicago, IL 60626

**Author's Note:** *The property owners of the Waukegan colony site filled the area with fishing wire to keep the birds from nesting in 1998. However, the gulls appropriated an area about 75 yards west of the original site, where they nested in 1998. On 31 May 1998, there were 850 nests on the site. The first sign of fledged young (13 total) was on 31 May 1998. On 3 July 1998, there were 1,665 adults and 325 juveniles present. In 1999 the property owners used various methods to deter gulls from breeding. As of this writing the methods have been successful.*



# Butterflying for Birders

by Kathy Phelps



An Eastern Wood-Pewee whistles “pee-err,” pee-a-wee” and “fee-ba-dee” in random order. A Carolina Wren shouts its “tea-kettle” calls from the ravine, and an Indigo Bunting sings its series of paired notes. All as color creeps into the eastern sky, and as I fight to wake up from a cool night that invites sleep.

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo adds a series of “klowps,” and a Field Sparrow rolls his songs to a stop.

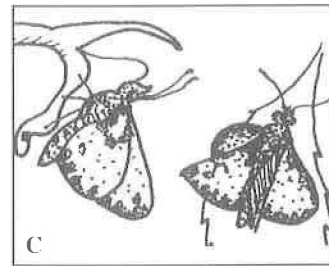
By 7 a.m. the bird chorus dwindles, and the grasshopper/cicada chorus builds. Even the abrupt calls of a White-eyed Vireo don't revive it. After all, what's to sing about on the first day of August? The little amount of activity doesn't do much to excite this birder. It's no excuse to stay home, though, not when the butterflies will begin basking, flying, and feeding as soon as direct sunlight reaches camp.

I remember complaining about butterflies flying into the trees when I was trying to locate birds. That was before I became interested in butterflies. Since birds become active in the early morning and butterflies wait for the sun to warm them before they fly, it simplifies things for this birder-butterflyer.

I camp at rural property we own seven miles southeast of Harrisburg. I mow the area around the camper and let the rest of the 33 acres grow naturally. The mixture of woods, two ravines, and barrens (a prairie-like plant community with scattered trees) offers a variety of habitat.

Sunlight slips over the driveway and the wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) bordering it. The first Spicebush Swallowtail

butterfly sails in and lands on the pink flowers, its forewings continually beating as it sips nectar. Soon two more join it. They fly about, feed, and occasionally bask with their black wings open flat. All the activity gives a good view of the row of light spots edging the wings and the wash of blue on



the hindwings. Two rows of orange spots edge a blue area underneath on their hind-wings. A

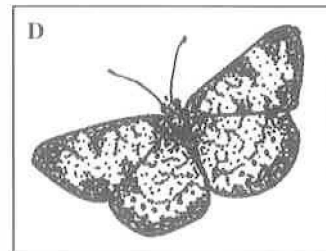
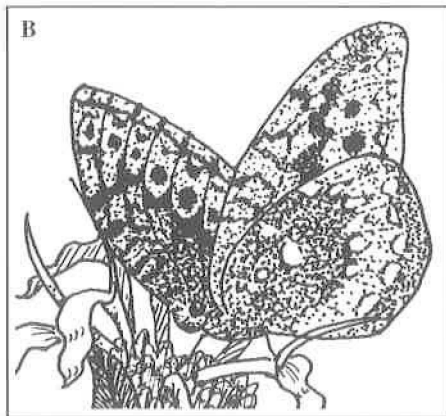
Tiger Swallowtail joins them. Its bold yellow and black pattern makes it easy to identify. Swallowtails are large butterflies with wingspans ranging between 2.5 and 5.5 inches, and with tail-like projections on their hindwings. Six species occur in Illinois.

As the sunlight covers more vegetation, the butterflies' area of activity broadens. Butterflies are cold blooded and need the sunlight to warm their blood and flight muscles.

Next comes a Great Spangled Fritillary. Its large size, orange and brown wings with a black pattern, and silver spots underneath on the hindwings make it another butterfly easy to identify. It and the Variegated Fritillary are the only fritillaries in southern Illinois; three other species occur in northern Illinois.

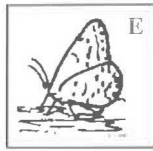
Fritillaries are one of the many members of the large diverse Family Nymphalidae, or brush-foots. The front pair of legs on brush-foots are greatly reduced, giving them the impression of having only four legs.

A male Zabulon Skipper zips in, lands on the mint, spreads its hind-wings out flat, and angles its fore-





wings. At least the Zabulon is one of the folded-wing skippers with a distinctive pattern.



A female Zabulon basks on the grass. The male approaches her from behind, his wings in a rapid flutter as he bumps her. She flutters her wings in protest, and he flies back to the mints. He's patterned mostly with orange and yellow with a little brown; she's mostly brown with light spots on the forewing.

New birders find sparrows confusing. As their experience grows they find fall warblers a challenge and then really complain about shorebirds. They should try skippers. A few species are so similar it takes microscopic examination of their genitalia for positive identification. I don't do that. I use the "my first guess is" philosophy. At least a butterfly specimen can be collected and sent to an expert for identification. I send mine to Jim Wiker, a field assistant with the Illinois State Museum.

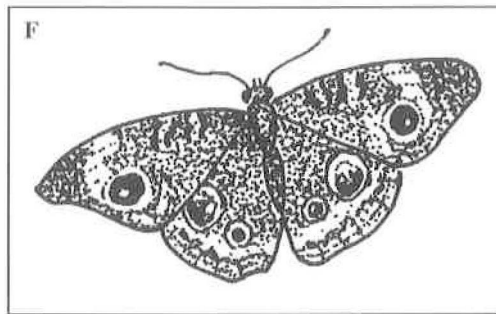
Fifty-two species of skippers occur in Illinois. Skippers aren't true butterflies: Butterflies and moths belong to the Order Lepidoptera. Butterflies are then divided into two superfamilies: the true butterflies (Papilionoidea) and the skippers (Hesperoidea). True butterflies have narrow bodies, long antennae, and brightly colored full wings. Skippers are stockier and more compact like moths, with short triangular wings that are most often dull colored.

The sky remains clear, and a breeze blows. A White-breasted Nuthatch gives "yank" calls as it moves through the woods, and a Summer Tanager repeats "pit-i-tuk-tuk" from perches around camp.

After a glass of iced tea, I walk the road looking for more species. Old roads like this one, with the woods, wet spots, and a roadside mixture of

weeds and native plants provide some of the best butterflying (unless the county mows the roadsides like they did two months ago).

There's a puddle party going on. The moisture from a rainy day before yesterday attracts several species of butterflies. Newly emerged males come to the road for the moisture and for salts and minerals needed for mating.



Sixteen Pearl Crescents fan their wings as they walk around and hold them closed as they sip. They're smaller and have less contrast to their orange and brown pattern than the Silvery Checkerspot. Both species fly now.

The Eastern Tailed-Blue's light blue-gray matches the color of the rocks. Seven flit about, all males. Males are blue above and the females brown. They rub their hindwings back and forth as they sit on the ground. Aredarea with a black spot makes a false target on the hindwing to attract a predator's attention away from the actual head. The tails become "antennae." The movement increases the attraction.

One of the five common buckeyes lands beside me as I sit on the road, at first fanning its brown wings and then holding them flat. An orange band connects two eye spots on the

hindwing, and a white band wraps part way around the eye spot on the forewing. Buckeyes migrate from the south and return in the fall.

The brown and tan pattern of the three Tawny Emperors matches the color of the wet dirt, until they open their wings and flash the patterned orange above.

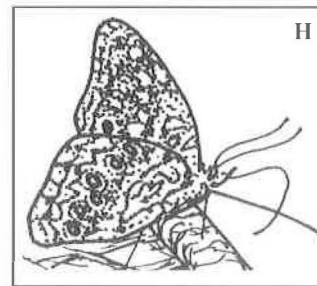
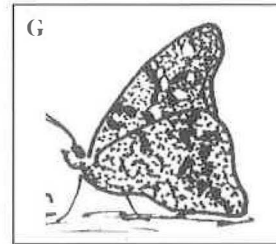
A Hackberry Emperor lands on the edge of my sleeveless blouse. I don't feel a thing as it sips sweat from my shoulder. This up-close view shows all the black spots on its brown and cream wings.

A Question Mark walks around on the road, fanning its wings and sipping. Its brown pattern underneath and shape give it the appearance of a dead leaf; fanning the wings shows the brilliant orange with brown markings on the forewing and the deep brown of the hindwing.

I can't see the silver question mark underneath on the hindwing from here. The Eastern Comma has a silver comma. To see these markings requires a cooperative butterfly. Often, I use the tail shape to differentiate the two: The Question Mark has a longer narrower tail and the Comma a shorter wider one.

The Question Mark, Eastern Comma, Mourning Cloak, and Goat-weed Leafwing all overwinter as adults and will emerge from hibernation on warm, sunny winter days. These species seldom visit flowers and instead prefer sap flows, rotting fruit, animal droppings, and carrion.

The nine Red-Spotted Purples either slowly fan their black wings or hold them closed. The purplish blue shines on the upper hindwings when



they're open, and orange spots show when they're closed. They resemble a Spicebush Swallowtail, only without the tails.

Except for the Eastern Tailed-blues, all the puddling species represent different sub-families of the brush-footed family.

A small brown butterfly flies low over the road in a hopping-style flight, its wings held more upright, barely flapping. Satyrs fly this way, landing in a sunny spot. Through my binoculars I see the silver area with black spots on the hindwing that identify it as a Gemmed Satyr. Satyrs have numerous eye spots and are shades of brown. Six species fly in southern Illinois.

Then when I think I've seen almost all there is to see, an American Snout flies at my approach and lands on the end of a dead branch in an oak tree. It's elongated palpi give it the impression of having a snout. It, the Hackberry Emperor, and Tawny Emperor all use hackberry trees as host plant.

I return to camp and discover a late-blooming butterfly-weed now in the sun. A Monarch nectars on the orange flowers. The Monarch is our only member of the Danainae sub-family of brush-foots. It flies.

Next, I head for the barrens. The first Virginia lespedeza to have any flowers, attracts the only Gray Hairstreak around. Bordering black and white lines pattern both wings, and its red area has two black spots. Hairstreaks are small fast-flying butterflies with tiny tails on the hindwing.

Blues, hairstreaks, and coppers make up the Family Lycaenidae. To find any coppers, I'd have to visit a site where dock grows.

Not much blooms in the barrens now to attract butterflies. Later this month more Virginia lespedeza, bush clovers, tick trefoils, tickseed sunflowers, and goldenrods will bloom.

I return to camp and eat lunch. Warm-weather cumulus clouds begin building and occasionally block the sun. The humidity level

rises with the temperature.

A Cabbage White lands on a selfheal and nectars on its remaining three flowers. The butterfly is all white except for the pale yellow under on the hindwing. A black spot and gray corner occur on the forewings.

A greenish-yellow Cloudless Sulphur flies through camp and lands briefly on a partridge pea, one of its host plants. This is a female; she has a spot on both wings; males are solid yellow.

Sulphurs and whites belong to the Pieridae family, which also includes Orange Tips. They're mostly yellow, orange, or white with black markings. Several species of sulphur fly in southern Illinois. Orange and Clouded Sulphurs are our most common ones. Orange Sulphurs have varying shades of orange on upper wing surfaces. Clouded are yellow above.

A Hoary Edge, one of the spread-winged skippers, circles the flowerhead on a selfheal as it sips from the violet and white flowers. It holds its wings at an angle, showing the fuzzy-edged white area underneath on the hindwing and the dark yellow band on the forewing. It darts up and chases a Spicebush Swallowtail.

Several species of spread-winged skippers occur in Southern Illinois. As the name suggests, spread-winged hold their wings out flat when perched.

## Butterfly Counts

My interest in butterflies involves more than walking around tallying them. Activities associated with birding also apply to butterflying: I keep a life list, site lists, yard list, and an Illinois year list. My list for here includes 64 species and 47 in my yard. It shocks people when I tell them I can saw 75 species last summer in southern Illinois.

The Illinois checklist includes 129 species, and 717 species occur on the North American, north of Mexico list. As with birds, some occur in specific habitats and others in a variety. The best way to locate a certain species, is to look in the vicinity of its caterpillar host plant.

I record flight dates every year on charts of graph paper; this shows me when the species fly during the season and how many broods occur. In southern Illinois butterflies fly from March through October, depending on the weather.

**Meadowlark**

