

Illinois & Indiana



INDIANA LAKEFRONT:

- A = Hammond Lakefront Sanctuary
- B = Miller Beach
- C = Dunes SP & Beverly Shores
- D = Mich. City Harbor

Abbreviations: Carl. L. (Carlyle Lake in Clinton, Fayette, & Bond, IL); I.B.S.P. (Illinois Beach S.P., on the lakefront some 17 km s. of the Wisconsin border); Jax. P. (Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront); L. Cal. (L. Calumet), L. Chau. (L. Chataqua N.W.R., IL); Mill. B. (Miller Beach, IN, the southernmost point on L. Michigan).

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Red-throated Loons were reported only along the Indiana lakefront, where 6 were seen off Beverly Shores 4 Jan (BJG), and an ad. was at the Port of Indiana 15 Feb (SBg, ph. JKC et al.). The season's only Pacific Loon was an imm. at Rend. L. 14 Dec (ph. DKa). Although a scattering of Common Loons appeared in early winter, numbers were below normal; the peak count was 5 at Rend. L., IL 14 Dec (DKa). Horned Grebes were essentially restricted to the s. reaches of the Region, where the peak tally consisted of 18 on L. Monroe, IN 8 Dec (DRW). The season's only Red-necked Grebe was at Rend. L., IL 3 Jan (FB), and Eared Grebes went unreported. American White Pelicans were scarce, but one wandered n. to Du Page, IL where it was seen 15 Dec (LLH). Despite extensive ice development, a few Double-crested Cormorants wintered on L. Michigan.

It was a good winter for Great Blue Herons, which were widespread across the Region; the peak count was of 174 at L. Chau. 1 Jan (RGB, SBj). Single early-winter Great Egrets were at Horseshoe L., IL 1 Dec (FH) and in Richland, IL on the same day (LHa, BS). Once again, Black-crowned Night-Herons wintered in the n.; 25 (3 ad. & 22 imm.) were at the Hammond, IN filtration plant 4 Jan (JKC, KJB), and an imm. was found at Riverdale, IL 1 Feb (WJM). Black Vulture numbers were up this winter, yielding several impressive totals: 105 in Massac, IL 3 Jan (FB), 50 in Lawrence, IN 21 Dec (JSC), and 36 at Brookville Res., IN 7 Jan (JF, RHe et al.). Good Turkey Vulture counts were logged in s. portions of the Region, where the peak tally was 85 in Massac, IL 3 Jan (FB).

WATERFOWL

Though still quite plentiful, fewer Greater White-fronted Goose were detected than in recent winters. Peak tallies included 6000 at Union County Conservation Area, IL 25 Jan (KAM) and 1500 at L. Carl. 9 Feb (DKa). In contrast, Snow Goose counts remained astronomical, with 300,000 at Carl. L. 9-18 Feb (DKa, KAM), 100,000 there 12 Jan (DKa), and 50,000 at Rend. L., IL 14 Dec (KAM, CL). Ross's Goose counts were down, with a peak of 6 at Rend. L. 14 Dec (KAM, CL), though more surely went undetected in the hordes at Carl. L. The Region's Mute Swan population continues to flourish,

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The winter was mostly a cold one, though most of December and the first third of January were fairly mild. In Chicago, December temperatures averaged some 2.8° Fahrenheit above normal, and on 4 January 2003, Lake Michigan remained completely ice-free. Following the first week of January, however, temperatures plunged and by the 25th, most of Lake Michigan was ice-covered. Overall, January was 0.7° below normal. Except for two brief periods, the gelid January pattern continued and intensified throughout February, with extensive ice developing on Lake Michigan.

On many occasions, visitors to the lakefront saw pack ice extending to the horizon. The brutally cold February averaged some 3.4° below normal in Chicago.

The winter storm track was established across the southern third of the Region, which is where most of the snowfall occurred. Several storms crossing that area produced more than 15 cm of snow. Well north of the storm track, Chicago received precious little precipitation and experienced its eighth driest winter on record, which does not bode well for summer water levels on Lake Michigan.

In response to the extensive ice development, waterfowl numbers were generally lower than normal. Several hardy and semi-hardy passerines lingered into December; however, very few were recorded thereafter. Noteworthy exceptions to this generalization included the Region's first confirmed Hermit Warbler, a Blue Grosbeak, and a Painted Bunting. Conspicuous by their absences were virtually all the winter finches; indeed, quite remarkably, "summer finches" outnumbered winter finches.

with counts of 145 at Wolf L., IL 7 Feb (CMA) and 71 in ne. Indiana's *Steuben* 12 Dec (Haw). Peak reports of introduced Trumpeter Swans included 35 (with 15 juvs.) in *Fountain*, IN 7-28 Dec (CCM, AWB) and 19 in *Madison*, IL 26 Jan (FH). The largest Tundra Swan concentration consisted of 28-34 at L. Chau. 19 Dec—16 Jan (RGB, SBj). No doubt in part due to limited open water, dabbling numbers were lower than in recent winters. Noteworthy peak counts included 665 Gadwall at Horseshoe L., IL 31 Jan (KAM), 1500 Northern Pintails at Carl. L. 9 Feb (KAM), and 215 Green-winged Teal at Horseshoe L., IL 15 Dec (FH). Bay duck numbers were also unimpressive. Maximum tallies included 5000 Canvasbacks at Rend L., IL (LSt) and 2000 Greater Scaup on L. Michigan at Winthrop Harbor, IL 29 Dec (KAM).

On L. Michigan, female Harlequin Ducks were reported at Waukegan, IL 7-8 Dec (PSw) and in Chicago 25 (RC, RHu, AA) & 28 Feb (JEL); a male was seen at the USX plant in Gary, IN 25 Feb (MT). Following last fall's scoter invasion, numbers returned to normal levels for the winter. Surf Scoters were reported in both states, with a maximum of 13 at Rend L., IL 18 Dec and 3-5 Jan (LSt, DKa, FB). Single White-winged were at Mermet L., IL 31 Dec (FB), I.B.S.P. 1 Jan (GAW), and the Port of Indiana 15 Feb (AM, JKC, SBg). The peak Black Scoter tally consisted of 3 at Rend L., IL 14 Dec (DKa); one was also at Wilmette, IL 10 Jan (EW). Inland Long-tailed Duck reports included 3 at Rend L. 18 Dec and 5-8 Jan (LSt, DKa, KAM), a female at L. Lemon, IN 16-20 Dec (DRW, MC, J&SH), a male at Carl. L. 26 Jan (DKa), and a male in *Richland*, IL 23-28 Feb (LHa, BS). Other noteworthy duck tallies included 149 Bufflehead at L. Gibson, IN 15 Dec (G&LB), 3500 Common Goldeneyes at Rend L., IL 8 Jan (KAM), and 1670 Common Mergansers in *Putnam*, IL 15 Dec (DJS).

RAPTORS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

As expected, the largest Bald Eagle counts were logged along the Mississippi R., where five reports exceeded 200 birds. The peak tally was 589 (380 ads., 180 imms., & 29 not aged) at Lock & Dam 13-16 in *Whiteside* and *Rock Island*, IL 9-10 Jan (KJM). The largest count away from the Mississippi was 78 in *Parke*, IN 18 Jan (AWB et al.). Northern Goshawk reports included 3 in Illinois and 2 in Indiana, which are fairly typical winter numbers. The season's Red-tailed Hawk list included 2 Krider's, 3 Harlan's, and two dark morphs. Rough-legged Hawks were scarce this winter, and the peak count

of 6 was logged twice: 7 Dec in *Sullivan*, IN (DRW) and 31 Jan in *Greene*, IN (J&SH). Golden Eagles were slightly more common than normal, with 5 in Indiana and 2 in Illinois. Three Merlins made for a low count this winter, with 2 of the pale *richardsoni* form. Hands down winner of the "raptor of the season" award was an imm. dark-morph



A Blue Grosbeak is hardly an expected winter visitor to Illinois, which has only one previous winter record. This immature male, believed to have been present all winter, was photographed 1 March 2003 at a Palos Hills, Cook County feeder. Photograph by Geoff Williamson.

Gyr Falcon at La Salle L., IL 5-19 Jan (†WS, GAW, KAM, DKa, m. ob.). Along with the Gyr Falcon, a Prairie Falcon was reported in *La Salle*, IL 19 & 25 Jan (KAM, DKa, DBJ, AS, m. ob.).

The Indiana Wild Turkey population is flourishing, as evidenced by reports of 42 in *Brown* 24 Dec (MCI) and 26 in *Parke* 2-28 Feb (AWB). A fine mid-Dec count of 30 Sandhill Cranes was made in *Du Page*, ne. Illinois 15 Dec (BF, KF). Farther s., winter migrants peaked at 2-3000 at L. Lemon, IN 8 Dec (J & SH). With the cold weather shorebird numbers were down this winter. The largest Killdeer tally by far was 21 in *Pope*, IL 21 Dec (RRo, VL, DM). The only Least Sandpiper was at the Fort Wayne, IN terminal ponds 1 Dec (TH). A tardy Pectoral Sandpiper lingered in *Steuben*, IN until 5 Dec (†Haw, SSc), and 3 were still at L. Lemon, IN 15 Dec (J & SH). A single Dunlin was recorded at Carl. L. 17 Dec (KAM, CL, LHa, BS), and at 2 were at Brookville Res., IN 5 & 7 Jan (LAC, DG, JF, RHe et al.). In view of the cold Feb weather, the American Woodcock recorded in *Massac*, IL 18 Feb (FB) was all the more remarkable.

GULLS THROUGH OWLS

Bonaparte's Gulls were concentrated in s. Illinois, where 5500 were tallied at Rend L. 8 Dec (KAM), 2000 at that site 3 Jan (FB), and 1000 at Carl. L. 29 Dec (DKa). Ring-billed Gulls peaked at Carl. L. 8-9 Feb, when 80,000 were counted (DKa). A well-studied ad. California Gull at L. Cal. 8 Feb (†WJM,

JA, JH, WS) provided the season's only report. Extensive ice development on L. Michigan and the closing of nw. Indiana's last landfill greatly reduced winter gull numbers near the lake. This was not the case for inland n. Illinois, especially Starved Rock Lock & Dam, *La Salle*, where excellent counts of Thayer's, Iceland, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were logged (MLR et al.). Extralimital records included single Thayer's in *Massac*, IL 31 Dec & 2 Jan (KJM, FB) and *Madison*, IL 26 Jan (FH), Indiana's first inland Iceland (a first-year bird) at L. Lemon 15-20 Dec (J&SH, CM, DRW, LP), plus at least 4 Lesser Black-backeds in s. Illinois. The season's only Black-legged Kittiwake was at Carl. L. 17 Dec (LHa, KAM, CL, BS).

Eurasian Collared-Doves were reported at 10 Illinois and one Indiana locations, suggesting the continued expansion of this species. The peak count was of 34 at Carl. L. 17 Dec (KAM, DKa), but 30 were also tallied in *Jefferson*, IL 1 Jan (DKa). The largest Monk Parakeet counts came from Burnham, IL,

where 149 were seen 2 Feb (WJM) and 134 on 4 Jan (EW). Two out-of-place Monks were at Carl. L. 8 Dec (DKa). The Region's only Snowy Owl was an imm. in *La Salle*, IL 28 Dec—26 Jan (DTW, KAM, m. ob.). Numbers of both the "eared" owls were reduced this winter. Peak Long-eared counts included just 4 at Rend L., IL 8 Jan (KAM) and 3 in *Steuben*, IN 23 Dec (JMc). The season's only double-digit Short-eared Owl tally came from the Hawthorne mine in *Sullivan*, IN, where 18 were recorded 27 Dec (LSb). Four Northern Saw-whet Owls were reported in Illinois and 5 in Indiana, the largest count being of 4 in *Monroe*, IN 23 Dec (LSb).

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH WAXWINGS

An ad. male Rufous Hummingbird frequented a *Kane*, IL feeder 8-14 Dec and 4 Jan (MBC, JCh, KAM, LLH, ph.). Much of the Region's Red-headed Woodpecker population apparently wintered in s. Illinois, where 306 were counted in *Jackson* 1 Jan (KJM, VL) and 212 were found in *Union* 21 Dec (RRo, VL). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were more prevalent than normal, with 15 reported in Illinois and 3 in Indiana. Despite the frigid winter, an Eastern Phoebe lingered in n. Illinois's *Du Page* until 3 Jan (MBC). Modest Northern Shrike numbers appeared in n. reaches of the Region, with 7 in Illinois and 3 in Indiana. Following last summer's acute concern about the impact of West Nile virus on American Crows, the largest crow concentration reported this winter was a pal-

try 1000 at Horseshoe L., IL 29 Jan (KAM). This number, which is far below most peak winter counts, suggests that close monitoring of this species is warranted. Maximum Horned Lark tallies were near normal, with 600 in *Monroe*, IN 2 Feb (DRW) and 300 at Carl. L. 17 Dec (DKa).

A few swallows lingered in s. portions of the Region; most remarkable among these were 12 Tree Swallows at L. Gibson 29 Dec (G&LB) and 2 Barn Swallows in *Union*, IL 20 Dec (SB, SD). Red-breasted Nuthatches were decidedly scarce, and only 3 were reported across the Region. Lingering House Wrens were recorded in *Rock Is.*, IL 15 Dec (†KJM, SBH, BC) and in *Vermillion*, IN 23 Dec (CCM, †AWB). Winter Wren numbers were up in Illinois, where the peak count was 6 in *Alexander* 19 Dec (VK, KJM). Other tardy wrens included a Sedge in *Massac*, IL 19 Dec (FB), a Marsh in *Union*, IL 20 Dec (SBa, SD), and another Marsh at Mermet L., IL 31 Dec (FB). An extremely late Swainson's Thrush was seen at Jax. P. 8-10 Dec (†PRC). Hermit Thrushes were unusually plentiful, with some 30 reported in Illinois and 3 in Indiana. The Region's only Varied Thrush, an ad. male, visited the Elmore feeding station in *Brown*, IN 20 Jan—10 Feb (J&SH). Gray Catbirds tarried through early winter, with two Dec records in Illinois and two more in Indiana. Small numbers of American Pipits were widespread; however, an impressive winter tally of 61, in *Lawrence*, IN 14 Dec (LSb, CS, DR et al.), was unexpected. Cedar Waxwings were scarce, with no reports exceeding 150.

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

As has occurred in recent winters, a number of unexpected warblers lingered in the Region. Most were seen in Dec, but a handful remained into Jan. Among these were an Orange-crowned at Horseshoe L., IL 19 Jan (DBo) and a Cape May in *Monroe*, IN 1-4 Dec (SBl).

Illinois had 3 Pine Warblers: 22 Dec in *Kane* (RRe, NBe), 1 Jan at Rend L. (DKa), and 28 Dec and 5-12 Jan at Carl. L. (UG, DKa). Adding to the winter warbler list were a Palm in *McLean*, IL 14-15 Dec (DBi, LSo, MLR) and a Common Yellowthroat in

Massac, IL 20-31 Dec (FB).

Good numbers of American Tree Sparrows were widespread across the Region. Although winter Vesper Sparrows remain quite rare, reports have increased in recent years. This winter, 3 Vespers were reported: one in *Alexander*, IL 19 Dec (VK, KJM), another in *Parke*, IN 28 Dec (CCM, AWB), and another in *Union*, IL 15 Feb (FB). The winter's only Le Conte's Sparrow reports consisted of 2 at Mermet L., IL 31 Dec (FB) and one at Rend L., IL 14 Dec and 8 Jan (DKa, KAM). A fine late-winter tally of 20 Fox Sparrows was logged in *Lawrence*, IL 4 Feb (LHa, BS). Reports of winter-period Lincoln's Sparrows are becoming more commonplace. This winter, singles were reported in downtown Indianapolis 3 Dec (CHe) and in *Union*, IL 20 Dec (KJM). Harris's Sparrow reports were confined to Illinois, where an imm. lingered in *La Salle* 11 Jan—22 Feb (EW, KW, m. ob.), an ad. was in *McDonough* 14 Dec (LLH), and another ad. appeared in *Mercer* 27 Dec (†KJM). Lapland Longspurs occurred in good numbers, with peak counts of 3000 in *Lawrence*, IL 27 Jan (LHa, BS) and 1000+ in *Parke*, IN 10 Feb (AWB). In contrast, Snow Buntings were deemed scarce in Illinois; however, a count of 500 was made in *St. Joseph*, IN 24 Feb (VR).

Among the season's most astonishing reports was an imm. male Blue Grosbeak that was photographed at a Palos Hills, *Cook*, IL feeder 1 Mar; it was believed that this bird was present all winter (GAW ph.). This is apparently the 2nd winter record for Illinois. Less astonishing, but still quite noteworthy, was an Indigo Bunting at a *Lawrence*, IN feeding station 8-22 Dec (JSC). Rounding out the winter's "summer finch" list was a male Painted Bunting in *Hidalgo*, *Jasper*, IL 16 Jan (LHa, BS, ph.). In *La Salle*, IL, a Dickcissel visited a feeder 9-10 Feb (DTW, †DJS, ph.). Winter-period Western Meadowlarks are rarely reported; consequently, the single birds observed in *Marion*, IL 28 Dec (†RRo, m. ob.) and *Monroe*, IL 12 Jan (JPZ) were noteworthy. Also unexpected were a male Yellow-headed Blackbird in *La Salle*, IL 16 Feb (PSw) and 3 at Mermet L., IL 5 Dec (FB). A Great-tailed Grackle made a brief appearance at Horseshoe L., IL

21 Dec (†FH). An ad. male Baltimore Oriole brightened the dreary winter days by lingering at a *Monroe*, IN feeding station from 20 Dec—5 Feb. It dined on oranges and suet (J&SH, ph.) and provided Indiana's first Jan record.

Winter finches ranged from scarce to non-existent across the Region. Only one Purple Finch was reported in Indiana, and the peak Illinois count was 6 in *Jackson* 1 Jan (CHu). In Illinois, House Finches occurred in fairly typical numbers (KJM) but were deemed scarce in Indiana. For the first time in at least 20 years, no siskins, crossbills, redpolls, or winter grosbeaks were reported anywhere in the Region. Based on counts of 128 in *Tazewell* 5 Feb (JCh) and 127 in *Mercer* 27 Dec (TM, m. ob.), the cen. Illinois Eurasian Tree Sparrow population appears to be flourishing.

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SA On 8 December, youthful birder Eric Secker visited the Morton Arboretum, Chicago in an attempt to locate the source of a strange call he had heard the previous day. In response to young Eric's pishing, a strange warbler suddenly popped up. Although he was unable to identify the warbler, Eric clearly recognized that it was a bird that did not belong in Chicago during the dead of winter. Subsequent research convinced him that the bird was in fact a **Hermit Warbler**. Anticipating criticism, he reluctantly posted the find on the local listserv, and as expected, received numerous helpful responses suggesting that his bird was almost certainly a Pine Warbler. Finally, a more experienced birder (BF) visited the site and confirmed Eric's identification. Incredibly, this western vagrant lingered at the Arboretum until at least 12 Jan (†ES, †SF, JMc, ph. m. ob.), delighting scores of birders and providing Region's first confirmed record. Photographs of the bird revealed no outward evidence of hybridism.