

May 29, 1985

Tom Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Tom,

I enclose a spring report.

As you will note, I did not use the selected species report you sent to contributors earlier. This does not mean that I disapprove of your attempts to get some standardization into the reporting procedures. The reasons why I have not followed your suggested format are the following:

(1) Since my birding time is extremely limited, I have found it most useful and efficient to type observations into my computer as I go along. So when due dates arrive, I merely need to print out the report and submit it. (Incidentally, I print out several copies of a draft report and submit them to local birders for comment and corrections.)

(2) I don't quite understand how to handle numbers of birds observed in relation to counties, as requested on your proposed forms. I very seldom bird the same area in our county successively. Sometimes I cover quite a bit of territory, but more usually I check certain, differing, limited areas. So my estimates of relative abundance, in comparison to previous years, is based on various territories, and, as a result, numbers in any given locale vary greatly.

Though I can appreciate your desire to get some standardization in reporting, I do not know just how to react to the kind of reporting you are suggesting. At this point it seems a bit complex to me. I would suggest the following:

(1) Require that all reporters use exactly the same species list. The list to be followed should contain all the birds occurring in Iowa during a given period (comparatively speaking, there aren't so many birds in Iowa as to make such a list unwieldy). Indicate (perhaps with an asterisk) the blue-listed species and those that require special attention. Also, a specific symbol could be used by the reporter to indicate species observed, but about which no further information need be provided (to prevent a tendency exhibited by some field editors to raise questions about common birds not mentioned in field reports).

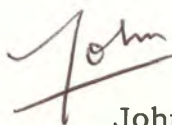
(2) There should be greater clarity as to what kind of information we need to submit (e.g., early, late, peak dates, trends, unusual observations, unusual behavior, documentations, etc.).

(3) There should be a uniform system of estimating increases and decreases in populations. I don't think simply giving numbers is helpful, since such numbers are always relative to the size and nature of the area covered (as well as to time and effort expended). Individual birders should work with a consistent system, such as, perhaps, a percentage system. For example, as I check out various areas ranging from extensive territories such as Oak Grove Park to small plots in my neighbor's farmyard, I might conclude that this spring's, say, White-throated Sparrow migration is 25% below that of last year, and 30% above that of spring 1983, and so on. Such percentages could be associated with average numbers of individuals present at a given time in a given area.

Though I have no experience with the editing of field notes, it seems to me that with the use of the computer a large number of reports can be processed expeditiously, as long as all reports follow exactly the same order of species and provide specifically prescribed kinds of information.

I am submitting my spring report a few days early, since tomorrow I will be leaving the state for a little while.

With greetings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John", with a stylized flourish extending from the bottom.

John Van Dyk

736 East 1st Street
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

Spring 1985 Report

Weather for the period:

March: March ushered in an early spring. Most of the month was mild and dry, with temperatures above normal. Two winterstorms: one on March 3 dumped a half inch of rain most of which turned to ice, coating everything and causing heavy limbs to snap from trees. On March 30-31 a winter storm delivered 6 inches of heavy wet snow. On March 26 the temperature reached 74 degrees; that evening Sioux and Lyon counties were placed under a severe thunderstorm warning. The thunderstorms were accompanied by pea-sized hail.

April: The first three weeks of the month were dry and warm. The warmest day of the year thus far was April 18: 90 degrees. The third week of April was very wet: nearly 7 inches of rain. Also several days of severe weather warnings. End of April: dry and warm.

May: The first half of May was dry and warm. In mid-month we experienced about five days of wet and cloudy weather, accompanied by cool temperatures and northern winds. It looked like the kind of weather to stall the passerine migration. The rest of May: sunny, dry, and relatively light winds.

Species List:

Grebes through Ducks:

- ✓ - Pied-billed Grebe: a flock of 6 at Hawarden, western Sioux Co., on March 27 appeared to be the first migrants.
- Eared Grebe: normally uncommon but regular. This spring, however, we did not observe any.
- American White Pelican: none observed or reported.
- Double-crested Cormorant: sparse migration. One individual was present in western Sioux Co. on May 3.
- ✓ - American Bittern: an individual was present at Sandy Hollow near Sioux Center on May 5.
- Great Blue Heron: first migrant observed on April 14. As many as three at a time were present in various places in Sioux Co. in May.
- Greater White-fronted Goose: a flock of 11 in western Sioux Co. on March 29 were the only ones observed.

- Snow Goose: excellent migration, especially in mid-March. On March 15 flocks of 100+ were overhead throughout the day, carried northwards on strong southerly winds.
- Wood Duck: abundant this spring.
- Other ducks: the following regular species were observed at normal times and in normal numbers: Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Red-head, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Golden-eye, Bufflehead, Common Merganser (especially abundant), Ruddy Duck.

Hawks through Rails:

- ✓ - Turkey Vulture: the only migrant was near the Rock River on May 3. This species is very uncommon in north-west Iowa.
- ✓ - Bald Eagle: very much in evidence this spring: single adults were present in western Sioux Co. on March 9 and 15. Another reported near Doon on March 19 (fide John Zwart). A group of 3 adults and 3 immatures were seen in Oak Grove Park on March 20 (fide Gordon Brand). Two more adults were west of Inwood on March 22.
- ✓ - Northern Harrier: first migrants (two females) observed in western Sioux Co. on March 9. No others observed in March. Gordon Brand and Dan Rankeing reported seeing one individual in western Sioux Co. on April 28. No others observed.
- ✓ - Sharp-shinned Hawk: first migrant observed in Oak Grove State Park on March 29. Rather poor migration.
- ✓ - Cooper's Hawk: on March 23 Gordon and Beth Brand and I observed one individual pestering a crow in Oak Grove Park. We observed the bird for almost 5 minutes at distances sometimes less than 30 yards from us. A very fine observation. No others observed.
- Northern Goshawk: on March 2 I flushed a large accipiter out of a brushy area in woods in Oak Grove State Park. I saw the bird only momentarily, and only its upper parts, which were dark slaty gray. The primaries were much darker. Tail banded accipiter-like. I considered the possibility of a large Cooper's Hawk, since the upper parts of the bird appeared darker slaty than one would expect of a Goshawk. I am deciding in favor of a Goshawk on the following grounds: (1) the bird was too large to be a Cooper's (it was bigger than a crow, more the size of a Red-tailed Hawk); (2) Goshawks have been in the area this winter (I saw one in December

less than half a mile from where I flushed this bird); (3) some Goshawks, particularly those of the western race, are quite dark slaty above; (4) Cooper's Hawks normally do not reach our area until late March and April.

- Broad-winged Hawk: unusually poor migration. The usual flocks of 20+ individuals migrating through Sioux Co. in the spring were absent. Only a few individuals were observed.
- ✓ - Red-tailed Hawk: excellent migration in March. A nest in Oak Grove park was occupied already on March 16.
- ✓ - Merlin: one individual quite clearly observed at Oak Grove Park on March 15. The bird was negotiating a strong southerly wind. Typical falcon shape, about the size of a Kestrel, and no rufous on the tail or upper parts.
- ✓ - Common Bobwhite: completely absent this spring.
- Gray Partridge: their numbers appear to be down (as reported in the previous -- winter -- report).
- ✓ - Wild Turkey: one male with two females were present at the edge of woods along the Rock River just west of Rock Valley on March 2.
- ✓ - Sora: one individual was present at Sandy Hollow near Sioux Center on May 5.

Shorebirds through Terns: No unusual observations to report.

- ✓ - Killdeer: Dan Rankeing of Orange City observed the first migrant at Orange City on March 1.
- ✓ - Greater Yellowlegs: first and only migrants observed on April 14.
- Solitary Sandpiper: several migrants were in Sioux Center on April 29 and in the first week of May.
- Common Snipe: good migration in late March. On March 28 and 29 singles and small groups of 2 or 3 were present in various parts of Sioux Co.
- ✓ - American Woodcock: In mid-morning of April 6 one of these birds flew into a picture window of a home in the middle of town. The bird severely damaged one of its eyes. The bird was left on the patio where it had fallen. The next morning it was gone: either revived and flew off, or caught by a cat! However, a week later what appears to have been the same individual was found in another yard in Sioux Center, near death; it died shortly thereafter.

- ✓ - Wilson's Phalarope: Gordon Brand and Dan Rankeing found a migrant at Sandy Hollow near Sioux Center on April 28.
- Franklin's Gull: poor migration. Normally many are seen coming overhead in April and May. Only a few were reported.
- Ring-billed Gull: migration started in third week of March.
- Herring Gull: two birds were migrating up the Big Sioux River on March 16.
- Forster's Tern: Gordon Brand and Dan Rankeing observed two individuals in western Sioux Co. on April 28.
- Black Tern: poor showing. Normally flocks appear at various ponds in Sioux Co. Very few reported this spring.

Doves through Flycatchers:

- Mourning Dove: the first migrants appeared in Sioux Co. on the rather early date of March 15.
- ✓ - Short-eared Owl: one individual was at Oak Grove on April 28 (observed by Gordon Brand and Dan Rankeing).
- Common Nighthawk: very poor migration this spring. Only a few individuals observed and not before mid-May.
- ✓ - Whip-poor-will: I flushed an individual roosting in a small grove of trees at the outskirts of Sioux Center on April 29. Another one was calling at Inspiration Hills in NW Sioux Co. on May 10.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird: first migrants observed on May 19. About half a dozen were reported in the subsequent week.
- Belted Kingfisher: first migrant observed on March 29.
- Red-headed Woodpecker: returned to Sioux Center on April 28. Present in good numbers.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: first migrant observed in Sioux Center on April 7. Three other sightings reported in the subsequent week.
- ✓ - Empidonax: first migrants in Sioux Center on April 22. During final week of April, both Least Flycatcher and Willow Flycatcher were singing in the Sioux Center area. A spectacular migration in the second and third weeks of May. In mid-May as many as 20 individuals were counted in a small clump of trees in Sioux Center.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: none observed.

Swallows through Waxwings:

- ✓ - Purple Martin: returned to Sioux Center on April 18, somewhat later than usual. The number appears to be down, judging by the number of unoccupied (and formerly occupied) martin houses.
- ✓ - Red-breasted Nuthatch: Several individuals remained in the area and were still present on May 21.
- Brown Creeper: the main migration commenced in the last week of March. However, only a few isolated individuals were observed.
- ✓ - House Wren: first migrant observed in Sioux Center on April 22.
- ~ - Winter Wren: a migrant in Sioux Center on April 20.
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: small flocks were moving through Sioux Center on April 5 and the week following.
- Eastern Bluebird: one individual observed in Oak Grove State Park on March 20 (fide Gordon Brand). Two others were at Sandy Hollow near Sioux Center on May 20.
- ✓ - Veery: first individual observed in Sioux Center on May 17. Excellent migration in third week of May, with as many as 6 counted in Sioux Center on May 21.
- ✓ - Swainson's Thrush: excellent migration beginning in late April and continuing into the third weeks of May. They were literally "all over the place," outnumbering Gray-cheeked Thrush about 6 to 1.
- ✓ - Gray-cheeked Thrush: first migrants reported in Sioux Center on April 27.
- ✓ - Hermit Thrush: first migrant reported in Sioux Center on April 4, and one reported on April 27. I observed one near my home on April 28.
- Wood Thrush: individuals were singing in western Sioux Co. on May 18.
- Cedar Waxwing: four individuals were present in Oak Grove Park on March 2. Other than on individual seen in Sioux Center on February 28, these four signaled the beginning of their spring migration. Several were in Sioux Center on March 7. Very few others observed in March. However, in late April and early May many individuals in small flocks appeared in the Sioux Co. area.

Vireos: better than usual migration:

- Solitary Vireo: good migration this spring. First observed on May 8, and almost daily thereafter for a week or so.
- Red-eyed Vireo: many singing in Sioux Center on May 21.
- ✓ - Philadelphia Vireo: excellent migration -- counted 5 of them in a small woodlot near Sioux Center on May 21.
- Warbling Vireo: first migrants were singing on May 7.

Warblers: excellent migration, in spite of the early leafing out of trees, which made observation difficult. The following species were observed:

- ✓ - Black-and-White Warbler: arrived in Sioux Center on April 30. Good migration during first week of May, with several individuals observed on a daily basis.
- Tennessee Warbler: as usual in this area, excellent migration beginning on May 7.
- ✓ - Orange-crowned Warbler: arrived in Sioux Center on May 3. As many as 6 could be counted in a 100-yard stretch at the edge of Sioux Center.
- Nashville Warbler: as usual, good migration, beginning on May 7.
- Yellow Warbler: first of the migrants observed on May 7.
- Magnolia Warbler: first observed on May 17. A common migrant.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler: first migrants arrive in Sioux Center on April 17. This species was not as abundant as it usually is.
- Blackburnian Warbler: observed two individuals in Sioux Center on May 21. This species is regular in NW Iowa.
- Chestnut-sided Warbler: one in Sioux Center on May 21.
- ✓ - Bay-breasted Warbler: only one observed one on May 20. This species is very uncommon in NW Iowa.
- Blackpoll Warbler: plentiful migrant beginning on May 15.
- Ovenbird: arrived in Sioux Center on May 3. Very good migration.
- Northern Waterthrush: good migration, beginning on May 5. Observed through third week of May.

- ✓ - Mourning Warbler: very good migration, beginning on May 13. We saw several individuals, almost on a daily basis, for nearly two weeks.
- Common Yellowthroat: arrived on May 5.
- ✓ - Wilson's Warbler: exceptionally good migration, beginning on May 13. Large numbers (about 6 a day) moved through in mid-May.
- ✓ - Canada Warbler: one individual was in our yard on May 21. Not a common migrant in our area.
- American Redstart: as usual, plentiful, beginning at the end of the second week in May.

Fringillidae:

- Northern Cardinal: Cardinals were singing in Oak Grove Park on March 2. They are doing well, both along the rivers and in the towns of Sioux Co.
- Purple Finch: a male was reported at a feeder in Sioux Center on April 4 (fide Tina Van Dyke).
- ✓ - Common Redpoll: two individuals still present in Sioux Center on March 1. A few individuals also present in Rock Valley on March 2. Two individuals remained in Sioux Center until March 17; another one was in Orange City at Gordon Brand's feeder on March 16.
- ✓ - Pine Siskin: singing in Sioux Center in early March. Many individuals were present in Sioux Center, Hawarden and Rock Valley throughout the period. At Hawarden, in a cemetery with many evergreens, some individuals displayed nesting behavior (some were observed carrying what appeared to be nesting material). In early May numbers began to decline, as American Goldfinches moved in (not necessarily cause and effect). Several pairs remained, however, into the third week of May.
- American Goldfinch: very scarce in March and early April. By the end of April their numbers began to increase rapidly.
- Rufous-sided Towhee: first migrants in Sioux Center on April 19.
- ✓ - Savannah Sparrow: a very early migrant observed in western Sioux Co. on March 21.
- ✓ - Grasshopper Sparrow: present in western Sioux Co. on April 20.
- ✓ - Northern Junco: the last one observed on April 27.

- American Tree Sparrow: many individuals singing in western Sioux Co. in the first week of March. Still present on April 14.
- Clay-colored Sparrow: excellent migration through Sioux Center. On April 19-21 one or two individuals were observed on almost a daily basis. In the first two weeks of May this species was exceptionally plentiful: one could hear as many as 6 individuals singing at one time in the Sioux Center area. This species is a common migrant in north-west Iowa.
- Harris' Sparrow: first migrants arrive on March 27. Excellent migration, with flocks of 10-20 in various places in the county moving through in April and May.
- White-crowned Sparrow: usually this species is not as common a migrant as the White-throated Sparrow. In the second week of May, However, this species clearly outnumbered the White-throated Sparrow.
- White-throated Sparrow: first migrants in Sioux Center on April 19. Their numbers seemed somewhat down.
- Lincoln's Sparrow: first migrants arrived in Sioux Center on April 15. Excellent migration. Singles or small groups were present in Sioux Co. well into May.
- Fox Sparrow: first migrant appeared in Sioux Center on March 30. Males were singing in Sioux Center on April 7.
- Lapland Longspur: several flocks of 100+ were present on March 2 in fields a few miles north-west of Sioux Center.

Icteridae:

- Western Meadowlark: migrants arrived and commenced singing in second week of March.
- Yellow-headed Blackbird: migrants in Sioux Center on April 21.
- Red-winged Blackbird: the first migrant flocks of 100+ individuals appeared in western Sioux Co. on March 2.
- Orchard Oriole: a singing male was present in western Sioux Co. on May 18.
- Rusty Blackbird: several flocks of 100+ birds were migrating through Oak Grove Park on March 16. Smaller groups were still present by March 31.

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