

Mid-March to mid-May

Southeast

Yes, I thought it was a hoax. But the late-April announcement that at least one Ivory-billed Woodpecker still survives has redrawn the mental map of North American birding. A year-long search in the bottomland forests of northeast Arkansas resulted in no fewer than 15 sightings of Ivory-bills between February 2004 and February 2005; the species' distinctive double rap was heard as recently as March 7. What does it all mean? All sightings thus far in which the sex of the bird could be determined have been of a male; no more than one bird has been seen at a time. Perhaps the greatest immediate effect of the rediscovery is the new urgency to efforts to preserve the half-million acres of Arkansas's Big Woods—and with that imperiled landscape, just perhaps, a population of North America's largest and once again rarest woodpecker.

Exciting as the news from Arkansas was, other sites in the southeast turned up some great birds as well. In Alabama, the state's second White-winged Crossbill hung on at a feeder through at least April 22. Coastal North Carolina birders enjoyed their own visitors from the north, with Thick-billed Murre, Atlantic Puffin, and Harlequin Duck discovered the last week of March. An adult California Gull in mid-March on the Potomac River mudflats of Fairfax Co., Virginia, was one of a number of birds of this species detected in the east this spring.

The big news in Georgia was a Buff-bellied Hummingbird photographed in a yard near Thomasville in early April; if accepted, this will be the first record for the state of this not unexpected winter visitor. A Connecticut Warbler May 1 in DeKalb Co., Georgia, was east of its usual Midwestern route north. It is too early to speak of a "usual" route for the new Whooping Crane flock moving between Florida and Wisconsin; eleven were traced as they flew across Georgia in the last days of March—countable or not, a dramatic sight.

Even with its white cranes headed for frostier climes, Florida provided more than its share of excitement. Another Buff-bellied Hummingbird was found the end of March in Coral Gables; an alternate-plumaged Surf-bird showed for two days in April at Ponce de Leon inlet. But it was the West Indian vagrants that made Florida so exciting this spring. A pair of Masked Ducks was photographed on the Viera Wetlands in March. A Western Spindalis was found at Key West April 10, followed a couple of weeks later by a La Sagra's Flycatcher at Garden Key; another La Sagra's in Fort Lauderdale was still present May 11, along with at least one Thick-billed Vireo. Key West also produced a Red-legged Honeycreeper in late April.

Northeast

Three of what were certainly those Florida Whooping Cranes flew past the Ripley hawkwatch on western New York's Lake Erie shore April 6. Just as out of place were an unusual spring Swainson's Hawk mid-month at a Maine hawkwatch and a dark-morph bird a few days later on the Lake Ontario coast in New York.

This season's kite show started early in Pennsylvania, with a moribund Swallow-tailed Kite in Lancaster Co., Pennsylvania, March 17. Healthier members of that species were seen through April in Maryland, New Jersey, and even Rhode Island; Mississippi Kites had made it as far north as Northampton Co., Pennsylvania, by the last week of April, and New Jersey's venerable Montclair hawkwatch scored its first ever of the species May 3. Wannabe raptors, Loggerhead Shrikes made what passes nowadays for a good showing, with three in Maryland the last week of March and a bird lingering in central New Jersey from mid-March to at least April 10.

Waterfowl watchers in the east were rewarded with Barnacle Geese (of, as always, uncertain origin) in New Jersey and eastern Massachusetts; fewer worried about the provenance of Green-winged (Common) Teal in Maine, Maryland, and Massachusetts. Vermont's fifth-ever Tufted Duck was last seen April 15, one day after a Ross's Goose in Northampton Co. set a new late spring date for Pennsylvania.

Rare but regular along the Atlantic Coast, Ruffs were found in New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Delaware, where as many as four at a time could be seen April 10 in their Bombay Hook stronghold. Far rarer, and perhaps offering hope for an eventual recovery in some historical breeding areas, Wilson's Plover was found as far north as New Jersey in late March and in New York and New Hampshire through the first week of May.

A few of the winter's southern vagrants persisted, with New Hampshire's Yellow-throated Warbler staying until nearly the end of March and New Jersey's male Painted Bunting abandoning its feeder April 22 (to the great chagrin of World Series of Birding teams!). It was the westerly rarities, though, that made headlines most of the spring. White-faced Ibis, now not unexpected anywhere on the Atlantic coast, were reported from New Jersey to Massachusetts, and California Gulls were found in early April in Massachusetts and on the Ottawa River in Ontario. Ottawa's Townsend's Solitaire not only remained through early April, but had the temerity to sing in the last days of its stay; another appeared mid-month in Niagara Co., New York. Three Violet-green Swallows were reported from Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River in early April.

Certainly the bird of the season in Maine and the northeast was a Clark's Grebe at Owl's Head Light State Park; apparently only the second record ever of this species from the east coast, this bird was last seen March 22.

Midwest

Whooping Cranes provided some startling moments for observers along Lake Michigan in both Illinois and Michigan March 17-19 and again April 2; the April date is particularly interesting, as it falls well within the migration schedule of the wild flock, members of which have strayed as far east as Illinois in the past. Michigan birders also found two Black Vultures in April and early May; a Little Blue Heron at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory April 18 was apparently only the second record of this southern species for Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Also hailing from warmer

climes, groups of up to four Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were found in three Iowa counties in mid-April, with three seen in Missouri the second week of May. Glossy Ibis strayed to Missouri and as far north as Minnesota in late April; very rare on the Great Plains, a **White Ibis** spent a week in central North Dakota.

Some of these spring “overshoots” overlapped with the end of this past winter’s owl invasion in the upper Midwest. By mid-March, Minnesota observers were finding Great Gray Owls in northern counties, suggesting the beginning of a return migration; a month later, the invaders were becoming quite difficult to find, though a Great Gray was still present in Woods Co. on the late date of May 6. Of Iowa’s five Great Gray Owls this winter, one lingered until April 17; the Northern Hawk-Owl, only Iowa’s second, was found more erratically by late March and apparently departed in early April.

Other exciting wintering species included a Great Black-backed Gull on the Missouri River in Bismarck, North Dakota, a first state record if accepted. A California Gull in western Iowa in March would be the first documented for that state in spring. A late-March Mountain Bluebird at Michigan’s Whitefish Point and a mid-April Black-throated Sparrow in Madison, Wisconsin, were both, one hopes, on their way back west where they belong.

A “**Sutton’s**” Warbler was photographed in Illinois in April.

The spring shorebird flight up the central states was just beginning at press time, but already Ruffs had been reported in Missouri, in southeast Nebraska, and at Riverton, Iowa, where one wader flock on May 6 included 2500 Lesser Yellowlegs, 900 White-rumped Sandpipers, 1800 Baird’s Sandpipers, 2000 Pectoral Sandpipers, and 2000 Long-billed Dowitchers!

Texas

Ivory-billed Woodpecker was just about the only rarity not observed in Texas this spring—yet. Most of the winter’s cohort of tropical strays continued into April and even early May. Crimson-collared Grosbeaks persisted in Pharr and Weslaco, with another male reported to be visiting a feeder in Rockport; the Pharr location also hosted Blue Mockingbird and a Rose-throated Becard, while Weslaco was the site of a male Elegant Trogon and, in mid-April, a Greater Pewee. The Gray-crowned Yellowthroat at Sabal Palm was reliably found through the end of April, and the state’s first Streak-backed Oriole was still present at Brazos Bend April 25. Even Tamaulipas Crows, hard to spell and in recent years even harder to find, were being seen dependably at traditional, often smelly, sites around Brownsville.

Away from the Lower Rio Grande, a startling **King Eider** continued at Bolivar Flats into the fourth week of April; in a rare conjunction, for most of its stay it was only a few miles away from a Masked Duck at Padre Island National Seashore. Two birds showing characteristics of first-summer Kelp Gulls were seen through April at Corpus Christi. Landbirds were no less exciting, with one or two Black-whiskered Vireos at Sabine Woods and two Yellow-green Vireos reported in late April at Port O’Connor and Weslaco.

Southwest

Tucson’s Least Grebe mystery continued this spring with sightings of a bird or birds at both of the city’s two traditional sites for the species. It is hard to decide which of the scenarios is less improbable: the simultaneous presence of two individuals barely ten miles apart, or the foolhardiness of a single bird repeatedly

making the roundtrip between the two locations through urban traffic. Another city bird, Arizona’s first Ruby-throated Hummingbird, lingered at a Tucson feeder through April 11, just three weeks before the arrival of a Berylline Hummingbird at Chiricahua National Monument; the summer’s first White-eared Hummingbird arrived punctually on May 8 in the Huachucas. Madera Canyon’s now-reliable Flame-colored Tanagers returned mid-April—and promptly set about building a nest. A Rufous-capped Warbler was observed in rugged Sycamore Canyon May 8, a site where breeding was confirmed last year.

New Mexico’s Great Kiskadee persisted through mid-March. A surprising Tropical Parula was reported from Grant Co., New Mexico, April 30. Ruddy Ground-Doves were reported through the period in Rodeo, just across the border from Portal, Arizona; others were reliably found at Red Rock, Arizona, and in Calipatria, California. A Spotted Dove seen in late March near the headquarters of the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge would represent only the second record of this exotic for the Imperial Valley. An alternate-plumaged Surfbird was an excellent find the same day at the Salton Sea.

Colorado, too, enjoyed visitors from the south, with a Glossy Ibis in Weld Co. April 16 and a **Common Black-Hawk** in Baca Co. a few days later; if accepted, the hawk would be only about the sixth record for the state.

West Coast

Strong contenders for oddest winter bedfellows were two Tropical Kingbirds and two Baltimore Orioles sharing a college campus in Culver City, California; the orioles were gone by the end of March, but the kingbirds lingered into the first week of May.

California birders discovered some very good raptors this period. A Common Black-Hawk soared over the Marin Headlands the end of March, with an adult Gray Hawk there the end of April. A Broad-winged Hawk strayed to Atascadero mid-month, while a Crested Caracara was photographed on Outer Point Reyes the first week of May.

March gull-watching proved productive in California, too, with a Lesser Black-backed Gull photographed in Malibu and a third- or fourth-winter **Slaty-backed Gull** found at Venice Beach. An early April Monterey Bay whalewatch encountered a Yellow-billed Loon and a Manx Shearwater; another Manx-type shearwater was seen over Oregon’s Boiler Bay in April. A Flesh-footed Shearwater was the highlight of a March trip out of Newport. A Brown Booby in California’s San Luis Obispo Co. lingered through early May.

Northwest

Oregon’s Falcated Duck remained through April 8, while the Kent, Washington, Baikal Teal continued to delight the m.ob. through mid-April. Green-winged (Common) Teal were found inland in British Columbia and, notably, Alberta.

Two Blue Jays, remnants of last fall’s big flight into the interior west, were seen in Oregon in March; one was as far north as Nelson, British Columbia, in early April. A Boreal Owl at British Columbia’s Reifel Bird Sanctuary stayed through at least March 24.

An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull spent several late-March days in Calgary. Montana’s first **Ross’s Gull**, pending acceptance, spent three early-May days on private property near Frenchtown. Five Hudsonian Godwits in eastern Montana were a bit west of the species’ usual spring route.