

IOS Lister's Corner 2008

Year Lists: 2008 & Alltime Big Years

What an unexpectedly great year! A record fifteen birders topped 290 for the year, with eight besting the 300 barrier. The old records were nine 290+ birders (in 2004) and five at 300+ (also in 2004). Andy Sigler's 320 was the 2nd-best Illinois Big Year on record! What was unexpected about the year is that many of the top twenty birders were not planning a Big Year until the year was well along. The good birds just kept coming, especially in the late summer, such as Swallow-tailed Kite, Mountain Plover, Roseate Spoonbill and Swainson's Warbler. The bigger question is: was 2008 merely the start of a new trend? With advances in communications, birders have unprecedented access to information, from both a giving and receiving standpoint. The growing ability to access the Illinois birding listserve (IBET) from almost anywhere was a factor in the success of many of the birders who are listed below. Let's keep it up and see where it takes us!

Key: • = list submitted

(updated 2/10/09; compiled by Eric Walters & Joe Lill)

2008 Illinois Year List

320	Andy Sigler
318	Dan Kassebaum
318	Mark Seiffert
317	Bruce Heimer
311	Keith McMullen
306	Jeffrey Sanders
305	Craig Taylor
300	<u>Bob Fisher</u>
299	Jeff Smith
297	Tim Kuesel
297	Mike Madsen
293	Joe Lill
293	Eric Walters
291	Michael Baum
290	Karen Fisher
286	Dan Williams
283	Paul Doughty
282	Alan Stokie
279	Douglas Stotz
278	Greg Neise
274	Jeff Chapman
271	Thad Edmonds
270	Travis Mahan
269	Demetri Lafkas
268	Jim Mountjoy
264	Geoffrey A. Williamson
263	Beau Schaefer
260	John McKee
260	Jeff Sundberg
258	David B. Johnson
255	Jeff Skrentny
253	Eric Secker
250	Darrell Shambaugh
248	Sue Friscia
235	Vernon Kleen
232	Christine Williamson
228	Matthew Cvetas
222	Cindy Alberico
215	Anthony Friend
215	Brian Smith
153	Todd Anderson

Progression of the IL Big Year Record

75+	Robert Kennicott	c.1855
100+	F. Dayton	c.1895
117	Herbert & Alice Walter	1897
162+	Benjamin T. Gault	c.1925
170	William Dreuth	1932
182	William Dreuth	1933
187	William Dreuth	1937
203	William Dreuth	1938
225+	Charles C. Clark	c.1960
241	Betty & Harry Shaw	1970
290	Larry Balch	1971
308	Richard Biss	1978
314	Kevin Richmond	1986
316	Robert Chapel	1996
322	Bob Fisher	2004

Alltime Big Year Lists (over 300)

322	Bob Fisher	2004•
320	Andy Sigler	2008•
318	Keith McMullen	2007•
318	Dan Kassebaum	2008•
318	Mark Seiffert	2008•
317	Bruce Heimer	2008•
316	Robert Chapel	1996•
316	Karen Fisher	2004•
315	Robert Chapel	2000•
314	Kevin Richmond	1986•
314	Alan Stokie	2003•
314	Keith McMullen	2004•
311	Keith McMullen	2008•
310	Louise Augustine	1986•
310	Alan Stokie	2004•
309	Eric Walters	1990•
309	Dan Kassebaum	1996•
309	Robert Chapel	1998
309	Michael Retter	1999•
309	Travis Mahan	2003•
309	Alan Stokie	2005•
308	Richard Biss	1978
308	Dan Kassebaum	2007•
307	Tom Pucelik	1983
306	Robert Chapel	1999

306	Adam Reyburn	1999
306	Keith McMullen	2000
306	Robert Chapel	2001
306	Jeffrey Sanders	2008•
305	Kevin Richmond	1985
305	Robert Chapel	1995•
305	Dan Kassebaum	2003•
305	Craig Taylor	2008
304	Dan Kassebaum	2000•
303	Robert Chapel	1997
303	Keith McMullen	2001
303	Keith McMullen	2006
302	Louise Augustine	1988•
302	Eric Walters	1989
302	Eric Secker	2004
302	Keith McMullen	2005
302	Jeffrey Sanders	2005•
301	Myrna Deaton	1988
301	Todd Fink	1994
301	Keith McMullen	2003
301	Mike Madsen	2005•
300	Myrna Deaton	1994
300	Keith McMullen	1999•
300	Alan Stokie	1999
300	Keith McMullen	2002
300	Bob Fisher	2008

2008 - A Memorable Year

As stated above, a record number of birders surpassed 300 species for the year during 2008. We asked them to recap their most memorable sightings of the year; their responses are included here.

Craig Taylor: I had four favorite species in 2008, all of which were new Illinois species for me: Eurasian Wigeon, MacGillivray's Warbler, Swallow-tailed Kite and Brant. My favorite sighting? Probably the two Swallow-tailed Kites Tim Kuesel and I chased. Starting downstate, racing back to DuPage County for the Curlew Sandpiper, hearing about the kites, heading back downstate late in the day, sleeping in a Mt. Vernon, IL auto dealership lot, arriving first and greeting birding friends as they arrive, scanning the skies futilely, finally deciding to drive around and look for them perched and surprising ourselves when we did!!!!

Jeff Sanders:

Easiest bird/hardest to find: Northern Pintail
 Hardest bird/hardest work: I spent several hours in bad weather for two Black-legged Kittiwakes
 Hardest birds/easiest to see this year: Mississippi Kite, Cerulean & Kentucky Warblers and Blue Grosbeak
 Favorite sighting: the Long-eared Owls at Plymouth Ct.
 Most surprising sighting: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Illinois Beach State Park
 Most unusual events: the redpolls (with Hoary) early and the White-winged Crossbills late

Bob Fisher: Narrowing it down to three is a tough one. Forced to pick, I'd say my choices would be: the Bewick's Wren nesting in a piece of farm machinery at Siloam Springs State Park.

The breeding plumage White-faced Ibis at Prairie Kame Forest Preserve in Kane County. How fortunate we were to encounter Andy Sigler and Al Stokie at nearby Big Rock Forest Preserve; they had just found the ibis and we got over to Prairie Kame just before a thunderstorm to see it.

Though not truly a species, Karen and I were thrilled with our 1st ever Harlan's Hawk, a beautiful bird which flew right over us one day at our Greene Valley hawkwatch in DuPage

Our most memorable sighting is easy, as it proved its always better to be lucky than good! While walking down the hill with Karen and Vicky to scan the 83rd St. fluddle at Greene Valley Forest Preserve, my cell phone rang. It was Mike Madsen, saying, "How quick can you get here Bob, as I'm looking at a Curlew Sandpiper in mostly breeding plumage at the 83rd St fluddle." What a sweet feeling it was for me to say, "Mike, I'm just about 50 feet away and should be in your view in just a few seconds!"

Bruce Heimer:

- 1) Swallow-tailed Kite
- 2) Swainson's Warbler
- 3) Brant

The Swallow-tailed Kites were spectacular because of the rarity and they were 40 feet over my head. I really thought we'd have problems relocating them and even if we did they'd be a mile in the air.

Keith McMullen: The 2008 birding year was noteworthy for many Illinois birders as evidenced by eight individuals eclipsing the coveted "300 species" mark. For me, 2008 marked the 10th consecutive year I reached the "300" mark. It's often difficult to pinpoint the best bird of the highlight of the year, but certainly, several come to mind right away.

Having not seen a Swainson's Warbler in Illinois since 1985, I was quite skeptical when Dan Kassebaum called to report the sighting of one and possibly two Swainson's in Alexander County that he and Mark Seiffert had discovered after a lead from another birding pal. I decided to investigate the area myself and upon arrival to the spot, I immediately heard the distinct song of a Swainson's Warbler! I parked the car and spent the next 15-20 minutes searching the dense vegetation before finally being rewarded with excellent views of the culprit, indeed a singing male Swainson's Warbler!

Not to be outdone was my first Illinois Swallow-tailed Kite, seen just south of Carbondale in Jackson County in August, roughly a month after the Swainson's Warbler discovery. I was able to get decent photographs of this beauty with my new Canon 40D, so possibly that is another reason this sighting will remain one of my 2008 Illinois birding highlights.

Last but not least was the August discovery of another excellent Jackson County bird, Roseate Spoonbill. On a Friday afternoon I received an e-mail from Rhonda Rothrock that Dave Kvernes had spotted what he was certain had to be a Roseate Spoonbill. Immediately Dan Kassebaum ventured south and within an hour, he relocated the spoonbill! Despite planning on working the following day, a Saturday, I rose early and hit the road for southern Jackson County, a 2-hour drive from my house. I arrived at first light and within minutes received a phone call from Mark Seiffert. He was already set up on the foraging waders that included, you guessed it, a Roseate Spoonbill! I quickly motored to the spot on the levee where Mark was stationed and stayed about 1/4 mile directly north of him, hoping not to spook the group. I located the Roseate amongst the group of Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Great Blue Herons, feeling satisfied the trip was worth it. Imagine how surprised I was when, suddenly, I looked up from my scope and watched three additional Roseate Spoonbill glide into the area and join the feeding frenzy! I grabbed my cell phone and notified Mark who was digiscoping the first spoonbill. He had not noticed the three newcomers to the group. To make the trip all the more worthwhile, we then discovered an immature White Ibis at East Cape Girardeau and we relocated the Marbled Godwit that had been hanging in the two-county area for several weeks.

The birding gods were in full force that Saturday back in August as Dan Kassebaum had called to report a Piping Plover at Carlyle Lake. Of course, any year bird is a must have when chasing the coveted "300" mark. After work, I zipped to Carlyle Lake and sure enough, the Piping Plover was cooperative, hanging out within 100 yards of where Dan said to search.

All in all, 2008 was a very productive birding year. I finished with 311 species and was able to add a few state firsts. I can't wait to start over again in 2009!