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THE KENTUCKY WARBLER

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Editor ............. B. R. Ferrell, Biology Department, Western Kentucky Univ.
Bowling Green 42101
Assistant Editor ......................... Herbert E. Shadowen, Bowling Green

Editorial Advisory Board
Anne L. (Mrs. F. W.) Stamm Burt L. Monroe, Jr.

THE COVER

We thank Brainard Palmer-Ball, Jr. for the excellent photograph of a Pacific Loon (Gavia pacifica) (see Field Note section).

Anne L. Stamm and Burt L. Monroe, Jr.

The weather during the winter period was unusually mild. There was no snow, but rainfall was above normal, with flooding in late December and early January, particularly in western Kentucky. The coldest day of the three-month period (December, January and February) was on February 16 when the temperature dipped to 7 degrees and a high of 31 degrees.

The mild weather enticed some species to linger beyond normal departure dates and some to overwinter. It was thought that many of the waterfowl remained on the lakes in Ballard County, where conditions seemed suitable to their needs, without going farther south. Northern finches were scarce, but a few rarities helped to make the season more interesting.

**Abbreviations:** BWMA = Ballard Waterfowl Management Area, Ballard County; BBC = Beckham Bird Club; BPS = Big Pond Sanctuary, Grayson County; CRL = Cave Run Lake, Rowan County; CHL = Chaney Lake, Warren County; CBC = Christmas Bird Count; CSL = Cool Springs Lake, Ohio County; EBPP = East Bend Power Plant, Boone County; KBRC = Kentucky Bird Records Committee; LBL = Land Between the Lakes; LBar = Lake Barkley; LPew = Lake Pewee, Hopkins County; McEL = McElroy Lake, Warren County; MCFH = Minor E. Clark Fish Hatchery; SCL = Sportsman Club Lake, Larue County; ThP = Thurston's Pond, near Monticello, Wayne County. The “transient lakes” are McElroy and Chaney lakes, Warren County.

**Loons through Herons** — A Red-throated Loon was first seen on LBL Kentucky CBC about 1.5 miles above Kentucky Dam along the western side of the lake, Marshall County, on December 15, 16 and 19 (BPB, CP, JTE, Don Parker and Carl Mowery, Jr.). A Pacific/Arctic Loon sighted on December 15 and 16 in the same areas as the Red-throated Loon is under review by the KBRC. Three Common Loons were still present on the Peabody Sinclair mine in eastern Muhlenberg County on December 2 (BPB, DC) and small numbers lingered through mid-December at Kentucky Lake and LBar but disappeared later (BPB); three birds lingered through January 12 at Green River Lake, Taylor County (JEl); up to six were reported at CRL between December 10 and February 22 (FB); three at Laurel River Lake, Laurel County on February 10 (JEl); and four had returned to Kentucky Lake on February 28 (BPB, RC). Twenty-five to 30 Pied-billed Grebes were still at LPew on December 2, but by December 19 only seven were found; a few remained at various places throughout the state in December but were scarce after the CBCs. A few Horned Grebes were still present in December with two at LPew on December 2 (BPB, DC); small numbers at the western Kentucky lakes through mid-December (BPB); four present at Green River Lake on January 12 (JEl); a single bird at McEL on February 3 (BPB, DC, RCA); and two at Hamlin, Calloway County on February 28 were probably early migrants (JTE, fide CP). The fall migration of Double-crested Cormorants continued through December and early January in western Kentucky with 190 on LBar at Silo Overlook on December 9 (BPB), 270 at LBL, Trigg County south of Silo Overlook, and about 30 in flight near the Overlook on January 11 (CP); single birds were reported in Meade (S, FS) and Muhlenberg (BPB, DC) counties in December, whereas one to three wintered at
Louisville (LR) and EBPP (KCa, JCa, LMc); and two were at MCFH on January 11 (FB). Great Blue Herons wintered in small numbers, but a concentration of 82 was observed at Hamlin, Calloway County on January 2 (JTE, fide CP).

**Waterfowl —** An immature Tundra Swan was reported in Pulaski County January 2-11 (JEl). Winter reports of Greater White-fronted Geese included two at CSL on January 1 (RH), nine at McEL February 23 (BPB, JB, FB, LR, JEl), five at BWMA (CW), and two at CRL on January 9 and 11 (FB, L. Komman, A. Surmont, S. Bonney); the latter is a first record for eastern Kentucky. Numbers of Snow Geese peaked at BWMA with 15,000-18,000 (CW), but only a few were found elsewhere, e.g., 13 at SCL (JEl) on January 12, one noted January 14 at the Owensboro Bypass, Daviess County (KC), and up to 10 birds at McEL on February 23 (BPB). Canada Geese were numerous at BWMA where they peaked at 110,000 (CW); the species was widely distributed during the winter with 1,000 at CSL (KC), 241 at SCL (JEl), up to several hundred at McEL (BPB), 78 at LPew (JH), and smaller numbers at Madisonville, Hopkins County (JH).

The mild winter and the flooding in western Kentucky in late December and early January made conditions right for ducks, and many remained rather than heading farther south. The duck population at BWMA reached 50,000, the highest number since 1972 (CW). Elsewhere most numbers were relatively small. A few Wood Ducks were observed during the winter at Caperton's Swamp and along the Ohio River at Louisville (MS); eight at BPS in December, but these left and others were seen again in late February (KC); and two pairs at CHL (BPB et al.). As many as 12-15 Green-winged Teal were present at LPew on December 2 (BPB, DC), with five still there on December 19 (JH); returning migrants arrived at the transient lakes on February 3 and continued throughout the month with no more than six on any one date (BPB). Large numbers of American Black Ducks were observed at BWMA (CW), but there were few reports from elsewhere; 50+ was the peak count at the transient lakes, whereas a similar number from CRL was a local high count (FB). Two Northern Pintail were still present at SCL on January 12 (JEl); and present at the transient lakes from January 13 through February, with a peak of 25-30 birds on February 3 (BPB, DC, RCa). Large numbers of Mallards were at BWMA (CW) and the peak at McEL was 500 (BPB), whereas 38 was a high count at Lentz's Pond, Louisville on December 15 (JB, PB). Apparently a few Northern Shovelers wintered in Kentucky this year, with four males and two females spending the winter months at Cave Hill Cemetery Lake, Louisville (MS); three birds at McEL from January 13 through February, with a peak of nine plus on February 23 (BPB et al.); one at CSL on January 15 (KC, AW); and two birds as late as December 30 at ThP on December 30 (JEl). Small numbers of Gadwall were noted at LPew, the transient lakes, and CSL. At least 60 American Wigeon were present at Honker Lake, LBL on December 9 and present at the transient lakes from January 13 to the end of February (BPB); it was rather unusual to see a male American Wigeon on a small pond in Ten Broeck subdivision, Louisville, with several wild Mallards on February 14 and 15, where wigeons have never before been recorded (S, FS). Canvasbacks peaked at LPew with 70 birds on December 10 (BPB), and 36 were still there on January 15, with three remaining until February 12 (JH); smaller numbers were observed on the Ohio River basin at Louisville on December 15 (JB, PB); and up to two males were noted at McEL during February (BPB). Redheads were present at McEL from
February 3-28 in small numbers but peaked on February 23 with 25+ (BPE et al.). Ring-necked Ducks were present at LPew from December 2 to February 20, with the greatest number of 319 on January 15 (JH); 25-30+ was the peak count at McEL on February 3 (BPB, DC, RCA); five were seen on CSL on January 24 (KC); and three were noted at Towhead Island, Louisville on February 25 (MS). A number of Greater Scaup were reported: one at EBPP on December 29 (KCa, JCa, BPE), one at Camp Ernst Lake at Burlington, Boone County on January 2-12 (LMc), an immature male at McEL on January 13 (BPE, D. Ebel), a large flock (50+) over northern LBar above the dam on February 9 and March 2 (BPE); and an adult and one first-winter male at Towhead Island on February 25 (MS). Two male Surf Scoters were noted on the Ohio River at McAlpine Dam, Louisville on January 11 (LR). Common Goldeneye were present at LPew from December 2 to February 12, with only a high of 11 birds on the latter date (JH); and fair numbers at McEL in January and February, with a peak of 25-30 birds (BPE). Buffleheads were present at LPew from December 2 to February 20, with a peak of 30 on December 2 (BPE).; 80-90 birds were noted at CRL on January 3, increasing to approximately 100 on January 11, with about 50 still present on January 19 (FB); and a pair was recorded in eastern Jefferson County near Prospect on February 15 (MS). Few Hooded Mergansers were reported: six at LPew on December 11 (JH) and a few at McEL on January 13, February 3 and 23 (BPE). One to two Common Mergansers were found at EBPP on January 5 (KCa, JCa) and January 19 (LMc), whereas one was noted on the Ohio River basin at Louisville on December 15 (JB, PB). Six Red-breasted Mergansers were seen at LPew on December 2 (BPE, DC) a female on the Ohio River at Louisville on December 4 (LR), one at EBPP on January 5 (KCa, JCa), and a female at McEL on January 13 (BPE, D. Ebel). As usual, LPew had the greatest number of Ruddy Ducks — 100 — on December 2 (BPE, DC), and one to three were seen at Green River Lake, Taylor County (JEl), CSL (KC) and McEL (BPE, DC).

Raptors — As a result of the mild winter, Black Vultures were present in unusually high numbers in north-central Kentucky; some 80+ were roosting in trees near the Kentucky Utilities Power Plant, Carroll County on December 15 (KCa, JCa, LMc), with 50 still at the site on January 19 (LMc); 60+ roosting at EBPP on December 28 (LMc); some 30-40 roosting on a tower during the winter along I-71 in Oldham County (Barry Tungland, fide BPE); 20-30 on a tower along I-64 in eastern Jefferson County on December (BPE, L. McNeil); 12 in Hart County near Nolin Lake on February 2 (KC); four in eastern Spencer County on February 22 (MS); two over Cave City in Barren County on February 22 (MStu); and two in western Anderson County on February 23 (MS). A flock of 25 Turkey Vultures was noted near Nolin Lake in Hart County on February 2 (KC, AW). The Bald Eagle survey taken in January totaled 169 birds (DY); in addition, single birds were seen between December 13 and February 24 in Barren (SK), Bullitt (BBC), Hardin (S, FS), Hart (SK), Warren (BPE, DC, RCA) and Woodford (JR) counties, and one or two birds were reported on numerous occasions at CRL and MCFH between December 10 and February 22 (FB). Northern Harriers were numerous in Ohio County, particularly on January 26 where some 40-45 were counted during a BBC field trip led by KC, and several birds of both sexes also noted in Muhlenberg County on February 3 (MS, BM, MM); one at ThP area on January 5 (JEl); and two at SCL on January 12 (JEl). A few Sharp-shinned Hawks were reported; an individual was noted at a feeder
in Morehead, Rowan County catching a European Starling on February 14 and a House Finch on February 16 (FB). Only small numbers of Cooper's Hawks were reported, and Red-shouldered Hawks continue to be in low numbers. This winter single birds believed to be the "Harlan's" form of the Red-tailed Hawk were seen in southern Ohio County on January 3 (KC, AW) and February 3 (MS, BM, MM); a melanistic Red-tailed Hawk was present in Gallatin County on December 15 (LMc) and another near CSL on February 23 (BPB, LR, JEl, D. Elmore); and a "Krider's" was seen and photographed at EBPP on January 19 (LMc), while an adult and immature were seen in southern Ohio County in late February (BPB). Rough-legged Hawks were reported from Breckinridge, Muhlenberg and Ohio counties; no less than ten were seen in one spot on the Peabody Sinclair mine in eastern Muhlenberg County on January 1 (BPB, L. Sparks), and 15- to 20 were the peak numbers in southern Ohio County on January 24 and 26 and February 30 (KC, BBC). An adult Golden Eagle was noted at Bernheim Forest, Bullitt County on February 10 (BPB, R. Klapheke). An adult Peregrine Falcon apparently wintered in downtown Louisville in the vicinity of 5th and Jefferson streets, as one was seen on various dates from December 12 to February 7, and an adult, probably the same bird, perched on the Kentucky Home Life Building on February 9 and the Brown Williamson Tower on Liberty Street on February 11 (CL). A Prairie Falcon was reported on the Paradise CBC, Ohio County on January 1 (JB, PB) and noted again on January 4 (KC) and January 13 (BPB).

Coots through Shorebirds — American Coots remained throughout the winter at LPew (JH), Kentucky Lake near the dam (BPB), and a few at McEL (BPB); however, the birds were not as numerous this winter. Sandhill Cranes were still moving southward through December 30, including a flock of 700 in Hart County (SK), two large flocks over Glasgow, Barren County (RS), and smaller numbers in Grayson and Jefferson counties (KC, JB, JJ); spring migrants began arriving on January 22 with approximately 50 over Cave City in northwestern Barren County (MStu), 88-90+ at McEL on February 3 (JB, PB, BPB), 250+ there on February 23 (JB, PB), 18 on the ground in Mercer County near McAfee on February 24-25 (T. and A. Bloom, fide BPB), 92 birds over southwestern Jefferson County during February 26-28 (RH), and birds passing over Surrey Hills Farm, Jefferson County on two dates in late February with more than 100-120 on one day and about 80 on the other (B. Palmer-Ball, Sr., fide BPB).

The concentration of 108 Killdeers in a flooded field along Highway 90 in Wayne County near the Pulaski/Wayne County line on January 5 was unusual for that time of year (JEl). Single yellowlegs were reported from LPew on 2 December as a Lesser (BPB, DC) and on 11 December as a Greater (JH); at this point, we are considering both records as "yellowlegs (sp.?)"; but if accepted as identified, each would be a late date for their respective species, 15 days for the Lesser and ten days for the Greater. Least Sandpipers lingered at Jonathan Creek embayment of Kentucky Lake, Marshall County through December 8 (CP) and 9 (BPB), and the CBC on December 16, with a count of 39 birds. Dunlin remained at Jonathan Creek in groups of 35-43 through December 15 (CP). Common Snipe were present in December in groups of 17 (JH) and 20 at LPew (BPB), 15-20 at Jonathan Creek on December 9 (BPB), and seven at ThP on January 5 (JEl). A few American Woodcock lingered rather late and one was performing its courtship flight near Jonathan Creek on December 9, and one was flushed near Swan Lake on December
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10 (BPB); spring migrants returned to BPS on February 11 (KC) and at Glasgow on February 16 (RS); others were heard at Eubank, Pulaski County on February 24 (JEl), and at least three were heard in courtship flight in eastern Spencer County on February 27 (MS).

Gulls — Bonaparte's Gulls were fairly widespread with the greatest number at Hamlin — about 5,000 — on December 31 (JTE, fide CP); several hundred were present on the western Kentucky lakes in early December, mid-December and January 6 (BPB); some 50+ were at Green River Lake, near the state park on January 12 (JEl); and two were seen at Louisville on the Ohio River on December 14 (LR). Ring-billed Gulls were in lower numbers in late December than last year, but numbers built up by February, especially at the western Kentucky lakes, where it was estimated that approximately 10,000 were present at Kentucky and Barkley dams (BPB); 52 was the high count at McAlpine Dam, Louisville (LR); 50+ at Green River Lake on January 12 (JEl); 33 on Nolin Lake, Grayson County on February 2 (KC, AW); ten on the upper end of Taylorsville Lake, Anderson County on February 22 (MS); and about 200 wintered on CRL, with another 225 noted at MCFH on February 22 (FB). Herring Gulls were in lower numbers in late December compared to last year. An adult Thayer's Gull was noted at Barkley Dam on January 6 (BPB, M. Bierly et al.); and a second-year bird on Barkley Dam on February 9 (BPB, LR). Two adults and two first-year Lesser Black-backed Gulls were observed (and one of each photographed) in the vicinity of Barkley Dam, Lyon/Livingston counties, on December 15 (BPB, DP) and December 16 (BPB, DP, CP, JTE, C. Mowery, Jr.).

Doves through Woodpeckers — A Mourning Dove was incubating on a nest at the University of Louisville campus, Louisville as early as February 13 (MS). Short-eared Owls were not as numerous this winter as compared to last year. As in recent years, the birds were found in both Muhlenberg and Ohio counties, with as many as 30 on January 30 in the latter county (KC); 3-5 were reported in Green County (LC), both new county records. An injured Long-eared Owl was found on November 27 in Owenton, Owen County and turned over to Raptor, Inc. for rehabilitation (KA, JCa); no others were reported, except for the one on the Paradise CBC in eastern Muhlenberg County on January 1 (BPB). Red-headed Woodpeckers were fairly numerous in late December in the LBL area and fair numbers were present in Mammoth Cave National Park (CBC).

Flycatchers through Shrikes — Eight Eastern Phoebes lingered through the CBC period, but the only sighting afterward was one at Science Hill, Pulaski County on February 16 (JEl). Horned Larks were not numerous this year, particularly in December, but numbers increased during January, with large flocks of 500 and 1,000 birds noted in the vicinity of McEL on January 13 and February 3, respectively (BPB); a flock of 150 was seen at U. K. Agricultural Experimental Farm north of Lexington, Fayette County during January (WD). Populations of Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice remained good. Red-breasted Nuthatches were present but in low numbers (e.g., Kentucky had only a total of 21 birds on the 21 CBCs). The Carolina Wren population was up markedly over last winter. Eastern Bluebirds were reported to be up over last winter's numbers in Rowan County (FB). A single Gray Catbird was observed through December 13 at BPS (KC). In contrast, four Brown Thrashers wintered, one at Madisonville (JH), one in Ohio County (JB, PB), one in Grayson County (JP), and one in Rowan County (FB). Winter records of the
Water Pipit included a flock of 30 on the Otter Creek CBC on December 22 (BPB), but none could be found there in January (S); one at McEL on January 13, six at McEL and 35 at CHL on February 3, 30+ at McEL on February 17 (BPB), and 25-30+ at McEL on February 23 (m.ob.); about six birds were also present at Flaherty, Meade County on February 15 (RE). Cedar Waxwings were unusually scarce in most of the state (there were 1,694 fewer individuals this year on the CBC compared with last year). Loggerhead Shrike numbers were stable.

**Warblers through Finches** — Yellow-rumped Warblers were scarce which may in part be attributed to the scarcity of cedar berries. Although two Pine Warblers were recorded on the LBL CBC and one on the Calloway County CBC, none were noted later. An immature Prairie Warbler was reported on the Otter Creek CBC in Meade County along Highway 1238 on December 22 (BPB). An Ovenbird was observed in a parking lot off Preston Highway, Louisville, on December 15 (RH). A female plumaged Common Yellowthroat was reported on the Otter Creek CBC in Meade County on Fort Knox Reservation on December 22 (BPB). The only Savannah Sparrows reported were the small numbers on the reclaimed strip-mines in southern Ohio and eastern Muhlenberg counties in December and January (BPB). Fox Sparrows were in lower numbers than last winter, as were White-throated Sparrows. A Chipping Sparrow was seen at a feeder in Somerset, Pulaski County on December 9 (JEl). As usual, small numbers of Lapland Longspurs were observed during the period. Two blackbird roosts were found in Kentucky this winter: one with about a half-million blackbirds located in Clark County, and the other in Hardin County near Elizabethtown. Eight Red-winged Blackbirds and 15 Common Grackles were observed at a feeder in Morehead, Rowan County, on February 22 (FB); a male Brown-headed Cowbird was also recorded there on January 3 (FB). An adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird was discovered in suburban Elizabethtown on February 16 (BPB). Approximately 500 Rusty Blackbirds were at LPew on December 2 (BPB, DC). Brewer's Blackbirds showed up in the vicinity of McEL and 50 were noted on January 13, smaller numbers on February 3, and probably five on February 22 (BPB); and at least one was observed at Flaherty, Meade County on February 26 (RH). A female Northern Oriole visited a feeder in Lexington, Fayette County from January 9-21 and was photographed (M. Sutton); although reported as a "Bullock's," it is more likely a "Baltimore" (the record is currently under review by the KBRC). Pine Finches were unusually scarce this winter and practically nonexistent at Glasgow (RS). Pine Siskins were also scarce all across the state; Calloway County was the only place having more than a few. American Goldfinches were present in good numbers. Few Evening Grosbeaks arrived this winter; there were two reports on December 11 at Valley Station in southwestern Jefferson County with one bird at one feeder and two at another (DS), a female at a Brownsville, Edmonson County feeder in late December (DB), and a male at a feeder in Murray, Calloway County on January 12-13 (WB); up to four birds were noted on several occasions between 13 January and 22 February in Morehead, Rowan County (FB); the CBCs also showed only a total of six birds on three counts. Nest building of the House Sparrow was noted as early as February 20 at Louisville (MS).

**Errata** — The date of the adult Bald Eagle on BWMA attended by a begging immature (Ky. Warbler 61:5, 1991) should be 3 August, not 31. The record of a flock of eight to ten Red Crossbills heard as they passed overhead in northern Jackson County near Sand Springs on November...
RETURN OF THE WOODBURN LAKES, 1989; PART I.

Brainard Palmer-Ball, Jr. and Gary Boggs

When Dr. Gordon Wilson passed away in 1970, it not only marked the end of the life of one of Kentucky's foremost ornithologists, it also signified the end of an era spanning more than forty years of intense study of the well-known "transient" or "karst" lakes near Woodburn in southern Warren County. From 1929, when his first summary appeared in The Wilson Bulletin, until his last article summarizing observations at the lakes was published in The Kentucky Warbler in 1968, Dr. Wilson related his observations of waterbirds at these seasonally flooded areas in nearly two-dozen separate articles. A summary of observations for the 1972 season published by Dr. Herbert Shadowen (1972) represents the last major seasonal summary of observations to appear in The Kentucky Warbler. Since that time, only a few accounts of waterbird observations at the Woodburn lakes have been reported.

Although Dr. Wilson (1940) has more than adequately described the nature of the Woodburn lakes previously, a brief introduction is in order for those readers unfamiliar with the factors responsible for the presence of this unique situation. The Woodburn lakes are located in the Pennyroyal, a region of Kentucky characterized by extensive underground drainage due to the presence of a very soluble limestone bedrock. This "karst" topography is characterized by little or no surface drainage and many sinkholes and underground passages into which surface water drains directly into the subsurface. The two most well-known lakes, "Chaney" and "McElroy" (as well as many lesser known ones), form as a result of above-normal precipitation. These broad depressions lie below the elevation of much of the surrounding land, and as the subsurface water level rises during periods of heavy rainfall, these areas fill with water. While each lake is fed by one or a small group of major springs, each is also fed by numerous smaller ones. The waters may rise for several weeks after heavy rains. Likewise, the water exits these broad depressions through similar openings to the subsurface, and the lakes may take months to dry up since they are continually rejuvenated by the underground
springs as long as the ground water level remains above their lowest elevation. Both Chaney and McElroy Lakes vary widely in extent and duration from year to year, and they may not hold water at all some years. In order for the lakes to persist into summer, an unusually wet spring must occur, followed by near or above normal rainfall afterwards.

Only a few times during the 1900s has summer rainfall following an unusually wet spring been sufficient to allow the lakes to persist into the fall. In fact, in an article summarizing waterbird observations from 1950 (Wilson 1951), his best year ever at the lakes, Dr. Wilson says in closing, "If the lakes follow the usual cycles of high and low, it may be half a lifetime before any other such year as 1950 will come." Let it be known that Dr. Wilson was not only a fine student of ornithology, but also an adept prophet. For in 1989, nearly forty years after his best season, such a year came with both record rainfall and unsurpassed birding at the timeless transient lakes of Woodburn.

During the late winter and early spring of 1989, much of Kentucky received an abnormally large amount of rainfall. Through the first three months of 1989 Bowling Green recorded over 24 inches of precipitation (some 10 inches above normal), representing the fifth wettest January through March period on record (G. Conner, pers. comm.). This unusual period of excessive rainfall caused a rise in the local groundwater level, filling both Chaney and McElroy lakes to levels comparable to those recorded by Wilson in years like 1937 and 1950 (the seventh and fourth wettest first-quarters of a year on record, respectively (G. Conner, pers. comm.). Chaney Lake covered more than 250 acres during much of March while McElroy Lake covered at least 400 acres at the same time. Although the lakes receded gradually over the next few months, normal periods of rainfall helped them to persist through early summer. Both would have disappeared in mid-July had it not been for the highly unusual occurrence of more than 6.25 inches of rainfall within a two-day period 2-3 July. This rainfall caused the lakes to return to their late April levels, and thus assured their life into the early fall, apparently for only the third time since Dr. Wilson began his observations in the mid-1920’s (1935 and 1950 being the others).

In 1989, waterbird study at the lakes was initiated in early February by Boggs. Palmer-Ball began visiting the lakes on 11 March, when waterfowl migration was already in full swing. From discussions about the lakes with local farmers, it was clear that the water began to rise in January, and subsequent to a period of heavy rainfall in late February, they rose to their maximum levels.

Through the months of February and March, waterfowl were quite numerous. During the peak of waterfowl migration in March, it was not uncommon to compile a list of 20 species of ducks and geese at the lakes. As of mid-April, many of the ducks had departed, although a peak count of an estimated 4-5,000 American Coots at McElroy 10-16 April was rather impressive.

Shorebird numbers built up slowly through April until suddenly during the last few days of the month, everything seemed to arrive at once. One of the highlights of the spring occurred during the weekend of 29-30 April when Palmer-Ball and a small group of KOS members visited the lakes and found several unusual species at McElroy Lake. In the span of less than an hour on 29 April, we observed a flock of 43 Willets accompanied by four Marbled Godwits, a Black-bellied Plover, at least a dozen Lesser Golden-Plovers (some nearly in full breeding plumage), and a flock of 22 Long-billed Dowitchers. On the following day, Palmer-Ball
and Don Parker returned, and although the Willets and godwits had departed, three Western Sandpipers molting into breeding plumage and an Eared Grebe in nearly full breeding plumage were observed.

The month of May saw the arrival of more shorebird species and several notable occurrences of gulls and terns. In addition, the first nesting record of Hooded Merganser for south-central Kentucky was recorded at Chaney Lake in late May. Shorebirds continued to be abundant through the month, and on 20 May, a group of ten observers tallied an impressive list of 18 species of shorebirds including a Red-necked Phalarope, a first for Kentucky in spring.

In early June an amazing variety of thirteen species of waterfowl were still present on McElroy, and by mid-June many families of Blue-winged Teal and Mallards were present. During the month, a few very unusual records of other waterbirds were made, including observations of Lesser Golden-Plover and Common Snipe. In addition, an incredible variety of ten species of waterfowl remained at McElroy throughout the month!

In early July McElroy almost completely dried up, but a two-day, 6.25+ inch period of rainfall on 2-3 July swelled both lakes back to their late April levels. Waterfowl dispersed, and some species could not be relocated. By early July shorebirds were returning, and as the lakes receded through August and early September, perhaps the most spectacular concentration of shorebirds ever witnessed in the state developed. During late August and early September, such unusual shorebirds as the Piping Plover, Red Knot, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and Red-necked Phalarope were observed. By early September, McElroy was receding quickly, and large changes in its extent were visible even from day to day. On 10 September, several of us were presented with the most unusual experience of viewing 25 species of shorebirds at McElroy; of these, 22 were clearly in view from one spot! By 12 September, McElroy had all but disappeared, and the only water that remained was in a drainage ditch running through the now completely exposed fields. On that date Palmer-Ball and Don Parker were able to capture a female Lesser Scaup and a Horned Grebe (both with injured wings) that had been present on the lake throughout the summer. Both birds were released unharmed on nearby permanent bodies of water. By mid-September, only a few species were still present on the drying mud at McElroy, but a respectable concentration remained at Chaney where the water was slower to disappear. On our last visit to Chaney on 7 October, a few remaining pools of water were still filled with good numbers of more common shorebirds and dabbling ducks.

One might ask upon what food source this myriad of waterbirds subsisted while they stayed at McElroy and Chaney lakes, especially since their presence is of such unpredictable and temporary nature. Food for this great number of waterbird species was almost as varied as the diversity of birds themselves. Because the underground spring water feeding the lakes is relatively warm, aquatic plants and algae begin growing profusely, even in late winter when temperatures are still quite cold. During the late winter and spring, many of the birds also grazed on winter wheat growing in fields partially inundated by the waters. It is doubtless that a certain amount of unharvested grain from the previous year's soybean and corn crops was also present.

As the lake levels dropped in late spring and summer, a variety of native plants took hold on large portions of the receding shorelines. Dense mats of spike-rush (Eleocharis sp.) with scattered patches of smartweed (Polygonum sp.) water-plantain (Alisma subcordatum), water-
primrose (*Ludwigia* sp.), and watergrass (*Eichinochloa* sp.) grew up on the exposed flats surrounding both lakes. Once the water receded totally, scattered patches of coontail (*Ceratophyllum* sp.), water naiad (*Najas* sp.), and pondweed (*Potamogeton* sp.) were exposed on the muddy flats.

Aquatic animal life was also abundant. Certain aquatic invertebrates are quick to colonize such temporary waters, and some waterfowl and most of the shorebirds utilized this resource. Two small species of aquatic insects, a back-swimmer bug (Family *Notonectidae*) and a water boatman (Family *Corixidae*) were especially abundant in the shallow pools in late summer, as well as a species of aquatic snail (Family *Physidae*). Mosquito-like midges of the Family *Chironomidae* were also abundant as both larvae in the bottom of the lakes and as emerging adults. The latter were the primary food for the swallows and Black Terns. Although the lakes are well-known for their populations of the small, semi-blind Spring cavefish (*Chologaster agassizi*), none of these could be found, although tens of thousands of young black bullhead catfish (*Ictalurus melas*) were found stranded in isolated pools and in the ditch running through the middle of McElroy on 12 September. These fish were apparently the primary food source for the grebes, herons, cormorants, mergansers and Osprey.

In general aspect the lakes have changed little throughout the recent past, although clearing of surrounding forest land has progressed at a steady rate. For the most part, land use surrounding the lakes has been, and continues to be, dominated by row-crop agriculture with lesser amounts of hay and pasture land. Use of the fields inundated by the lakes is dictated by the unpredictable rising and falling of the ground water. The water that collects in the lakes has nowhere to go, and once in place must recede naturally, so that some years crops may not be planted at all. Although more and more forest surrounding the lakes has been cleared through the years, a large tract of mature timber is still present at Chaney, providing cover for species like the Wood Duck. In contrast, the stark openness surrounding McElroy may actually serve to enhance its attractiveness to many migratory waterbirds. While it is doubtless that clearing of some areas has altered the habitat negatively for some species, the overall effect seems to have had little impact.

The nature of the vegetation covering and surrounding the lakes at the time of settlement is unclear, but it is highly possible that the periodic inundation of the lower areas in combination with fires (either occurring naturally or set by native Indians) may have kept prairie grasses and herbaceous wetland plants in dominance, thus providing for an abundance of food for migratory waterbirds. In contrast to the relatively recent development of waterbird habitat on the state’s reservoirs and management areas, this habitat (much like the Falls of the Ohio) has been present for many generations of waterbird use. This may explain the aura of tradition one perceives from the surprising abundance and diversity of birds that can be encountered during a good season at the lakes. As vast flocks of waterfowl and shorebirds arrive and depart, or rise from the shallows or shores and wheel in unison, one is overwhelmed by an impression that it is an instinctual attraction that has drawn these birds to the lakes. On the other hand, the use of these areas by so many birds may do nothing more than illustrate the adaptability and opportunistic nature of waterbird migration. More likely than not, it is a combination of these factors that makes for such a unique situation.

In many ways, the season of 1989 was quite similar to that reported by Wilson for 1950. Perhaps the most striking contrast was the lack of herons and egrets in 1989 as compared to 1950. Wilson reported eight
species of herons and egrets in 1950, some in considerable numbers. While we observed most of these species in 1989, observations of most were infrequent and number were quite low in comparison. The effect of widespread DDT use had not taken its toll on bird populations at the time of Wilson's earlier observations, and wading bird numbers remain relatively low today as they continue to rebound from low levels observed in the 1950s and '60s. In terms of other species, waterfowl variety and numbers were quite comparable to earlier years except for the unique array of summering birds observed in 1989. The combined shorebird seasons of 1989 were by far the best ever documented from any single location in the state, and they will probably remain a standard for comparison and recollection for many years to come. Unfortunately the lakes dried up before fall shorebird migration was complete and the fall diving duck migration began. Because of this, we were not able to obtain good late dates for shorebirds as Wilson did in 1950, nor were we able to see how diving ducks might respond to the presence of the lakes in fall.

Between the two of us, in excess of 80 trips were made between the dates of 3 February and 7 October 1989. Coverage of the lakes on these trips varied tremendously from cursory checks of just one to comprehensive visits of both. Due to several factors, McElroy received most of our attention, especially from late April through mid-June and mid-August through mid-September, when the numbers and variety of birds there were so great that we often found it difficult to make ourselves leave to check Chaney! Never was there a day when something new was not discovered; even during a given day, numbers and variety could change as migrants arrived and departed. In all, we observed 73 species of waterbirds at the two lakes in 1989. This represents considerably more than the 60 species Wilson and others recorded during his all-time best year of 1950.

Reported herein is a summary of the observations made by us, or by us and others in our presence. It is doubtless that at least a few other noteworthy sightings were made of which we are not aware. When seemingly pertinent, observations made in 1989 are compared to occurrences and/or abundances as reported by Dr. Wilson, mostly in a summary of Birds of South-Central Kentucky (Wilson 1962) and a supplement to the same (Wilson 1969). Also, a few observations are referred to photographs either accompanying this article or submitted to Anne L. Stamm, editor of the Seasonal Reports feature of The Kentucky Warbler. Information contained herein occasionally differs from that previously reported in The Kentucky Warbler Seasonal Reports, Vol. 65 (3 & 4) and Vol. 66 (1), primarily due to previously unreported sightings supplied by Boggs. Ages were noted for many shorebirds observed during the fall and are indicated as follows: a=adult, j=juvenile, u=unaged. This information is included due to its pertinence to an understanding of the timing of peaks of migration for the various species. Other abbreviations used include ca.=approximately, MCNP=Mammoth Cave National Park, and sc Ky= south-central Kentucky (as defined by Wilson 1962).

COMMON LOON. Gavia immer. Our only record was of a single bird observed by Boggs on McElroy on 22 April. Wilson (1962) regarded this species as "usually rare", although he seemed to record loons fairly regularly at the lakes during good years.

PIED-BILLED GREBE. Podilymbus podiceps. This fairly common grebe was present throughout the entire period of study (mostly at McElroy), with up to ca. 30 birds (28 March) there in spring and 10-15 birds (27 August-2 September) there during fall migration. Single individuals were observed in fall until 12 September on McElroy and 16
September on Chaney. Several birds remained on McElroy throughout summer, but nesting was not confirmed. The appearance of a stripe-headed immature at McElroy on 4 July was interpreted as originating from another breeding area although the possibility of nesting there could not be ruled out. Wilson (1940, 1962) found seven nests of this species at McElroy in 1927 and reported summering during a few other years.

HORNED GREBE. *Podiceps auritus*. Small numbers of Horned Grebes were present on McElroy from 11 March through early May with a peak count of 15-20 birds there 25 March-1 April. A single bird with an injured wing remained at the lake through the summer and was seen on every visit. On 12 September, Palmer-Ball and Don Parker were successful in capturing the bird in the small ditch running through the nearly dried up fields. The bird was released on the Ohio River at Louisville where it was thought that it should be able to persist even if it could never fly again.

EARED GREBE. *Podiceps nigricollis*. In 1989, McElroy was host to a number of species considered very rare in occurrence in Kentucky, and several species generally seen in Kentucky only a few times every decade were observed there on more than one occasion during the year. One such species was the Eared Grebe. Single birds were observed on 30 April and 14 May and presumed to be different individuals since none were seen on several dates in between. Both birds were in breeding plumage, the latter being particularly immaculate in appearance. On 27 August, two birds in non-breeding plumage were studied closely and compared with the summersing Horned Grebe, which was then molting out of breeding plumage. This rather early “fall” date is apparently representative of a small, but perceptible movement of this species that has become slightly more prevalent in the midwest over the past decade (B. Peterjohn, pers. comm.). Wilson (1962, 1969) did not report this species from sc Ky, but 1-2 birds were observed at McElroy in mid-May 1984 (Mason 1985).

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT. *Phalacrocorax auritus*. Cormorants were present at McElroy on several dates. During the spring migration, a flock of 32 birds was observed resting on the lake on 20 February, 11 birds were seen there on 23 April, and a single bird was present on 29 April. In late summer, a single cormorant was observed 3, 6 August and on all but one visit to the lake 27 August-8 September. Wilson (1962, 1969) noted only ten records from sc Ky. This species has increased in Kentucky as a transient over the past decade, and the relatively large number of observations in 1989 can probably be attributed to this increase.

LEAST BITTERN. *Ixobrychus exilis*. One bird was seen perched on a flooded farm fence at McElroy on 16 July. This bird was considered to be a post-breeding transient, even though the date was rather early for a “fall” migrant. Wilson (1940) listed one 1939 record from McElroy and regarded the species as very rare in sc Ky and possibly nesting only at MCNP (Wilson 1962).

GREAT BLUE HERON. *Ardea herodias*. Small numbers of Great Blue Herons were observed at both lakes in spring and from late summer into fall. Our peak counts were six birds at McElroy on 19 August and 10 September, and four birds at Chaney on 9, 13 August. On 7 October, three birds were still present at Chaney. These numbers are comparable to those reported by Wilson (1951) in 1950.

GREAT EGRET. *Casmerodius albus*. At McElroy, a single Great Egret came to roost with a flock of Cattle Egrets on the evening of 29 April. Otherwise, the only sightings were of single birds at Chaney on 23
May and 6 August. Wilson (1962) regarded this species as "sometimes common when the lakes remain into late summer.

SNOWY EGRET. *Egretta thula*. A single bird was observed at McElroy on 20 May and at Chaney on 23 May (probably same bird). Wilson (1951, 1962) recorded this species at the lakes on a number of occasions, including 1950 when up to 20 were present.

CATTLE EGRET. *Bubulcus ibis*. A flock of 33 birds came to roost at McElroy on the evening of 29 April. Otherwise, the only sighting was of a single bird there on 20 May. Wilson (1962, 1969) noted this species in the vicinity of the lakes on a few occasions, including the first state record on 9 November 1960. Since that time the Cattle Egret has become regular as a transient and summer resident in the state.

GREEN-BACKED HERON. *Butorides striatus*. Somewhat surprisingly, this species was not abundant at the lakes in 1989. Only a few birds were seen in spring and summer (mostly at Chaney), but as many as nine birds were present at McElroy during mid-August and as many as seven birds were seen at Chaney during August and September. Wilson (1962) regarded this species as "abundant in late summer when the lakes remain." We are not sure why Green-backed Herons were not as numerous in 1989; it is possible that reduced cover, especially at McElroy where very few trees remain, was responsible for the decrease.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON. *Nycticorax nycticorax*. The only records were for single adult birds observed at McElroy on 29 June and 13 August. This is another species of heron that Wilson (1962) reported in much greater frequency and abundance than we observed in 1989.

TUNDRA SWAN. *Cygnus columbianus*. Boggs observed a group of four birds (3 adults, 1 immature) at McElroy 20-25 February. Wilson (1962, 1969) did not list this species from sc Ky, but Shadowen (1972) observed the species at McElroy in 1972.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE. *Anser albifrons*. A flock of 19 birds was present at McElroy 18 March-1 April representing one of only a few records of this rare transient east of Land Between the Lakes and apparently the first for sc Ky.

SNOW GOOSE. *Chen caerulescens*. This relatively uncommon species was observed on a few dates during spring migration from 28 February to 1 April with a peak count of 61 birds (40 Snows/21 Blues) 28 February-8 March. Wilson (1962) recorded this species on a number of dates through the years, most often in spring, but occasionally in fall.

CANADA GOOSE. *Branta canadensis*. This species was observed sporadically throughout the year. Small numbers were present from early February through early April with a peak count of 15 birds in early March. Wilson (1962) recorded this species on a number of dates through the years, most often in spring, but occasionally in fall.

WOOD DUCK. *Aix sponsa*. Woodies were present virtually throughout the period of study. In spring, small numbers were observed from 28 February through May (mostly at Chaney). Broods of small young were observed on both lakes in late May and June but were most prevalent on Chaney where the woodland provides better habitat for this species. Several dozen were present on Chaney in late August while small numbers appeared periodically on McElroy through mid-August.
GREEN-WINGED TEAL. *Anas crecca.* This small dabbler was present on both lakes in spring from 11 March to late April with peak counts of 12 birds at McElroy on 15 March and 10 birds at Chaney on 23 April. Three males lingered at McElroy through mid-May and a single male was last observed there on 1 June, representing a new spring departure date for Kentucky. At least one bird returned to McElroy as early as 27 August where a few were seen until the lake dried up in mid-September, and four birds were still present at Chaney on 7 October.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK. *Anas rubripes.* Black ducks were present on both lakes in spring from 3 February to 30 March with a peak count of ca. 100 birds at McElroy on 21 February. In addition, a bird appeared at McElroy on 20 May followed by a pair of birds later in May (these individuals probably came from nearby smaller bodies of water that finally dried up). The same birds (or others) were seen off and on through 10 September at McElroy and until 7 October at Chaney.

MALLARD. *Anas platyrhynchos.* This species was present throughout the year until the lakes dried up in September and October. Mallards nested prolifically on McElroy and in smaller numbers on Chaney, with over a dozen broods seen on the former and at least two on the latter. Peak counts occurred in late summer with more than 200 birds observed on both lakes in late August and September.

NORTHERN PINTAIL. *Anas acuta.* This early spring migrant was present on both lakes 21 February to 1 April with a peak of 22 birds at McElroy on 1 March. Two birds returned to McElroy on the unusually early date of 8 August where they were observed through 22 August. This is a duck that Wilson (1962) regarded as “common to abundant” when the lakes were large in early spring.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL. *Anas discors.* This common dabbler was present throughout the year once the first migrants arrived in spring. A few males were first observed on 18 March, after which numbers built up to a relatively unspectacular peak of 100+ birds at McElroy 7–23 April. Numbers declined during May, but at the end of the month several dozen birds, including at least two broods of downy young, were still present on McElroy. During June broods of young were scattered across the lake, with perhaps more than 200 birds representing a dozen or more family groups. Although not confirmed, breeding was probably also successful at Chaney. During August numbers began to build up at McElroy as fall migrants supplemented the nesting population, and during early September some 400–500 or more birds grazed the shallows of the drying lake and wheeled overhead in spectacular flocks when frightened. On 12 September, a late brood of five or six nearly full-grown young was still present along the ditch running through the middle of the fields. By 16 September all had departed from the muddy flats at McElroy, but a few birds were present at Chaney as late as 7 October. In addition to breeding at the two well-known lakes, the species nested at a similar “transient” lake several miles to the southwest in Simpson County, where two downy broods of young were accompanied by females were seen on 6 June. This observation provided the first nesting record of Blue-winged Teal for Simpson county. Wilson (1962) reported nesting on four previous occasions at the lakes.

NORTHERN SHOVELER. *Anas clypeata.* Shovelers were present on both lakes during spring migration from 21 February into early May with a peak count of ca. 200 birds on McElroy 28 February–8 March. Surprising numbers remained on the lake throughout May with at least a dozen birds present during the first week and 3–4 pairs still present at the end of the
month. Two males were observed on 6 June, and a pair of birds lingered there until at least 13 June. Four birds in female/immature plumage reappeared on McElroy on 17 July, and the species was seen on both lakes on 22 July (1 bird at Chaney, 3 at McElroy). Small numbers (<10) were present through early September, and a peak count of 14 birds was made at McElroy on 12 September, the last day on which much water was present there. Due to the lack of observations between mid-June and mid-July, it is unclear whether or not shovelers summered in the vicinity, but the mid-July birds were observed ca. six weeks earlier than fall migrants have ever been reported in Kentucky. The heavy rain of early July caused many smaller ponds to refill, and some waterfowl apparently dispersed off the main lakes and could not be relocated. For this reason, we could not be sure that some species, including the shoveler, actually summered. It would seem that even the possibility of the species nesting at McElroy in 1989 could not be ruled out. Wilson (1952, 1962) reported this species in good numbers at the lakes including an impressive peak of ca. 1,000 birds in 1952.

**GADWALL. Anas strepera.** This species was present on both lakes in spring from 21 February through early May with a peak count of ca. 100 birds at McElroy 22-24 February. Some 6-8 birds lingered at McElroy through mid-May and at least a pair and an additional male remained through May and summered on McElroy through mid-July. Boggs last observed the species there on 20 July, but he again observed 1-2 Gadwalls at McElroy 13-20 August. It is unclear whether or not these latter birds were the summering individuals or early fall migrants. Curiously, the Gadwall is a species that Wilson (1962) regarded as rare in sc Ky. The reason for the discrepancy between his and our observations is unknown.

**AMERICAN WIGEON. Anas americana.** Wigeons were present on both lakes in spring from 20 February through early April with a rather impressive peak count of at least 300 birds on McElroy on 25 March. After the peak, numbers decreased to 125+ by 1 April, and at least two males summered on McElroy through early July when the big rains came. Boggs last observed a male on McElroy on 19 July, although it was suspected that the species must have remained in the area, perhaps on smaller ponds that refilled in early July. The wigeon is a species that Wilson (1962, 1969) reported at the Woodburn lakes in good numbers in spring, but never into summer.

**CANVASBACK. Aythya valisineria.** This declining species of diving duck was observed for only a brief period at McElroy during spring migration, 11-18 March (up to 3 birds). These observations are consistent with Wilson's who regarded the species as rare in sc Ky (1962).

**REDHEAD. Aythya americana.** Relatively small numbers of Redheads were present on both lakes during spring migration from 21 February through mid-April with a peak count of at least 50 birds present on McElroy on 11 March. A pair of birds and an additional male lingered at McElroy through 14 May providing a relatively late departure date. Wilson (1962) reported this species lingering into mid-June on one occasion.

**RING-NECKED DUCK. Aythya collaris.** This species was present on both lakes in spring from 8 March through 14 May with peak counts of ca. 100 birds at McElroy and ca. 300 birds at Chaney, both on 11 March. A male lingered throughout May and then summered on McElroy until it dried up in mid-September (seen flying reluctantly from the remaining ditch on 12 September).

**GREATER SCAUP. Aythya marila.** This uncommon diving duck
was positively identified only 11-19 March (1 male at Chaney) and 1-15 March (up to 5 birds at McElroy). Wilson (1962) regarded this species as rare in So Ky and reported it only occasionally, even in good years.

**LESSER SCAUP. Aythya affinis.** Good numbers of Lesser Scaup were present on both lakes during spring migration from 1 March through mid-April with a peak count of ca. 200 birds on McElroy 11-25 March and 150 birds on Chaney on 19 March. Some 10-12 birds lingered at McElroy through mid-May and two pairs lingered until the end of the month. Throughout the rest of summer, at least a pair of birds summered on McElroy until early September. On 12 September, Don Parker and Palmer-Ball captured the injured female (the male apparently had finally moved on) and released it nearby on Three Springs Lake.

**COMMON GOLDENEYE. Bucephala clangula.** Goldeneyes were present on both lakes (but primarily McElroy) during spring migration from 28 February through early April with a peak count of ca. 50 birds on McElroy 1-8 March. A female lingered on McElroy and a small pond nearby until at least 30 April.

**BUFFLEHEAD. Bucephala albeola.** Fairly good numbers of Buffleheads were present on both lakes during spring migration from 8 March through mid-April with a peak count of ca. 75 birds at McElroy on 25 March. After the departure of a few lingering birds in late April, a single female or young male, apparently with an injured wing, summered on the lake until about 2 September when fresh remains of it (including feathers) were found along the shore, indicating that a predator had just recently captured and eaten it.

**HOODED MERGANSER. Lophodytes cucullatus.** Small numbers of Hooded Mergansers were observed on both lakes during spring migration from 1 March into early May with peak counts of only four birds at McElroy on 1 March and 5 May. A single first-year male (unknown if injured) summered on McElroy until it dried up in mid-September (last seen on the ditch on 10 September). On 27 May, a brood of five half-grown young accompanied by a female was observed on Chaney, providing a first breeding record for this region of the state. Perhaps this same family group was observed on McElroy on 19 June (3 or 4 female/immature plumaged birds).

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS. Mergus serrator.** A few Red-breasted Mergansers were present on McElroy during spring migration from 8 March to 7 May (2 females on latter) with a peak count of 15 birds on McElroy on 11 March. In addition, a lingering female was observed by Boggs at McElroy 29-30 May.

**RUDDY DUCK. Oxyura jamaicensis.** This species was observed on McElroy during spring migration from 11 March through early May with a peak count of ca. 60 birds there on 10 April. A group of at least five birds (4 male, 1 female) lingered on the lake through the end of May and a pair was last observed there on 9 June. Boggs also observed 1-2 birds at McElroy 17-20 July, although because of the lack of sightings in the interim, it is unclear whether or not these were the same birds as were present in early June.

**SORA. Porzana carolina.** Single birds were observed foraging along thickly-vegetated margins of McElroy on 5 May (Palmer-Ball) and 15 August (Boggs).

**AMERICAN COOT. Fulica americana.** This common species was present in large numbers on both lakes during spring migration from 11
March through late April with a peak count of ca. 4-5,000 birds estimated at McElroy 10-16 April. Numbers quickly declined through the latter half of April, but several hundred birds were still present on McElroy in early May (350 counted on 7 May). At least a half-dozen birds remained into early June, and at least three birds summered on McElroy, the last of which was observed there on 12 September. In addition, a bird seen on Chaney 13-16 August indicated possible summering there. Neither nesting nor any evidence of the possibility of such was observed on either lake. In previous years when water persisted through the summer, Wilson (1962) found nesting attempts at McElroy, but with a lack of marshy vegetation at the lake in 1989, it could be that nesting was not attempted.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER. Pluvialis squatarola. This uncommon plover was present on McElroy during spring migration from 29 April (1 bird) to 27 May (3 birds) with a peak of at least a dozen birds (most in fine breeding plumage) on 20 May. During fall migration, single adults were observed at McElroy 17-22 August and 8-10 September. While Wilson (1962) recorded the Black-bellied Plover on numerous occasions in spring, he listed only one fall record from the lakes.

LESSER GOLDEN-PLOVER. Pluvialis dominica. This graceful shorebird was observed mostly at McElroy during spring migration from 23 April (ca. 12 birds, also the peak count) to 23 May (1 bird). Most of these birds were in beautiful breeding plumage. Of considerable surprise was the observation of a bird in non-breeding plumage feeding along the shore of McElroy on 13 June. This represents a unique record for Kentucky, lying midway between the normal spring departure and fall arrival dates for the species in the state. Golden-Plovers turned up in surprising numbers at McElroy during fall migration, as well. The first adult appeared on 6 September. On 12 September the first juveniles (3) appeared with ca. 25 adults, and on 16 September an impressive flock of 42 birds (32a, 10j) was observed on the muddy flats at McElroy with an additional 15-20 birds in a field nearby. This represents the largest number ever to be reported from Kentucky in fall. Ten birds (1a, 9j) were present on Chaney as late as 7 October. These observations apparently represent the first fall records for the lakes of a shorebird Wilson (1962, 1969) regarded as rare in the region and had reported only once before in fall in sc Ky.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER. Charadrius semipalmatus. This small plover was observed in good numbers at both lakes during spring migration from 23 April (1 bird on a pond near McElroy) to 1 June (5 birds at McElroy) and 6 June (1 bird at McElroy) with a peak of 75+ birds at McElroy 5-14 May. On 29 May, a bird with a badly broken wing was caught at McElroy and taken to the Louisville Zoo for possible rehabilitation. Semipalmated Plovers were again observed at both lakes in fall from 22 July (1a at Chaney) to 16 September (6u at McElroy, 4u at Chaney), with a peak of 35-40 birds (mostly juveniles) at McElroy on 8 September.

PIPING PLOVER. Charadrius melodus. This rare transient was present at McElroy on several dates during fall migration with a single adult observed on 20 August, three unaged birds present on 21 August, and two juveniles present on 22 August. Also, a juvenile was present again 8-10 September. These observations apparently represent the first fall records for sc Ky, since Wilson (1962) reported the species only in spring.

KILLDEER. Charadrius vociferus. This common plover was present throughout the year. Large numbers apparently nested in the farm fields surrounding McElroy where Boggs found six active nests in June. Numbers were hard to keep up with, but 200 or more birds seemed to be present
on most visits from mid-summer until the lakes dried up in September and October. Throughout later summer and fall, a strikingly beautiful partial albino Killdeer with nearly entirely white plumage was seen at McElroy by many observers.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS. *Tringa melanoleuca*. This large shorebird was observed on both lakes during both spring and fall migration. In spring it was seen at McElroy from 25 March (2 birds) to 29 May (1 bird) with a peak count of 5-10 birds there on 29 April (1-5 birds seen 10 April through 14 May at Chaney). In fall the species was recorded from 4 July (3a at McElroy) to 12 September (3u at McElroy) and 7 October (4j at Chaney) with a peak count of 8-10 birds at McElroy on 6 August. Wilson (1940, 1951) apparently observed this species in greater numbers in spring with representative peak counts of 50-75 in the 1930s and 20-25 in 1950.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS. *Tringa flavipes*. This common shorebird was observed on both lakes during both spring and fall migration. In spring the species was first seen on 19 March (2 birds at both lakes) then continuously through early June (at least 1 bird still at McElroy) with peak counts of 75+- birds at McElroy 29-30 April and 100+- birds at McElroy 5 and 14 May. Throughout June, at least one Lesser Yellowlegs was observed on every visit to McElroy, although summering was not confirmed. By 29 June, at least a dozen birds had already returned to McElroy on southward migration, and the species was recorded continuously through 16 September (5u) at McElroy and 7 October (25+u) at Chaney. Peak counts during the season included 100+- birds at McElroy throughout August and early September, 150+- birds at McElroy on 12 September, and 85 birds at Chaney on 16 September (probably including many birds from McElroy that moved after the water disappeared there). In contrast to the preceding species, our peak counts for this species compared more favorably to Wilson's (1940, 1951).

SOLITARY SANDPIPER. *Tringa solitaria*. This fairly common shorebird was observed on both lakes during both spring and fall migration. In spring it was observed from 23 April (6 birds at McElroy, 4 birds at Chaney) to 27 May (1 bird at McElroy) with a peak count of ca. 20 birds at McElroy on 29 April. During fall migration the species was recorded from 4 July (1 at McElroy) to 16 September (1 at McElroy) and 7 October (1 at Chaney) with peak counts of 20-25+- birds at McElroy on 6 August and 15 birds at Chaney on 13 August. Being a denizen of smaller bodies of water, Solitary Sandpipers were also observed during spring and fall migration on numerous farm ponds and smaller flooded areas in the vicinity of the two main lakes.

WILLET. *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*. On 29 April a flock of 43 birds was observed resting and feeding at McElroy by a group of KOS members. This apparently represents the largest flock ever to be reported in the state and interestingly occurred on the same day that ca. 40 were seen at nearby Barren River Reservoir (different birds).

SPOTTED SANDPIPER. *Actitis macularia*. This common sandpiper was observed at both lakes during both spring and fall migration, as well as throughout the summer at McElroy. Individuals were present in spring from 23 April (1 bird at Chaney; 3 at McElroy) through the end of May (at least 2 birds still at McElroy) with a peak of ca. 15 birds at each of the lakes on 14 May. Afterwards, at least 3-4 birds remained at McElroy throughout June where courtship flights (early to mid-June) and copulation (6 June) were observed. Unfortunately, further evidence of nesting was not obtained. The sudden rise in the lake level in early July may have
flooded any active nests. Similar numbers remained through late July when the first fall migrants began to arrive. By 6 August, at least five birds were at McElroy, and small numbers were observed through 16 September at McElroy and 7 October at Chaney. A peak count of 6-8+ birds was made at McElroy on 4 September. Confirmed nesting evidence apparently also alluded Wilson (1962), who regarded the Spotted Sandpiper as "possibly" a summer resident at the lakes.

UPLAND SANDPIPER. *Bartramia longicauda*. This rare to uncommon shorebird could not be found in the vicinity in spring but was observed on at least three dates in fall as follows: 28 July, two birds along the shore of Chaney; 2 September, one bird heard well and seen briefly flying overhead at McElroy; and 10 September, two birds seen and heard calling as they passed overhead at McElroy.

THE KENTUCKY ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SPRING MEETING — APRIL 26-28, 1991

The Kentucky Ornithological Society held its 68th annual spring meeting at Carter Caves State Resort Park on April 26-28, 1991. Virginia Kingsolver, President, opened the Friday evening session with a welcome to members and guests. Lee McNeely, Vice-president, introduced the evening program speakers. John Tierney presented The Natural History of the Carter Caves Area. Fred Busroe presented an update on the birds utilizing the Minor E. Clark Fish Hatchery. The evening program concluded with a photo-quiz of slides provided by members. An informal social hour followed the program.

The weather was mostly clear and warm for the Saturday morning field trips. One group birded the Cascade Cave and Box Canyon area, two groups remained in the lodge area and one group visited the Minor E. Clark Fish Hatchery.

The Board of Directors met at 3:30 p.m. in the lodge.

After a buffet dinner in the lodge dining room, the group assembled for the Saturday evening program. Virginia Kingsolver introduced Dr. Burt Monroe, Jr. who presented The Birds and Wildlife of Venezuela for Dr. Herbert Clay who was ill. Dr. Clay's slides were excellent.

The Board recommended the following change in the Bylaws for new dues structure: Article II, Section A. The annual dues for Active Membership shall be $8.00, for Contributing Membership shall be $15.00, for Student Membership $4.00. The fee for Life Membership shall be $100.00. The fee for Family Membership for an Active or Contributing Member shall be $2.00 in addition to that member's regular dues; the fee for Family Membership for a Life Member shall be $2.00 annually, to continue for the life of that member. The membership passed the new dues structure.

A statement from the Board was made establishing a Kentucky Rare Bird Alert hotline.

The weather was warm and sunny with early morning fog for the Sunday field trips. One group met at the Minor E. Clark Fish Hatchery and others birded in the park area.

Fred Busroe compiled the bird list which totaled 114 species including the Sunday morning count. Fifty-four people registered for the meeting.

— FRED M. BUSROE, Recording Secretary.
ATTENDANCE AT THE SPRING MEETING
AT CARTER CAVES STATE PARK

ANCHORAGE: Dr. and Mrs. Burt Monroe, Mark Monroe
BEREA: Art and Tina Ricketts
BOWLING GREEN: Blaine Ferrell, Herb and Jacky Shadowen
BUCKHORN: Eileen Sandlin
BURLINGTON: Kathy and Joe Caminiti, Mr. and Mrs. Lee McNeely,
 championed by Becky McNeely, Tom and Karen Stephens
CARLISLE: Dr. and Mrs. Wendell Kingsolver
COX'S CREEK: Dona Coates
DANVILLE: Neil and Ginny Eklund
FRANKFORT: Deb White
HAZARD: Dr. Dennis Sandlin
LEXINGTON: Mike and Jean Flynn, Jim and Gerry Williams
LOUISVILLE: Kathryn Clay, Brainard Palmer-Ball, Mr. and Mrs. F. W.
 Stamm, Mike and Tanya Stinson, Don Summerfield
MACEO: Burt and Millie Powell
MOREHEAD: Fred Busroe, Les Meade, Brian Reeder
MURRAY: Dr. Clell Peterson
OWENSBORO: Margaret Craig, Mary Lydia Greenwell, Marilee and
 Wendell Thompson
PROSPECT: Fred and Coleen Mansmith
SOMERSET: Gay and Jim Hodges
STANLEY: Tom and Anne Lee Stevenson
UTICA: Tony and Brenda Eaden
BORDEN, IN: Scottie and Chester Theiss

BIRDS OBSERVED AT THE ANNUAL
SPRING MEETING, 1991

Birds observed on Saturday field trips within a 15-mile diameter circle
 centered at Carter Caves State Resort Park lodge and at the Minor
E. Clark Fish Hatchery (indicated by an asterisk) included: Pied-billed
Grebe*, Great Blue Heron, Green-backed Heron, Canada Goose*, Wood
Duck, Mallard*, Blue-winged Teal, Red-breasted Merganser*, Turkey Vul-
ture, Osprey*, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk,
Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot,
Killdeer, Solitary Sandpiper*, Spotted Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull*, Rock
Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Screech-Owl, Barred
Owl, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted
Kingfisher*, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-
bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern
Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher,
Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swal-
low*, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow*, Barn Swallow,
Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-
breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Ruby-crowned
Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Veery, Wood Thrush,
American Robin, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher,

FIELD NOTE

FIRST KENTUCKY RECORD FOR PACIFIC LOON

On December 15, 1990, while participating on the Land Between the Lakes Christmas Bird Count, we found a Pacific Loon (Gavia pacifica) on the west side of Kentucky Lake, approximately a mile south of Kentucky Dam Village State Park. The Pacific Loon was observed with fifteen to twenty Common Loons (Gavia immer) scattered loosely on the lake in ones, twos and threes, and a Red-throated Loon (Gavia stellata).

The Pacific Loon was rather distinctive in appearance. The forehead, crown, and entire nape were a medium gray, darkest on the forehead and on the sides of the neck. In comparison, the back was blackish, contrasting sharply with the lighter gray of the nape. This feature was conspicuous, even at a great distance. The back was distinctly marked with a “hatching” of squarish lighter edgings, making for a very noticeable pattern at closer range. The underparts, including the throat and foreneck, were white. The distinction between the gray of the hindneck and white of the foreneck was very abrupt and enhanced by the darkness of the side of the neck. Running across the throat was a complete, narrow band of gray, or “chin strap”, noticeable only at close range. We estimated that the bird was approximately three-fourths the size of nearby Common Loons. The bill was rather straight, lightish gray in color, and not as heavy as those of nearby Common Loons. It was almost always held roughly horizontal to the water.

The Pacific Loon seemed to associate casually with the other loons on the lake. It usually did not forage close to shore, seeming to prefer more open (and perhaps deeper) water. On December 16, 1990, Joe Tom Erwin, Carl Mowery, Jr., and Clell Peterson viewed the Pacific Loon in the same vicinity.

On December 19, 1990, Palmer-Ball returned to Kentucky Lake and was successful in relocating the loon, as well as obtaining a series of photographs of it (see cover). The only distinguishing field mark viewed in the field but not shown in the photographs was the “vent strap,” a narrow band of gray extending across the vent from either flank. Although usually impossible or quite difficult to see, the vent strap was clearly
viewed on one occasion when the loon raised out of the water to exercise its wings.

The presence of both an obvious chin strap and vent strap apparently serve sufficiently to distinguish the Pacific Loon from the very similar Arctic Loon (Gavia arctica) of the Old World. These two species were formerly treated as two races of the holarctic “Arctic Loon,” and only recently were split into separate species.

Apparently the Pacific Loon has been overlooked to some extent in the eastern United States. Subsequent to the publication of the latest series of field guides and other resources, it seems that observers are now more aware of both the possibility of the occurrence of the species in the eastern United States and the characters distinguishing it from other loons. Documented records for the species are added in the midwest annually, and it would appear that we might expect to encounter the Pacific Loon in Kentucky again.

—BRAINARD PALMER-BALL, JR., Louisville, and DONALD PARKER, Louisville.

NEWS AND VIEWS

K.O.S. WELCOMES PEABODY COAL COMPANY

The Kentucky Ornithological Society is pleased to welcome Peabody Coal Company as its first corporate member. A special thanks goes to Ms. Joyce Fitzgerald, Manager Post Mine Lands, for her interest in K.O.S. and the activities of members that visit the post mine lands in Muhlenberg, and Ohio counties. Please send information regarding interesting observations of birds and other wildlife made on Peabody Coal Company lands to the editor in order that it can be forwarded to Ms. Fitzgerald. Thank you.

NEW BIRD ALERT SERVICE FOR KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Rare Bird Alert hotline is already in service at (502) 894-9538. Mike Stinson will be updating the tapes with your reports of unusual bird sightings from around the state. This is a K.O.S. project.

ANNOTATED CHECKLIST SALE

Another printing of the Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Kentucky by Burt L. Monroe, Jr., Anne L. Stamm, and Brainard L. Palmer-Ball, Jr., is for sale at a reduced price of $4.00 ($3.00 to K.O.S. members). All Kentucky residents should add 6% sales tax, plus shipping ($1.05 for the 1st book plus 50¢ for each additional book). Foreign customers will be billed for additional postage. If you would like to take advantage of this offer, please contact the K.O.S. at 9101 Spokane Way, Louisville, Ky. 40241-2425.