

worked two tree nurseries and Cedar Lake and found Great Blue Heron, Pied-billed Grebe, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, American Coot, Long-eared Owl, and Fox Sparrow. Great finds! My group recorded 53 species (See Table 1 for CBC results from all my field parties on the various counts).

But by far, the “best” bird of the day was a Gray Catbird (my first ever on a CBC). This unusual wintering species arrived at Weir’s property in late fall, and remained. The bird seemed to be in excellent shape and fed regularly on the ample amounts of grape jelly that Weir happily provided.

**December 15** - At 4:30 a.m., I was on my way to meet Steve Hager and Brad Cosentino for the Dav-enport, Iowa-Illinois CBC, for which I am the compiler. It was a perfect day – warm temperatures and little or no wind. Our territory included most of the Illinois side of the Quad Cities metropolitan area. The habitat included small fragmented woodlots, a few wetland areas, some agricultural fields, residential and urban areas, and a large stretch of the Mississippi River. As with the previous count, much of the woodland and wetland habitat within this circle has been and continues to be lost to development. Even agricultural fields are disappearing in the wake of urban sprawl.

My group identified 60 species. Noteworthy passerines included a Winter Wren and Fox Sparrow, along with 20 White-throated Sparrows. Waterfowl and other waterbirds were the highlight of this count. We had Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Trumpeter Swan, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Killdeer, and even, Thayer’s Gull.

But the bird of the day was discovered while I was walking along a weedy, overgrown creek bottom. There, I heard the distinctive scold note of a House Wren. Investigating a little closer, I “spished” a couple of

times and the House Wren hopped up on a fence post and broke out into a full song, a sound so familiar during the summer. The House Wren was another CBC first for me.

**December 16** - I departed at 4:30 a.m. for a 1.25-hour drive to meet Ulf



*Kelly McKay got his first Christmas Bird Count Gray Catbird during his 2002/2003 CBC marathon. Photo by Kanae Hirabayashi 13 October 2003, Montrose Harbor, Cook County.*

Konig for the Green Island, Iowa-Illinois CBC. The weather had changed substantially. It was much colder, and a stiff wind was blowing. Our key site, the Green Island State Wildlife Area, an extensive wetland complex, was nearly 100% frozen and we hardly saw any waterfowl save for the 24 American Black Ducks, a single Wood Duck, and a single Green-winged Teal. Located at the southern end of the non-glaciated “driftless area,” this CBC contains a considerable amount of floodplain and upland forest as well as extensive wetlands and some good grassland habitat. The steep bluffs were heavily forested with cedar stands. By the end of the day, with a chill in my bones, we had tallied a respectable 51 species including 2 Northern Harriers, 1 Winter Wren, 24 Eastern Bluebirds, and 160 Cedar Waxwings.

During the drive home, I began to feel very tired, and a bit uneasy about completing my challenge. And I had only done three CBCs at this point.

**December 17** - Brent Langley and I departed for the Lost Nation, Iowa count at 3:45 a.m. on a cold,

damp, and very breezy day. Data are not submitted to the National Audubon Society for this state-only count. The habitat we covered in this rural area included mostly agricultural land, with numerous smaller woodlots, several wetland areas, and a couple of large pine plantations. We had very limited access to the floodplain of the Wapsipinicon River.

Although we were dressed in multiple layers of winter clothes, 13 hours of exposure to the bone-numbing wind chills made for a difficult CBC. We were only able to identify 47 species, the most notable including 1 Winter Wren, 8 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 6 White-throated, 2 White-crowned, 1 Field, and 3 Fox Sparrows.

**December 18** - Brent Langley and I left for the Clinton-Savanna, Iowa-Illinois CBC, for which I am the compiler, at 4 a.m. and met Ryan Schmitz at 5 a.m. The day was warm and breezy, in the 50s and 60s. The weather plus the fact that my territory possesses exceptional-ly diverse habitat helped give me the strength to continue. My portion of the circle remains relatively undeveloped and is at the extreme southern end of the driftless area where habitat varies from fairly extensive forest and wetland, along with large areas of agricultural land and grassland as well as a stretch of the Mississippi River floodplain.

Alas, the winds began blowing 20 to 30 mph and we had periodic torrential downpours amid severe thunderstorms. We spent the entire day soaked and chilled. Believe it or not, although conditions were miserable the entire day, the thought of canceling or postponing the count never entered my mind. I actually thrive on the challenge presented by less than optimal conditions.

Amazingly, given the conditions, we still recorded a “decent” number of species (53), including Tundra Swan, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Red-breasted Merganser, and Thayer’s Gull. Additionally, we recorded 112 Bald Eagles, 15 Brown Creepers, 9 Golden-crowned Kinglets, and 60