

# The 1997 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

By David B. Johnson and Alan F. Stokie

Nearly every birder claimed the discovery of good birds and high numbers during the 1997 Illinois Christmas Bird Count. This phenomenon was probably due, in part, to the El Niño winds. Predominately southerly warm air flowed through Illinois during the later part of the count period, 19 Dec. 1997-4 Jan. 1998, giving observers spring-like weather in early winter. Despite a 5-inch snowfall in northern Illinois on Christmas Eve, birds that were supposed to depart lingered and many count circles recorded all-time high species counts. The expected winter finch invasion did happen, but for some counts, finches mainly trickled in and waterbirds remained in one place. Passerines stayed long enough for some counts to bolster landbird tallies. This mix of good water and land bird numbers along with some winter finches gave Illinois compilers the right stuff!

Results from 61 counts included 169 species, including one exotic Monk Parakeet, a Baltimore Oriole (actually in Iowa), and the unbanded Trumpeter Swans at Crane Lake/Sangamon. The result was 20 species higher than the 1996 Illinois CBC.

Rend Lake led the way with 104 species — a remarkable total. Nine other counts recorded 90 or more species, four of which were reported as all-time record species counts: Cypress Creek (96); Carlyle Lake (95); Clinton Lake (93), a record count; Union County (92); Horseshoe Lake

(92); Chautauqua, a record count (90); Crane Lake/Sangamon (90); Springfield, another record count (90); and Evanston (90), a record count (in 36 years) and surprising for northern Illinois. Collinsville had the highest

count circle map; blank circles indicate counts not reported to us this year or bordering circles that do not report their counts).

## CBC Firsts and Rarities

The top rarity prize goes to Lisle Arboretum's **Yellow-breasted Chat** (see photograph) at the Little Red Schoolhouse Forest Preserve in Cook County. The bird feasted on bees that emerged from their hive during the winter warm-ups! A state and CBC first were two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** at Carlyle Lake. These two birds attempted to breed in winter and were well-documented by photographs. This rapidly colonizing species was also recorded at Champaign. This is the second record for Illinois of this invading species.

The well-documented **Prairie Falcon** at Clinton Lake was the most outstanding raptor find. Lingering shorebirds included five Pectoral Sandpipers at Meredosia Island, a count week Greater Yellowlegs, three Least Sandpipers and two Dunlins at Mermet Lake and another at Pere Marquette. Clinton Lake's **Sedge Wren** was a well-documented find. A count week **Varied Thrush** was at a feeding station at Joliet.

Some insectivores like warblers were noted more than usual in the state; four Orange-crowned Warblers were detected on four counts: Morris/Wilmington (see photograph), Kishwaukee, Springfield, and Rend Lake. Springfield had a well-



*Yellow-breasted Chat. Little Red Schoolhouse, Cook Co. 31 Dec. 1997. This chat wintered here (see seasonal highlights for details) and was observed at the Lisle Arboretum Christmas Bird Count. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.*

number of individuals: 1,206,189. Fermilab/Batavia fielded the highest number of observers in the state, 95. In second place was Lisle, with 63 observers. Evanston came in third with 57 observers.

We welcome a new count and all their Greater Prairie-Chickens, all 103 of them to be exact, from Newton in the southeast central portion of our state. Jeff Walk compiled this count. We also welcome Mermet Lake in the south, compiled by Frank Bennett. Also, thanks to Larry Hood for resurrecting the Bushnell Count (see the