

American Robins.

The "best" bird of the day, however, was another CBC first for me. While driving across one of the wide agricultural fields, I observed a small bird fly across the road. Thinking it did not look right for a Horned Lark, I walked back and found an American Pipit near the edge of the field, once again proving it pays to check birds closely.

At home by 7 p.m., and thankful that it gets dark early in the winter, I took a hot shower. Despite physical exhaustion, though, I had to pack for the next three days, which would be spent in southern and central Illinois. And I wasn't going to sleep that night. At 10:30 p.m., I began the seven-hour drive to southern Illinois and the next CBC, which would begin at 6 a.m.

**December 19** - After driving all night to get to the Horseshoe Lake, Illinois-Missouri CBC, I was beginning to find it very difficult to stay awake. Adding to the adversity of the situation, was the fact that I drove through periodic bouts of heavy rain. Weather forecasts called for more of the same all day. Pepsi and Vivarin, or as I like to call it "nectar and food of the gods" powered me through that long night and the day's count. I arrived at the meeting location for this count at 5:30 a.m. and joined Vern Kleen at 6 a.m., to begin the Horseshoe Lake CBC.

### Deja vu!

Another day with periodic heavy rains. I was soaking wet and chilled to the bone as the wind whipped through my drenched clothing. Given the horrible conditions, I could not believe my field party actually had 66 species. Some of the more interesting birds found in bottomland forest, agricultural fields, and wetlands included 300 Snow Geese, 7 Northern Harriers, 51 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 15 Carolina Wrens, 2



*Flocks of Snow Geese are a common sight on the Horseshoe Lake and Union County Christmas Bird Counts. Lucky southern Illinois CBCers even find one or two Ross's Geese in with the flock. This photo taken recently in Texas by Steven D. Bailey looks just like something you would see in Union County, Illinois.*

Yellow-rumped Warblers, 236 White-throated, 33 Field, and 17 Fox Sparrows, 18 Eastern Meadow-larks, and 75 Rusty Blackbirds. Nothing like a good southern Illinois CBC, with more species such as Carolina Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Towhee, and Vesper Sparrow (one of the best birds this count), to cure the northern Illinois CBC blues!

Considerably more species are possible on CBCs in southern Illinois, since many birds that migrate out of the northern Midwest actually winter in the southern reaches of Illinois. For example, many of the species listed above are unusual or rare in northern Illinois, but are relatively common wintering species in the southern portions of the state.

**December 20** - After a mere 5.5 hours of sleep, my first sleep in 45 hours, I joined Vern and Jim Funk to begin the Union County, Illinois CBC. The weather was clear, and it was considerably colder, but that just served to rejuvenate me as I continued the marathon. Our territory was the Union County Conservation Area, a rich matrix of bottomland woods, hedgerows, fields, and various wetlands. Our group recorded an outstanding total of 77 species! A good diversity of waterfowl characterized this CBC (18 species). Some noteworthy birds included 221 Snow Geese, 1,000 Greater White-fronted

Geese, 2 Ross's Geese, and 802 Ring-necked Ducks. Other interesting finds included 6 Red-shouldered Hawks, 81 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 16 Carolina Wrens, 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 384 White-throated, 41 White-crowned, 1 Lincoln's, 3 Field, and 4 Savannah Sparrows, as well as 90 Eastern Meadowlarks.

It would have been nice to go to bed after this CBC, but instead I had to drive five hours to central Illinois, which

was where my next CBC was scheduled. I had a plan. I would drive four hours to Havana, get a hotel room and sleep for two or three hours, and then drive another hour to Richard Bjorklund's house, the meeting location for the Lake Chautauqua CBC. I arrived in Havana at 2 a.m., only to find the one hotel in town closed. So, like many a birder has done, I pulled into a rest area to sleep for a couple of hours. I awoke at 4:30 a.m., freezing cold, and decided to continue driving towards the next count. My only other option was to bail out and forfeit the marathon and that was unthinkable!

**December 21** - I arrived at the Lake Chautauqua, Illinois CBC at 6 a.m. and was assigned to Dan and Angella Moorehouse's field party. My exhaustion was made that much worse by cold weather. Nevertheless, after a hearty breakfast courtesy of Richard Bjorklund (birders always get rejuvenated by food), I remained enthusiastic about the count, especially knowing about the rich habitat, consisting of upland and bottomland forest, large pine plantings, agricultural fields, and wetlands - including the Lake Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, found within our territory. Although it was cold and windy, the recent weather had been mild enough that the Lake Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge was largely open and that made for some great waterfowl