

# The 2006/2007 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by Paul Sweet

If the 2006/2007 Illinois CBC season were to be summed up in one word, it would be “warm.” Despite an early December snowstorm in the northern part of the state, only one circle reported a high temperature below freezing, and only four more reported highs below 40 degrees F. As a result, half-hardy birds were counted in large numbers – seven circles reported high counts of Great Blue Heron, 10 reported high counts for Carolina Wren, and 11 reported high counts for Eastern Bluebird.



*Say's Phoebe at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, Newton Christmas Bird Count, Jasper County. 15 December 2006. Photo by Bob Shelby.*

Overall, 1,055 field observers in 510 parties and 213 feeder observers contributed nearly 3,900 hours of observation. Fermilab had the most field observers with 102, and Waukegan had the most feeder observers with 70. Rend Lake had the most individual birds reported (1,441,858) as well as the most species (111). Overall, 6 counts reported more than 100 species – all from southern Illinois, as always. Despite the abundance of birds, southern counts don't attract many observers – only Newton (23) and Union County (24) had more than 20 (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). For the entire state, more than 3.79 million individuals of 167 species were reported. A map of the state with count circles is included (See Figure 4).

## Ducks Through Hawks

Numbers of Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese were impressive, with high counts of 8,000 (Union Co.) and 7,000 (Horseshoe Lake) Greater White-fronted and 80,000 (Rend Lake) and 74,000 (Carlyle Lake) Snow Geese. Statewide, Snow Geese outnumbered Canada Geese 296,000 to 140,000. Twenty-five species of ducks were reported, including 24 Blue-winged Teal on three counts, two Harlequin Ducks in Chicago, eight Surf and five White-winged Scoters, and a Mottled Duck that reappeared at Springfield. Evanston continued to find large numbers of Greater Scaup (12,617) and Redhead (374). Gray Partridges continue to hang on in the state, with seven being reported on the Freeport count.

Common Loons were seen on six counts, two from central Illinois and the rest from southern Illinois, with a high of four on the Crab Orchard count. A remarkable seven Red-throated Loons were seen on the Waukegan count. Illini State Park had a Red-necked Grebe, and there were Eared Grebes seen at Quincy (1) and Crab Orchard (2). Forty-three Black-crowned Night-Herons were reported in 5 counts, including 25 at Calumet. A well-documented (and extraordinary) Osprey at Chautauqua was seen near a new nesting locale. Bald Eagle numbers continue to rise, with 1,666 seen in 46 counts, including every circle in southern Illinois. Solitary Golden Eagles were spotted at Hennepin and Pere Marquette. The only Northern Goshawk was a count week bird at Champaign. Eight Merlin and 5 Peregrine Falcons were reported, all singles except for 2 Peregrines at Calumet.

## Rails through Owls

The only Virginia Rail was recorded at Rend Lake. The only Sandhill Cranes were 13 in McHenry. A lone Least Sandpiper was at Rend Lake, and Warbluff Valley had 6 of the 16 American Woodcocks (in 7 counts). New for the state was a 1st winter Laughing Gull spotted and photographed by three different groups on the Waukegan count. Also new for the state was a well-described Forster's Tern at Rend Lake. Six Thayer's Gulls were reported on five counts, all from the Chicago area, while Evanston had the only Iceland Gull, as well as two remarkable Black-legged Kittiwakes. Nine Lesser Black-backed Gulls, including 5 at Carlyle Lake, and 5 Great Black-backed Gulls in 3 counts were notable. In stark contrast, no Glaucous Gulls were