

birding. Our field party had a good day, identifying 61 species including an impressive diversity of waterfowl including 7 Double-crested Cormorants, 21 Great Blue Herons, 57 American Black Ducks, 246 Gadwalls, and 50 Ruddy Ducks. We also had 8 Killdeer, 2 Hermit Thrush, 2 Northern Mockingbirds, and 79 Eurasian Tree Sparrows.

We finished the group compilation at 7 p.m. and even though I was thoroughly exhausted, I still had a 2.5 hour drive to get home. While fighting to stay awake during this drive, I was also beginning to question my sanity for attempting this odyssey. Thank heaven for Pepsi and Vivarin! I finally got to bed around 11 p.m. It had been 42 hours since I had last slept in a bed.

December 22 - After 4.5 hours sleep, I felt re-energized both mentally and physically to take on the Muscatine, Iowa-Illinois CBC, another count I compile. At 4:30 a.m. I was on my way to meet Steve Freed, with whom I birded fairly large upland and bottomland woodlots, extensive agricultural land, and a substantial stretch of the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, this circle also continues to lose habitat to development.

Throughout the day, we were exposed to a 20-30 mph wind, which caused a severe wind chill factor. Although we were dressed in multiple layers, it was still very painful while working the river and being exposed to the full force of the wind. Waterfowl and gull numbers were much lower than normal. As a result, my group had a fairly poor day with only 46 species identified. The highlights of the count were 9 Great Blue Herons, 61 Bald Eagles, 1 Northern Goshawk, 1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 6 Yellow-rumped Warblers, and 30 Eurasian Tree Sparrows. Although this CBC produced the fewest number of species so far, my enthusiasm for the marathon remained high. And besides, I was going to get six full hours of sleep that night, the most sleep I had since December 15.

December 23 - At 4:30 a.m., I



Eurasian Tree-Sparrows are practically a "ginme" on the Lake Chautauqua Christmas Bird Count, and Kelly McKay was there to see them during his 2002/2003 CBC marathon. Peter Weber took this photo on 10 October 2003 in Rochester (Sangamon County).

embarked on my tenth consecutive count and the fourth one I compiled, the Princeton-Camanche, Iowa-Illinois CBC. My territory includes small scattered woodlots. For the eighth day in a row, the wind was substantial. I had my poorest CBC to date - only 44 species. The most noteworthy species was a Red-breasted Merganser! Tomorrow was an off-day and I planned on sleeping in. At this point, I began to wonder if the folks who questioned my sanity at the outset of this adventure may have been right.

December 25 - I felt very refreshed, following a day off, and was ready to begin the second half of this 2002-2003 CBC marathon. At 3:15 a.m. with a three-hour drive ahead of me, I set off to the Chicago Lakefront, Illinois CBC, to join Joel Greenberg's field party. While driving toward Chicago, early on this Christmas morning, I couldn't help but thinking, "I really need to get a life!" A fairly strong wind was blowing and with Chicago an hour east away, I started encountering heavy snow squalls. These periodic snows continued through the early morning hours of the count.

The weather today was - Chicago! Gusty winds blowing off Lake Michigan. The habitat was - Chicago! Lakeshore Drive. Cars. Buildings. Sorry Chicago, but this

CBC resulted in the fewest number of species recorded by one of my field parties in the last 20 years of CBCs (31). In fact, this was the first CBC in more than 15 years in which my field party failed to identify at least 40 species.

Nevertheless, this was where I got my life bird when I was desperately birding in Jackson Park near the end of the day, trying to get to 40 species. I heard a raucous call and looked up to see a small group of Monk Parakeets flying in to the enormous communal stick nest located in the light structure at a ball field. I couldn't help telling myself "that this made the whole day worth it."

Did Kelly make it through all 20? Find out in the next issue of *Meadowlark*, Volume 12, No. 4, when we feature Part 2. We'll also publish two tables and literature cited that



Kelly McKay got his only "lifer" bird during his CBC marathon in Chicago when he saw a flock of Monk Parakeets. This photo of Monk Parakeets was taken in Chicago last winter by Eric Walters.

correspond with this piece.

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