

couple hours driving home. We had a fairly poor day identifying only 30 species and 501 total birds. Nevertheless, a number of notables were observed including 25 Greater Prairie-Chickens, singles of the Northern Goshawk and Merlin, 6 Common Ravens, and 149 Common Redpolls. Following a 5-hour (249-mile) drive home, I was finally able to sleep after 42 consecutive hours of being awake.

3 January

(North Linn, Iowa)

After a mere 3 hours of sleep, I departed on the 198-mile round trip at 4:30 a.m. to join Weir Nelson, Ken Kadlec, and Diana Pesek. All day I felt very tired and I could feel my respiratory infection coming back. To make matters worse, a strong winter storm was approaching Iowa from the west. The temperature dropped all day from the low 30s to the low 20s. The 5-15 mph wind created a biting wind chill, which along with the falling thermometer, kept birds in cover all day and made counting very difficult. We observed only 38 species and 2,104 individuals. Interesting finds included 4 Rough-legged Hawks, 292 Cedar Waxwings, and 12 White-throated Sparrows.

4 January

(Muscatine, Iowa-Illinois)

Although I was nearing the successful completion of this CBC marathon, the last couple of days were not going to go down easily. I left on the 76-mile round trip at 4 a.m. with my infection back in full force. Additionally, a major winter storm moved in overnight and continued all day long. Frigid temperatures (low to mid 20s) and moderately strong winds (10-20 mph), along with 8 inches of snow, created extremely difficult conditions with many roadways drifted shut. Lindsey Maess, another first time Christmas counter, joined me in these brutal conditions and amazingly we had a very good day

tallying 52 species and recording 1,869 individual birds. Nine species of waterfowl definitely helped. Notable finds included 2 Green-winged Teal, 1 Northern Shrike, 2 Hermit Thrushes, and 4 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

5 January

(Andalusia, Illinois-Iowa)

I departed on the 74-mile round trip drive at 4:30 a.m. Catherine Bland and I once again formed a field party for this CBC marathon finale. The winter storm was now over, leaving in its wake very cold temperatures (low to mid 10s) and light to moderate winds (10-15 mph), which produced a substantial wind chill. Regardless of the weather conditions, bird activity was good and we had a great day to conclude this 23-count CBC epic. My group identified 56 species and 2,295 individual birds. However, as with several of the counts, many of the common woodland species remained relatively scarce. The highlights of this final CBC included 124 Horned Larks, a single Winter Wren and Northern Mockingbird, and 12 Lapland Longspurs. As I was driving home at the end of the day, I couldn't wait until next year and began to wonder what sort of CBC challenge I would undertake next.

During the course of completing these 23 counts, my field parties identified a total of 132 species and recorded 241,223 individual birds (Table 1). Overall, the 10 most abundant species encountered included the Red-winged Blackbird (46,054), Common Grackle (39,895), Canada Goose (29,054), Ring-billed Gull (24,345), European Starling (12,658), Mallard (11,945), Snow Goose (9,372), Ring-necked Duck (8,960), Common Goldeneye (8,646), and Canvasback (6,495). These 10 species accounted for 81.8% of all identified birds. I participated on 14 counts in Illinois, 7 in Iowa, and 2 in Wisconsin.

I spent 360 hours, most of them (267.25) counting birds and only 32

hours sleeping. I drove 7,100.25 miles either en route (4,829) or counting birds (2,271.25). and I consumed 16.4 gallons of soda.

Completing the full 23-count marathon, establishes a new all-time record for the number of CBCs conducted by a single person in one year (breaking last year's record of 20 counts). I greatly enjoyed working and collecting data with so many old friends and new acquaintances. I carry away from this marathon countless memorable moments and experiences, and thank all the dedicated birders with whom it was my privilege to work. A CBC marathon is certainly a grueling endeavor, and not for everyone. However, we definitely require as much information as possible regarding avian population trends in order to better understand and make informed management decisions concerning the health and status of our avian communities. Consequently, it is my hope that reading this article will inspire more people to actively participate and contribute data to the CBC program. In the years to come, I believe that citizen scientists will play an increasingly important role in the wildlife research and monitoring which is absolutely necessary if we are going to protect and preserve the Earth's biodiversity.

With the successful accomplishment of a complete CBC marathon, I am now actively soliciting ideas from other birders and Christmas counters on a new CBC challenge. If anyone has a suggestion, please drop me an e-mail at KellyJMckay@aol.com.

(Editor's suggestion:

Kelly, get some sleep!)

*Kelly J. McKay,
BioEco Research
and Monitoring Center
420 1st Avenue, P.O. Box 452
Hampton, IL 61256*

KellyJMckay@aol.com