

The 2007/2008 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

By Paul Sweet

What a difference a year can make! The 2006/2007 Christmas Bird Count season was very warm and dry. But during the 2007/2008 CBC season, cold temperatures dominated, and snow cover was recorded on half the counts in Illinois. At least one downstate count was postponed (twice) due to winter storms. However, some good birds were still found by our intrepid counters.

Not surprisingly, gulls were headliners, although several species of shorebirds were good finds as well.

In all, 64 counts were conducted in Illinois in 2007/2008, including four Iowa counts that cross the Mississippi. This includes two new counts we welcomed to the state: Coles-Cumberland and Shelbyville Reservoir. A total of 175 species were counted, with an additional 4 count-week birds, including Dunlin. Seven counts reached the 100 species mark, with Carlyle leading the way with a state record 114. There were 1,109 field observers who put in 3,385 party-hours, covering 19,950 miles. In addition, 275 feeder watchers contributed 495 hours of observation. Fermilab had the most field observers with 95, and as usual Waukegan had the most feeder observers with 78.

Several new species were recorded during the season. The headliner has to be the Slaty-backed Gull that was seen and photographed at Carlyle Lake. The Glaucous-winged Gull on the same count had been present for some time. A Ruddy Turnstone was photographed at Calumet-Sand Ridge (see photo and story in this issue).

Ducks through Grebes

Overall, goose numbers were down from the last two years' high counts, especially Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese. 79 Ross' Geese were counted on 9 counts, all in Southern Illinois. Trumpeter Swans were on 7 counts, for a total of 56. The 27 counted at Union County represented a new state high, as did the 99 Tundra Swans at Chautauqua NWR. Unusual ducks included a Harlequin Duck on the Chicago Urban count, 2 Surf Scoters at Waukegan, lone Black Scoters at Bird Haven and Calumet, and lone Long-tailed Ducks at Carlyle and Bloomington. The 2,859 Red-breasted Mergansers at Chicago Lakefront represented a new state high.

Only 417 Ring-necked Pheasants were counted, on 26 counts. In contrast, there were 2,095 Wild Turkeys on 41 counts, including 240 in Champaign County alone. The Greater Prairie-Chickens at Newton were down to 45 four years after a record high of 106. Only 19 counts recorded Northern Bobwhite, and only 1 count reported 1 Gray Partridge at Princeton-Camanche.

Waukegan had a Red-throated Loon, and lone Common



This Dunlin was seen during the Calumet City-Sand Ridge Christmas Bird Count Week on 26 December 2007. Six species of shorebirds were observed during the 2007/2008 Illinois Christmas Bird Count. Photo by Michael Topp.

Loons were reported on 4 counts. The 132 Pied-billed Grebes at Crab Orchard represented a new state high. The 121 Horned Grebes at Baldwin Lake were also noteworthy. Eared Grebes included one at Rend Lake and 2 at Crab Orchard. A count-week Red-necked Grebe was at Springfield.

Pelicans through Cranes

American White Pelicans were on 6 counts. Double-crested Cormorant numbers were very low overall, with 115 on 14 counts. Meredosia Island, Kankakee Valley, and Crane Lake (2) reported Great Egrets. Black-crowned Night-Herons were reported at 3 locations, with the 21 at Calumet-Sand Ridge being notable.

Black and Turkey Vultures were in typical numbers in Southern Illinois. Bald Eagles were noted on 48 counts, with 228 at Green Island, 422 at Andalusia, and 429 at Muscatine. The Andalusia count was the highest in the state for a count not centered in Iowa. 14 Sharp-shinned Hawks at Lisle Arboretum were notable, and 37 Cooper's Hawks at Fermilab represented a new state record. A Northern Goshawk was documented at Joliet. 2 others were reported without documentation. A fourth Northern Goshawk report was unconvincing. Union County's 47 Red-shouldered Hawk represented a new state high. Pere Marquette reported a Harlan's Hawk and a Krider's Hawk. Merlins were reported on 7 counts, as were Peregrine Falcons.

The only Virginia Rail was a count-week bird at Waukegan. Only 15 Sandhill Cranes were reported, on 5 counts.

Shorebirds through Jaegers

Despite the cold and stormy weather, 6 species of shorebirds were reported this CBC season. A Ruddy Turnstone at Calumet-Sand Ridge was new for the state. It was accompanied by a count-week Dunlin. 6 Least Sandpipers were at Pere Marquette, and one was at Carlyle. 4 American Woodcocks were reported on 2 counts.

12 species of gull were reported on Illinois CBCs this year. A Little Gull was reported count week at Springfield. Rend Lake's 9500 Bonaparte's Gulls were a new state high. 12 Tayer's Gulls were reported on 5 counts, an Iceland Gull was at Chicago Lakefront, and another was reported count