

The 1998/1999 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

Participants enjoyed the best of late fall and early winter weather with no freezing temperatures until—the official start of winter—literally on 21 December! Even with the cold snap on the 21st waterbirds did not clear out of the state and many lingering birds to the north, like loons and grebes, either migrated into the state or tarried just long enough—until the big blizzard on 2 January. Compilers who held their counts early or in mid-period tallied excellent species lists and numbers; compilers who waited to hold their counts after 1 January lost even if they got to hold their count at all! Snow falls exceeding twenty inches by the end of the day on the 2nd caused drifts that literally shut down Christmas bird counting and traveling by car. Six counts had to be canceled and some had to resort to feeder counts only. In spite of all this weather mix, birds that

nearly never linger in winter appeared on counts statewide. One example was the 157 Sandhill Cranes (in 9 count circles); another was 21 Eastern Phoebe (in 6 count circles). In addition, plenty of rarities were found including a remarkable hummingbird CBC first for Illinois—a male **Rufous**! For more stunning rarities...read on. Record count numbers were established for certain species particularly waterbirds, though certain groups of other birds were noted in record numbers. These include bluebirds, robins, and sparrows. Every Illinois CBC season has its ups and downs. This season was no exception, but many counts this year had more highlights than lowlights. Most importantly, field observers and feeder watchers had a great time counting birds during early winter in Illinois, complete with all the CBC surprises, blizzard or no blizzard!

Results from 57 counts included 162 species. Three counts tied for highest species totals (97): Rend Lake, Cypress Creek, and Union County. Next in line with 90 or more species were: Carlyle Lake (96), Horseshoe Lake (92), Chatauqua NWR, a record count (91), Mermet Lake, Massac Co. (91), Clinton Lake (90), and Evanston (North Shore) (90), tying the record count (in 37 years). Other reported all-time high species totals were: Barrington (65), Fermilab--Batavia (81) and Rockford (79). Cypress Creek had the highest number of individuals: 264,660. Fermilab--Batavia once again fielded the highest number of observers in the state, 88. We welcome the restart of the Kankakee Valley count. For a complete listing of all counts see Table 1 and the count circle map of those reporting to Illinois; the slashed circles represent those counts not held due to the blizzard.

CBC Firsts and Rarities

The sprinkling of rarities kept the unusual bird-seekers happy. One example was the state's second confirmed **Yellow-billed Loon** at Bloomington. The state's sixth CBC **Red-throated Loon** was recorded at Illini. A **Brant** was at Union County, and Waukegan tallied a **Purple Sandpiper**. Always unusual, a **Franklin's Gull** was noted at Collinsville. Most remarkable of all, however, was that Springfield tallied the first ever CBC record of a hummingbird of any kind on an Illinois CBC. A male **Rufous Hummingbird** left the day after it was counted.



Peregrine Falcon, Brandon Locks, Will County. 19 December 1998. Recorded on the 1998/1999 Illinois Christmas Bird Count. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.

Warbluff Valley posted a well-described **Bewick's Wren**, and for the second consecutive year a **Yellow-breasted Chat** was recorded in northern Illinois, this time on Chicago Urban.

Other unusual birds noted were three Eared Grebes, the northernmost at Springfield, and singles at Rend Lake and Cypress Creek. A solitary Trumpeter Swan was at Andalusia. Count week Great Egrets were noted at Collinsville and Fermilab. Twenty-one Black-crowned Night-Herons were noted in 4 count circles. Twenty Ross's Geese appeared on 10 counts, with Pere Marquette having