

The 2002/2003 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

As fickle as the weather is in early winter, compilers try to hold their count early in the CBC period (14 Dec. to 5 Jan) to bolster increased species counts. They hope to count late lingering birds when water is still open and berries and seeds are still available. But cold weather and some snow came almost three weeks before the 2002/2003 count period. As a result, many northern and central counts already had frozen lakes during the counts, and waterbird numbers and other species numbers were down. Compilers who held their counts early clearly had no distinct advantage.

Ironically, perhaps due to the weather mildness during the actual CBC period, there were some great surprises and good tallies of several species. Most noteworthy and mentioned by many compilers and observers were high counts of Great Blue Heron, Gadwall, Bufflehead, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Ruddy Duck, Cooper's Hawk, Wild Turkey, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Carolina and Winter Wrens, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, and Northern Cardinal. To a lesser degree there were noteworthy small numerical spikes in other species including Lesser Black-backed Gull, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Northern Mockingbird and Le Conte's, Fox, Harris's and White-crowned Sparrows. Low numbers were often mentioned for American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-necked Pheasant, Loggerhead Shrike, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Purple Finch. Winter finches were almost non-existent.

Results

Results from 62 counts included 164 species and one unrecognized form. Two counts surpassed the magic 100 species mark — Rend Lake (102) and Cypress Creek (105, a record high for that circle). Fermilab-Batavia had the highest number of field observers at 96. Lisle Arboretum fielded an impressive 63 observers while Rushville could only muster up 5 field observers. Waukegan had an impressive number of feeder observers —78—and the combined effort of 25 field observers put Waukegan in the century club of 103 participants.

High counts

Thirteen (13) all-time state high counts were set or tied for an individual species total recorded within a count circle. Rend Lake tallied 56,915 Snow Geese. Carlyle Lake recorded 53 Eurasian Collared-Doves and 28,546 Ring-billed Gulls. Cypress Creek tallied a record 39 Barred Owls, 61 Winter Wrens, 241 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 1,447 Song Sparrows, and 985 Swamp Sparrows. Union tied a record 2 Barn Swallows and tallied a record 479 Tufted Titmouse. Fermilab-Batavia tied their last year's high of 18 Cooper's Hawks. Calumet City-Sand Ridge tallied a record 8 Thayer's and 6 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The top ten total numbers of individuals (in order of abundance) were: Common Grackle (1,188,607), Mallard (274,312), Red-winged Blackbird (252,594), European Starling (240,398), Canada Goose (167,700), Snow Goose (124,134), American Crow (113,088), Ring-billed Gull (67,707), House Sparrow (43,028), and Brown-headed Cow-bird (26,510). While not quite as abundant, there were other good "high counts" mentioned by com-pil-

ers and observers. Great Blue Herons (1,433 in 55 circles) were almost everywhere. Gadwall (6,645 in 36 circles), Bufflehead (492 in 30 circles), Hooded Merganser (1,282 in 37 circles), Red-breasted Mergansers (1,022 in 17 circles), and Ruddy Duck (624 in 15 circles) were waterfowl noted as in "good numbers." Cooper's Hawk (216 in 56 circles) confirms the widespread status of that species. Wild Turkeys (1,668 in 41 circles) are now an introduction success. Belted Kingfisher (438 in 59 circles) were noted by almost all count circles. Red-bellied Wood-peckers (4181 in 61 circles, missed only by Chicago Lakefront) have become a dominant woodpecker. Brown Creeper (1,128 in 58 circles), Carolina (1,476 in 52 circles) and Winter Wrens (253 in 43 circles), Golden-crowned (1,553 in 55 circles) and Ruby-crowned Kinglets (74 in 20 circles), Eastern Bluebird (1,801 in 47 circles), Hermit Thrush (103 in 33 circles), White-throated Sparrow (6,706 in 53 circles), and Northern Cardinal (16,707 in 62 circles)—were all species in good to increasing numbers for many count circles. Lesser Black-backed Gull (14 in 9 circles), is becoming an increasingly common winter visitor. Eurasian Collared-Doves (102 in 6 circles) are on the move (look on your next CBC around small town grain elevators). Northern Mockingbird (410 in 28 circles) seems to be expanding northward a bit. Fox (185 in 36 circles), and White-crowned Sparrows (1,502 in 47 circles) were more widespread. Dark-eyed Juncos were widespread (30,360 in 62 circles) plus 3 "Oregon" types were noted. The next most widespread sparrow was the American Tree Sparrow (14,585 in 61 circles).