

The 2005/2006 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

Weather wise, the 2005/2006 Illinois Christmas Bird Count practically mirrored the previous season (2004/2005). Cold and snowfall came very early to the state (around Thanksgiving time), pushing many waterbirds out of the state due to the many frozen bodies of water. The average low temperature was 23 degrees Fahrenheit and the average high temperature was 33 degrees Fahrenheit. The average snow depth was one to 2.5 inches statewide.

A total of 162 species were reported from 64 counts. Also reported were two forms ("Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk, and "Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco), and one unrecognized form (Ringed Turtle-Dove), as well as four count week species.

Where there was open water, waterfowl were observed in good and often record numbers. Amazing numbers of some geese, waterfowl, herons, wrens, thrushes, and sparrows were tallied on many counts.

Observers covered 21,895 miles in 3,608 party hours, plus spent 183 hours and 1,381 miles owling statewide. Rockford logged 8 hours and 12 miles by ATVs and cross-country skis.

Three southern Illinois counts surpassed the century mark of 100 species: Arklands (103), Mermet Lake (109), and Rend Lake (101). The highest species total for a central Illinois count came from Crane Lake – Sangamon (92) with Springfield a close second (90), and the highest northern Illinois count was Lisle Arboretum (80). Fermilab-Batavia reported the highest number of field observers (101), and Waukegan had the highest number of feeder watchers (76). Table 1 lists the counts, their compilers and other pertinent count circle data. Map 1 shows the count circle locations. The remaining tables show the count species broken down into North, Central, and South regions of the state.

High Counts

Sixteen all-time state high counts were set for an individual species total recorded within a count circle.

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*Eastern Bluebirds
at Rock Cut State Park,
Rockford, Winnebago
County.
25 December 2005.
Photo by Eric Walters.*

Union noted 27 Trumpeter Swans. There was an amazing mix of geese high counts: Arklands noted 15,266 Greater White-fronted, 99,080 Snow, and 200 Ross's Geese. Rend Lake tallied 6,755 Common Goldeneye and 903 Hooded Mergansers. 28 Cooper's Hawks at Fermilab-Batavia and Lisle Arboretum reflect

this species' population expansion. Arklands noted an impressive 10,023 American Coot. 2,142 Mourning Doves were at Thorn Creek. Calumet-Sand Ridge noted 201 Monk Parakeets. A remarkable 17 Eastern Phoebe, 72 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 350 Eastern Bluebirds and 126 Hermit Thrush were at Horseshoe Lake. Three very tardy Gray Catbirds were at Fermilab-Batavia. Finally, Arklands tallied a remarkable 38 Pine Warblers.

The top 10 species with the most number of individuals (in order of abundance) were Common Grackle (1,048,601), blackbird sp. (659,766), Red-winged Blackbird (401, 612), Snow Goose (268,718), European Starling (244,525), Canada Goose (195,960), Mallard (183,301), American Crow (165,235), Ring-billed Gull (65,442), and House Sparrow (37,774). Close behind (11th spot) were Greater White-fronted Goose (35,716) and (12th spot) American Robin (32,330).

Geese through vultures

Greater White-fronted (35,716 in 21 circles), Snow (268,718 in 30 circles) and Ross's (254 in 8 circles) Geese were detected in outstanding numbers this season – mostly in southern Illinois. Trumpeter Swans (54 in 8 circles) are being noted with increasing frequency particularly along the Mississippi River Valley. Tundra Swans (19 in 7 circles) were barely detected this season. New to the state's CBC list was a Mottled Duck at Springfield (present as a count week bird last 2004/2005 CBC season). Crane Lake (1), Mermet (1) and Pere Marquette (1) recorded the only Blue-winged Teal.