

The 2004/2005 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson and Steven D. Bailey

The 2004/2005 Illinois Christmas Bird count season began soon after a major cold front descended into Illinois, dumping snow into northern Illinois just before Thanksgiving. Then, in the middle of the Christmas count period, southern Illinois received an accumulation of 12 to 18 inches of snow. All this early and prolonged cold and snowy weather drove many lingering migrants out of the state before some if not most of the counts were held. Still, cold and snow cover often serves to concentrate birds and this season was no exception.

A total of 64 counts were received including a new Arklands (officially known as Pyramid State Recreation Area, see Walk 2005, this issue) count; also Elsayh (Principia College) renewed their count circle this season. A total of 167 species plus one unrecognized form (Ringed Turtle-Dove) were reported; in addition six count week species were tallied. The average low temperature was 25 degrees Fahrenheit and the average high temperature was 37 degrees Fahrenheit. Observers covered 24,325 miles in 3,495 party hours plus, spent 169 hours and traveled 1,436 miles owling.

The century mark of 100 species was surpassed by four counts – all from southern Illinois: Arklands (108) – remarkable for their inauguration, Mermet Lake (101), Rend Lake (105), and Carlyle Lake (109). Fermilab-Batavia fielded a remarkable 110 observers and Waukegan had the most number of feeder watchers (84). Table 1 shows the count compilers and other pertinent count circle data. Map 1 shows the count locations. The remaining tables show the count species broken down into North, Central and South regions of the state.



Varied Thrush at the Calumet-Sand Ridge Christmas Bird Count. 23 December 2004. Photo by Eric Secker.

High Counts

Only seven all-time state high counts were set for an individual species recorded within a count circle. Rockford tallied 3,618 newly acclaimed Cackling Geese. Waukegan tallied 5 Black Scoters. Newton established a record 106 Greater Prairie-Chickens (the only count with this species in the state). A daunting 68,713 Ring-billed Gulls were recorded at Carlyle Lake. Calumet-Sand Ridge noted 196 Monk Parakeets. Finally, Meredosia Island tallied a remarkable 12,000 American Robins.

The top 10 total numbers of individuals (in order of abundance) were blackbird sp. (589,514), Common Grackle (262,730), European Starling (219,217), Canada Goose (177,345), Red-winged Blackbird (136,380), American Crow (109,128), Ring-billed Gull (104,973), Snow Goose (104,511), Mallard (100,849), and House Sparrow (41,353).

Geese through vultures

Greater White-fronted Geese are becoming quite the regular goose in some circles (6,691 in 18 circles) though still quite rare in northern Illinois. Ross's Geese (31) were noted in 10 circles with Waukegan recording its first. Cackling Goose made its debut as a new countable species this season with records in many circles (7,096 in 37 circles). Seventeen Trumpeter Swans (now officially countable) were recorded in seven circles. Eight-hundred-fifty-seven Tundra Swans were noteworthy along the Mississippi River at Davenport, Iowa.

Duck season was ho-hum. Pere Marquette and Newton did record two (each) Blue-winged Teal and another was at Hennepin. The big miss was Springfield's count week Mottled Duck (present for sometime) and Calumet-Sand Ridge's count week Harlequin Duck. Inland scoter records included a Surf at Jackson, a White-winged at Rend Lake, and a Black at Horseshoe Lake. All three scoters were at Waukegan on Lake Michigan. Long-tailed Ducks at Davenport (2) as well as Springfield's count-week individual were unusual inland records for this species. Only five Long-taileds were at

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