Thrushes through buntings

Higher counts and more frequent reports of frugivorous species (birds that eat poison ivy, honeysuckle, wild grape, and berries off of other trees and shrubs that retain their fruits) were Eastern Bluebirds (2,423 in 49 circles), Hermit Thrushes (245 in 45 circles), American Robins (18,588 in 53 circles), Gray Catbirds (12 in 10 circles), Northern Mockingbirds (346 in 35 circles), Brown Thrashers (50 in 16 circles), and Cedar Waxwings (7,177 in 55 circles). These species were noted by many compilers as being in above-average numbers. For example, the report of 12 Gray Catbirds statewide is nearly unheard of in early winter in Illinois. American Pipits (232 in 6 circles) were noted throughout the state with northernmost individuals at Evanston (1 at Ft. Sheridan in Lake County, see photo) and Champaign (5); remarkable high counts were tallied at Meredosia Island (35), while Horseshoe Lake's 127 pipits was, indeed, a state record.

In the warbler department, most unusual were the northerly single Pine Warblers at Lisle Arboretum and Waukegan both first for their respective counts. Evanston (North Shore) had its first Orange-crowned Warbler. Palm Warblers were noted at Newton (1), Mermet Lake (2), and Jackson (1). Single Common Yellowthroats were at Baldwin Lake, Chicago Urban, Meredosia, and two were at Mermet Lake.

Two Spotted Towhees were noted, one each at Fermilab-Batavia and Lake Mermet; Chicago Urban had a count week bird. Eastern Towhees (286 in 23 circles) were well represented particularly in the south; Mermet Lake tallied a very high count of 62 individuals. Three Chipping Sparrows were noted at

The Grasshopper Sparrow has not been recorded on an Illinois CBC since 1949. John Duran, who along with Marlys Oosting discovered this species 14 December 2003 during the Lisle Arboretum Christmas Bird Count returned with Geoffrey Williamson to obtain photographs 22 December 2003. The Lisle Arboretum count encompasses Cook, DuPage and Will Counties. The Grasshopper Sparrow was found and photographed in Cook County.

Cypress Creek (2 undocumented) and Green Island/Lost Mound (1). A Vesper Sparrow was found at Mermet Lake. Not since 1949 has a Grasshopper Sparrow been recorded on an Illinois CBC; Lisle Arboretum's well-documented and photographed bird (*see photo*) was a remarkable find.

Low counts of Le Conte's Sparrows were noted this year with 7 reported from 3 circles, plus Hennepin had a count week bird. Six Lincoln's Sparrows (in 6 circles)

were reported and Chicago Urban had a count week bird. A solitary Harris's Sparrow was noted at Cypress Creek. Most unusual were the 4 Indigo Buntings at Union and 5 buntings at Mermet Lake; these birds were frequenting weedy sorghum fields. A tardy migrant was a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Meredosia Island; this bird was found in an overgrown ragweed field associating with cardinals. Low numbers of Snow Buntings (375 in 11 circles) were indicative of the mild winter; a singleton at Carlyle Lake was the southernmost bird. No count missed our state bird, the Northern Cardinal (14,732 in 62 circles).

Blackbirds through weaver finches

Rusty Blackbirds (807 in 22 circles) were rather sparse. Brewer's Blackbirds noted were at Peoria (1) and Green Island/Lost Mound (1). House Finches (6,082 in 62 circles) were ubiquitous. Two White-winged Crossbills were at Middle Fork River Valley, while 20 Common Redpolls were noted (in 5 circles) with the southernmost being at Chautauqua. Pine Siskin (677 in 29 circles) was the most numerous winter finch. Purple Finches were more widespread than siskins (622 in 44 circles) and in greater numbers compared with last year's 71 in 17 circles. Where are the Evening Grosbeaks? It's been 9 years since they last were reported on an Illinois CBC. Eurasian Tree Sparrows (1,448 in 17 circles) are enjoying a bit of an expansion up the Illinois River Valley and Mississippi River Valley with Clinton-Savanna IA, Princeton Camanche IA, Bloomington, and Peoria recording this species for the first time.