

The 2000/2001 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

The CBC season might best be summed in one word — SNOW! Counters were bludgeoned with one of the snowiest CBC seasons on record for the state — this was a sharp contrast to the 1999/2000 Count that was the warmest winter on record for the state (Johnson 2000). Those wishing for a white Christmas got it! And then some. Chicago recorded its snowiest December on record and Peoria had its second snowiest and third coldest in Peoria weather station history, according to compilers Richard and Sigurd Bjorklund of the Chautauqua NWR count. The snowiest count was in the northeastern part of the state where Waukegan recorded a maximum 48 inches. Observers on this count were using snowshoes. Several other parties in northern Illinois also effectively used snowshoes and cross-country skis to count birds while others statewide resorted to roadside and feeder party counts when the hiking got difficult or observers could not leave their vehicles. In extreme southern Illinois Warbluff measured only 2 inches of snow cover but — all 60 counts had snow cover. Many participants had difficulty taking to the field with the large amounts of drifting snow and heavy snow cover (party miles on foot was nearly halved compared to last year's count). Several counts were postponed only to later succumb to even worse weather and no one could dodge the cold weather — 10 degrees being the average low temperature and 22 degrees being the average high — both well below freezing. Two intrepid observers, James and Eleanor Smith, managed

to participate in 10 snowy counts statewide dodging snowdrifts along the way. For an interesting account of this odyssey see Smith (2001). Needless to say, like the Smiths, nearly all Illinois observers who left the road often had to wade through knee deep snow to tally birds for the CBC.

RESULTS

Results from 60 counts included 151 species and one unrecognized form. No count reached the 100 species mark. Only four made it to the 90s: Union County (98), Mermet Lake (95), Springfield (93), and Cypress Creek (90). Fermilab-Batavia recorded the highest number of field observers — 71 — a remarkable number since many stayed home this year.

HIGH COUNTS

Only eight all-time state high counts were set for an individual species total recorded within a count circle. With cold and snow

came good concentrations of eagles — a record **2,283** statewide Bald Eagles was an impressive tally. A remarkable **357** Bald Eagles were a record at Davenport and **338** at Muscatine. Both totals exceeded the previous all-time high of 327 held by Pere Marquette Park in 1988. In addition, the 61 individuals at Starved Rock represented a record there, as did the 126 individuals at Meredosia Island. Also, **109** Northern Harriers and **42** Short-eared Owls were tallied at Cypress Creek. Newton recorded **105** Greater Prairie-Chickens and a record **11** Eurasian Collared-Doves. Fermilab-Batavia tallied **1,368** Cedar Waxwings, Cypress Creek tallied 367 White-crowned Sparrows, and Chautauqua capped off the high counts with **97** Red Crossbills. Tied all-time high counts were Evanston's **14** Cooper's Hawks and Quincy's **6** Harris's Sparrows. The top five species with the highest individual counts were: Canada Goose (398,216), American



Harris's Sparrow (left) and Northern Cardinal. 23 December 2000. Collinsville Christmas Bird County in Madison County. Photo by Frank Holmes.