

# The 2001/2002 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

Overall the CBC season fluctuated from warm to cold, then back to warm the last few days of the period. The cold temperatures, in most cases, were not cold long enough to freeze open water throughout the state, and snowfall was almost nil. The average low temperature was 27.5° F and the average high temperature was 38.6° F — a 17 degree difference from the previous cold and snowy CBC season of 2000/2001 (Johnson 2001) when the temperatures were an average low of 10.5° F and an average high of 21.7° F. What a difference a year can make for tallying some excellent water and land-bird numbers — this all due to the lack of a prolonged cold and hard freeze. Nearly all counts recorded some very high counts for many species that lingered longer farther north. There were the misses and low counts of species, too — and when are we going to get a major winter finch invasion? Some compilers and field observers often state that cold weather serves to concentrate the birds for counting purposes — maybe so — but this season the warm weather did work to produce some very high aggregate numbers of bird data. Several counts — for the first time ever — hit the magic century mark or above! Here, then, is the count.

Results from 60 counts included 169 species and one unrecognized form. Several counts joined the elite 100 species mark or above. These included: Union County (100), Mermet Lake (102), Carlyle Lake (103), and Rend Lake (104). Congratulations on this challenging achievement. Fermilab-Batavia made the “century club” by tallying the highest number of field observers, 102. Waukegan had the highest number of feeder observers, 65.

Twenty-one all-time state high counts were set for an individual species

total recorded within a count circle. **17** Common Loons lingered at Clinton Lake, **74** Horned Grebes were tallied at Carlyle Lake. **8,965** Double-crested Cormorants, **2,751** Bonaparte’s Gulls and **8,203** American Robins were recorded at Rend Lake. **965** Tundra Swans and **5,075** Lesser Scaup were at Clinton, IA along the Mississippi River. **Five** Great Egrets were at Collinsville. **3,000** Greater White-fronted Geese were at Union; in addition, this count had a record **four** Marsh Wrens. Cypress Creek tallied a record **178** Northern Harriers and **106** Wilson’s Snipe. Newton had a record **305** Bufflehead and **21** Eurasian Collared-Doves. Princeton tallied **3,390** American Coots, a record due to a wetland initiative and habitat restoration at Lake Hennepin. Fermilab-Batavia tallied **18** Cooper’s Hawks and **1,065** Black-capped Chickadees. Shapville recorded **334** Wild Turkeys. Calumet City-Sand Ridge noted **six** Great Black-backed Gulls. Waukegan tied a record **three** Lesser Black-backed Gulls with Calumet City-Sand Ridge (in 1991). Finally, the **three** Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Princeton-Commanche, IA was a record count.

The top ten total numbers of individuals (in order of abundance) were: Red-winged Blackbird (527,582), Mallard (331,023), Common Grackle (254,807), European Starling (176,382), American Crow (176,152), Canada Goose (161,401), Snow Goose (106,626), blackbird sp. (88,757), Ring-billed Gull (52,919), and House Sparrow (41,201).

## Regularly Occurring Species

Many of the large data aggregates of certain species may note trends of greater population successes to the north. Three good examples of this are Double-crested Cormorant

(9,732 in 23 circles), American White Pelican (251 in 9 circles), and Eastern Bluebird (1,928 in 48 circles). Other species including Killdeer (1,925 in 32 circles) simply lingered longer. Then, there were the early wintering population shifts. Certainly the large numbers of Snow Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, (6,164 in 22 circles), and to a smaller extent, Ross’s Geese (39 in 9 circles, 20 years ago this goose was a rare vagrant visitor to Illinois) are indicative of a west to east movement of geese that historically wintered farther west than Illinois. Within the state the larger numbers of Cooper’s Hawks (175 in 46 circles) certainly suggests a larger population success (at least this is an average of three per circle when 20 years ago this used to be a rare accipiter to find on a CBC). What about the re-introduced Wild Turkeys (1,390 in 36 circles)? They are increasing in numbers while Ring-necked Pheasants (206 in 27 circles) and Gray Partridge (none) seem to be on a downward slide. This was a good mast year particularly for white oaks. Accordingly good numbers of Blue Jays (10,459 in 58 circles) and Red-headed Woodpeckers (1,287 in 52 circles) were recorded. Red-bellied Woodpeckers (3,911 in 60 circles) perhaps overshadow the Red-headed Woodpecker’s increased numbers. 437 Pileated Woodpeckers (in 33 circles) were found particularly in river-bottom woods. Several field observers and compilers mentioned that White-breasted Nuthatches seemed to be everywhere; 3,924 (in 59 circles) was a good count. Fruit eaters such as the aforementioned Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins (24,790 in 57 circles), and Cedar Waxwings (5,877 in 50 circles) were widespread this season by increased numbers. Robins were

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