
SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Five Species of Geese on the 1992 Union County Christmas Bird Count

Each year the Horseshoe Lake and Union County Christmas Bird Counts in southern Illinois are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively, before Christmas. These two count circles include the wintering home of up to 500,000 Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) and excellent populations of many other species. The annual species totals for these two CBCs vary from the low 80,000s to the upper 90,000s.

It is not unusual, every year, for someone to identify one or more "unsuspected" species on these counts; 1992 was no exception. At Union County, the count crew had heard that a Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*), which would be a first for the 22-year-old count, had been present there a few days earlier. On count day, four parties were assigned to various parts of the refuge to count all species and search for the Ross' Goose. Among the myriad Canada Geese, it was impossible to miss the 85 Snow/Blue Geese (*Chen caerulescens*). The Ross' Goose, in immature plumage, was found, but not always with the majority of Snow Geese.

As the refuge parties regrouped for lunch and afternoon assignments, an adult White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) was spotted in the shallow pond in front of the refuge headquarters.

After completing the basic afternoon surveys, I was back on the refuge scoping the large feeding flock of Canada Geese attempting to relocate the Ross' Goose. Had the Ross' Goose been findable, I probably would have missed the Brant (*Branta barnicla*), barely more than 100 yards away at the close edge of the feeding flock of geese. We never did relocate the Ross' Goose, but had the Brant in view for more than a half-hour — allowing at least eight observers to record this fifth species of geese on the 23 December 1992 Union County CBC.

— Vernon M. Kleen, RR #2, Box 481, Athens, IL 62613.

Three Lake Michigan Mew Gull sightings: Two in Chicago, One in Waukegan

On 22 and 25 February 1993, I found two distinctly different adult Mew Gulls (*Larus canus*) at Montrose Harbor, Chicago, Cook County. Both of these birds were in basic (winter) plumage although the first individual was considerably darker headed than the second. Also, both birds had obviously darker mantles than the accompanying Ring-billed Gulls. The birds had dark eyes and a small unmarked yellowish bill. All of the Mew Gulls I have seen in Chicago have been with Ring-billed Gulls perhaps lending credence that this rare gull tends to associate with a morphologically similar gull species.

—Robert Hughes, 696 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60613

At 1 p.m. 21 January 1993, I received a telephone call from Danny Diaz who had just seen his "lifer" Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) at the Waukegan lake front south harbor (Lake County) on some "pack ice" off the drive-up parking lot. One-half hour later I arrived at this location and immediately was able to spot the Mew Gull with its obviously darker gray mantle than the Ring-billed Gulls (at least two shades darker gray); dark grayish streaked head, dark brown pupil and black iris, all yellow bill except for the slight gray smudge at the gonys, and all yellowish legs and feet. The tail was all white except for some trace of gray smudges about 1 inch from the tip on at least two inner rectrices. This lead me to believe that this was an adult basic (winter) plumaged bird just completing its third-year molt. I was able to "chum" the gull in with bread as close as five feet outside my car window. I did not have my camera but the next day both Jim Neal of Zion and I were able to take excellent still photographs and video of the bird while it fed on bread at the old harbor. This Mew Gull was last reported seen at the Waukegan Harbor area on 25 January 1993 and represents the first confirmed record of the species for Lake County. Mlodinow (1986 *Chicago Area Birds*) does not even list the bird in his species accounts.