

# The 2003/2004 Illinois Christmas Bird Count

by David B. Johnson

“Man, what a day of birding!” exclaimed Frank Bennett, compiler of the Massac County Mermet Lake count. Everything went right, according to Bennett, who said his CBC was “a magical day of birding.” Mermet Lake tallied an amazing state record 112 species breaking the previous high of 105 species held by Cypress Creek (last season) by seven species. The average low temperature of 25 degrees Fahrenheit and average high temperature of 37 degrees Fahrenheit statewide helped hold many lingering species. Open water combined with the right weather conditions, observer effort, good wild foods (berries, mast and other seed crops), and other right stuff made for a season to remember—particularly in southern Illinois. Not to be overshadowed by Mermet Lake’s success, several other southern Illinois counts smashed the state’s previous record of 105 species. These included Rend Lake (110), Carlyle Lake (108), and Cypress Creek (107). Union County achieved 100 in 2001/02 and Horseshoe Lake achieved 100 in 1999/2000. No count in central or northern Illinois has ever come close to achieving 100 species. A total of 62 counts were received tallying a total of 167 species, including one new CBC species, White-winged Dove, plus one unrecognized form, (Ringed Turtle-Dove). Table 1 shows the count compilers, weather conditions, party hours and other circle data. Map 1 shows the location of the counts. Table 2 shows the count species data broken into North, Central and South.



**For the first time ever, a White-winged Dove was recorded on an Illinois CBC.**

**Travis A. Mahan photographed this bird at the Waltonville grain elevators in Jefferson County 6 December 2003. It remained in the area to be tallied on the Rend Lake count.**

## High counts

Twenty-two all-time state high counts were set or tied for an individual species total recorded within a count circle. Rend Lake tallied a record 235 Horned Grebes, 2 Eared Grebes, and 4,656 Bonaparte’s Gulls. Calumet City-Sand Ridge tallied an amazing 34 Black-crowned Night-Herons, 4 Peregrine Falcons, and 103 Monk Parakeets. Union County tied their 3,000 Greater White-fronted Geese and found a record 65 Ross’s Geese. Evanston (North Shore) recorded 179 Redheads and 6,899 Greater Scaup on Lake Michigan. Crab

Orchard NWR noted 703 Hooded Mergansers. Cypress Creek tallied a record 201 Black and 238 Turkey Vultures, 468 Killdeer, 4 American Woodcock, and 365 Yellow-rumped Warblers. Fermilab-Batavia set a record of 27 Cooper’s Hawks and 10 invading Northern Shrikes. Mermet Lake noted 8 lingering Dunlin and 5 Indigo Buntings. Horseshoe Lake recorded a remarkable 127 American Pipits. Rockford tallied a record 720 House Finches.

The top ten total numbers of individuals (in order of abundance) were: Common Grackle (335,286), Mallard (260,350), American Crow (218,866), Canada Goose (211,621), European Starling (196,164), Red-winged Blackbird (187,608), Snow Goose (162,653), Ring-billed Gull (74,745), House Sparrow (43,788), and Mourning Dove (20,977).

## Loons through waterfowl

Rare any time (especially inland) was Springfield’s Pacific Loon well documented by numerous photographs. Common Loons (28 in 8 circles) lingered statewide. Middle Fork River Valley noted a rare Red-necked Grebe. Chautauqua’s five American White Pelicans were the only pelicans recorded. Great Blue Herons (1,268 in 56 circles) were widespread. Crab Orchard (1) and Mermet Lake (1) noted the only Great Egrets. The northernmost Turkey Vultures were at Middle Fork (5), Forest Glen (1), and Springfield (12). Black Vultures (289 in 5 circles) were confined to southern Illinois. 14 Trumpeter Swans (in four circles) were noteworthy as were 51 Tundra Swans at Chautauqua and 7 at Hennepin,

**Meadowlark**