

The Illinois 1997 Spring Bird Count

By Vernon M. Kleen and Peter C. Petersen

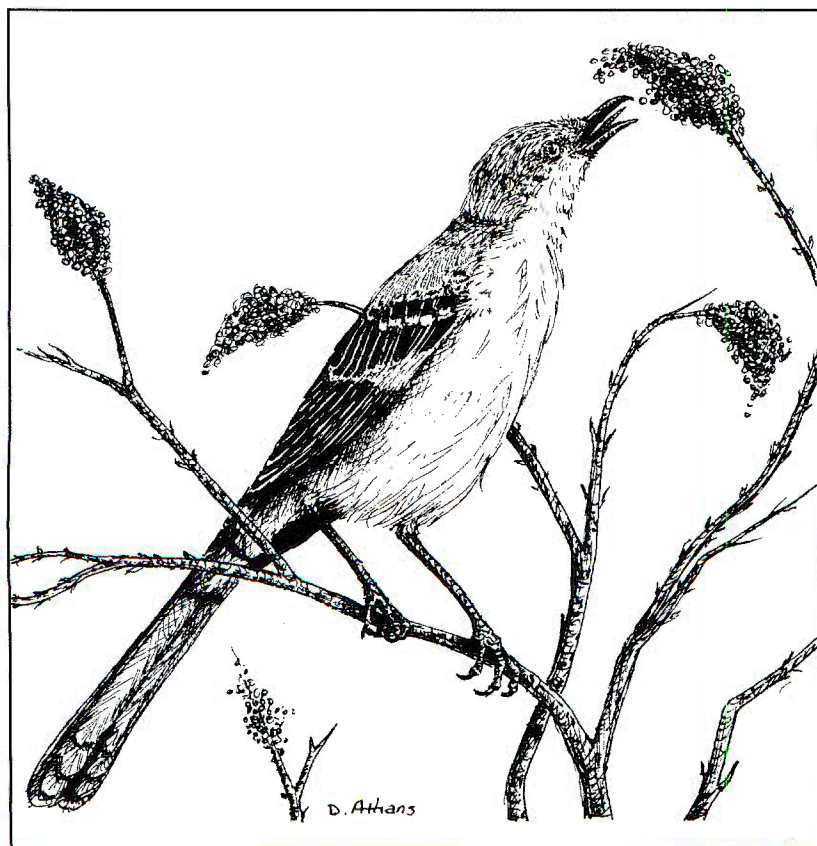
Saturday, 10 May 1997, was a gorgeous day for Illinois' 26th Statewide Spring Bird Count. The sky was clear (or nearly so), the wind was minimal, and the temperatures were accommodating. Everyone was out that day, including a record number of count participants. When such "picnic-like" weather occurs, birders do not expect peak birding opportunities; however, the 1997 count day was an exception. Anxious birds, whose migration had been retarded as a re-

sult of the cool, unspring-like weather of April and early May, were making up for down time and were en masse across the state. Had the count occurred a week earlier (when birders were still wondering if spring, and the birds, would ever arrive), the results, except perhaps in the extreme southern counties, would have been dismal. As it turned out, the 1997 Spring Bird Count was one of the best ever.

This year, count day fell on the latest possible date (which, incident-

tally, was also the same date for International Migratory Bird Day). Because of the late date, the northern counties were expected to have a greater number of species. True to expectations, 11 of the 17 counties with 150 or more species were in the northern half of Illinois; only 6 were in the southern half. On closer inspection, 5 of the top 6 counties were in the northern "quarter" of the state: Cook and Lake each with 194 species; then came Union (178), Will (177), Du Page (174) and La Salle (172). See Table 7 for details.

Early morning temperatures ranged from the mid-to-upper 30s in the north to the lower 40s in the south; by afternoon the temperatures had climbed to the mid-to-upper 60s or



Northern Mockingbird drawing by David Athans.

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to Pete Petersen who was an established birder and compiler in Illinois for nearly four decades. Despite being aware of his deteriorating condition (he died on Saturday, 12 July 1997), Pete continued the challenge of compilership for the 1997 Spring Bird Count. On receipt of the county reports he promptly reviewed and edited them and made them ready for computer processing. All this was done by 10 June. Even though he was unable to complete the final report, the part he did do made this compilation much easier. Thank you Pete for all you have done for birding. We will remember you.