

# The 2008 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count

by Vernon M. Kleen

A new record number of Harris's Sparrows was tallied during the 2008 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count.

Harris's Sparrow at North Pond, Chicago, Cook County. 9 May 2008. Photo by Jason Weckstein.



The 2008 Statewide Spring Bird Count was held on Saturday, May 10, marking the 37th consecutive year for the count, which began in 1972. Although there have been some poor-weather days in the past, this year was another excellent day for birds, birders and birding. Arlene Brei (Boone County) said, "Another totally perfect birding day in Boone County; non-glare sun in the a.m., non-threatening clouds in the p.m., and mostly nothing but gentle breezes all day long." Frank Storment (Richland County) noted, "Count day turned out to be an excellent day, with sun in the morning and cloudy conditions in the afternoon. The winds were relatively light...and the roads were not as bad as I thought they would be after the 4 to 5 inches of rain we had here from Wednesday evening through Friday afternoon." Quotes suggesting that migration was a bit late this year are from Karen Forcum (Shelby County), "Our spring here was behind times; I had worried about the date [for the Spring Bird Count] being so late, but no need for worry about that. The migration was slower than usual and later than usual. But May 10 was an

ideal spring day..." and Richard Call (St. Clair County) indicated, "Water was high everywhere, and there was very little shorebird habitat. Passerine numbers seemed to be down and there was less bird song than usual."

Count day began with early morning temperatures ranging from the mid-to-upper 30s and low 40s in the north to the mid-to-upper 40s and low 50s in the south. Temperatures then peaked in the low-to-mid 60s in the north and upper 60s to low 70s in the south. Winds were highly variable in both speed and direction throughout the day with light breezes less than 10 mph to periodic gusts of 25-30 mph; the predominant direction for more than half the county reports indicated winds from the east to southeast; however, some counties reported southerly, westerly, and northerly winds as well. The morning sky was clear to partly cloudy (with occasional overcast); in the afternoon it remained clear in much of the north but gradually changed to partly cloudy and overcast over the rest of the state. An early to mid-morning fog was reported from several counties. Southern counties (plus Jo Daviess

County) then experienced a slight drizzle in the late afternoon that, in the southern counties, turned into a steady rain after 6:30 p.m. (which affected the day-end birding in several counties).

Counters in Clinton, DeKalb, Jersey, and Vermilion counties began their counts at midnight; counting had begun by 3 a.m. in sixteen more counties and by 5 a.m. in another 39. Overall, 59 counties recorded at least some pre-dawn owling/railing hours (before 5:15 a.m.). Of the remaining 41 counties, most began birding at dawn or shortly thereafter; only 10 began as late as 6 a.m. or later with the latest starting time at 7 a.m. (two counties). At least 24 counties recorded owling/railing hours after dusk (after 8:30 p.m.) with six continuing as late as 10 p.m. including one until 11:30 p.m.

Table 1 compares the overall count results with those of the past two years and the record year. There were four new records in last year's table; however, there weren't any this year. The only 2008 listing that came close to a record was the 268 species – one short of the high (269) set in 1996. The total number of birds reported was 75,000 fewer