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The 2009 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count

by *Vernon M. Kleen*

The 2009 statewide Spring Bird Count was held Saturday 9 May for the 38th consecutive year. We were fully prepared for observers to participate in all 102 counties this year; however, for one reason or another, we fell five short of that expectation. Since there were no new species added to the statewide accumulative list this year, the overall count total still stands at 329 species.

Perhaps the most devastating impact for the count occurred at midday on Friday (the day before the count) in Jackson, Union and Williamson counties; Rhonda Rothrock provided the following report: "An inland hurricane hit the area on Friday, 8 May. It left the affected area in huge disarray. Roadsides were un-traversable, power lines and trees of all sizes were down and over the roads (hundreds in just a few miles). Many roads were not passable for days. Curfews were in effect from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m. for several days, and the power remained out for days. Some people were stranded in their homes for several days before cleanup crews were able to clear the roads." Rhonda did manage to do a bit of birding (walking) in her immediate neighborhood (despite the damage to her place) and only two other participants (from out of town) were able to get out and count in Jackson County. Vicki Lang-Mendinhall cancelled the count for Williamson County, but two intrepid observers went out anyway (despite the curfew). Union County wasn't hit quite as hard, but downed trees across favored roads, especially in Pine Hills, prevented access to these highly productive warbler sites. Even in September, not all was normal there.

For the most part count day was a very good day. Frank Storment (Richland County) indicated that "the day was great—a little windy at times, but I am quite pleased the way it turned out." Several counties reported their highest species tallies ever. Huge numbers of Dickcissels and Indigo Buntings were encountered along the Mississippi River levees and even at a few inland locations. Despite the good day, however, there were a few inconveniences and/or difficulties. Johanna Shipley (Calhoun County) said that biting buffalo gnats were so vicious that walking time was cut way down; she also indicated that floodwaters from the Illinois and Mississippi rivers made access to favorable birding areas impossible. St. Clair, Effingham, Shelby and other counties were also plagued by flooding and, as such, lack of shorebird habitat. The wind was a bit excessive in northern counties which made birding by ear somewhat challenging. And, Jo Daviess County missed the expertise of its Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge biologists because the Illinois Natural History Survey pulled its staff from the site.

Day-time temperatures at dawn ranged from the mid-to-upper 40s and low 50s in the north to the low to mid 50s in the south then by mid-afternoon had reached the low-to-mid 60s in the north and upper 60s and low 70s in the south. As usual, the wind was highly variable in both speed and direction. In the northwestern counties it ranged from 5-20 mph from the west/northwest. Farther inland it was reported as high as 35 mph from the northwest. Along Lake Michigan it was initially from the northwest at 10-35 mph,