

The 2001 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count

by Vernon M. Kleen

The 30th Annual Statewide Spring Bird Count was conducted on Saturday, 5 May 2001. It was a great day! It's hard to believe these counts have been going on this long. The most significant reason for the Spring Bird Count is to monitor bird populations in Illinois during the height of the spring migration. For that one day each year observers are asked to make an accurate accounting of all individuals of every bird species encountered that day, the number of hours spent making those observations, and the number of miles walked and driven during the course of making those observations. By requiring these three things, it is possible to compare species results from year to year and become aware of changing populations for many species. For example, this year's data compared with previous years show the decline in Carolina Wrens and the serious lack of migrant thrushes. One of the outcomes of keeping such data is there are always records involved and, like any sport, everyone wants to know what the best records are. So, this report not only provides a compilation of the 2001 results, but also shows how it compared, record-wise, to other recent years and identifies all the new or tied records that were set or matched. As a starter, the number of participating volunteers this year was 1,430, similar to the last two years, but 180 fewer than the record number set in 1997.

Over the years it has become apparent that the Spring Bird Count (probably because of the many records kept) has become an annual competition, or, perhaps, more appropriately, multiple competitions. Results of many competitions appear in the Tables that accompany this report; however, some, such as the friendly rivalries between counties or between parties within counties, are not herein recorded. On a state-wide level, the biggest competitions each year seem to be how the final tally of species will compare with other years: Which county, Cook or Lake, will report the greatest number of

species and which county will report the 3rd greatest number? At the county level, the biggest competitions each year are to do better than last year, to break 100 species (or some other species goal) and, if possible, to set a new high species count. Some even hope to set new high counts for a particular species for a single county. To meet these goals, county coordinators put together teams to assure thorough coverage of every nook and cranny in their counties and individuals who know where key or accidental species may be found on count day. In many counties, considerable advance planning and scouting occurs. With the recent arrival of what are now regularly occurring and widely distributed exotic species, such as the House Finch, Monk Parakeet, and soon-to-be Eurasian Collared-Dove, and major increases in what were formerly fairly rare native species (at least for May) such as American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Canada Geese, Bald Eagles, Wild Turkeys, Sandhill Cranes, winter gulls, and Clay-colored Sparrows (perhaps even Painted



The Chipping Sparrow was among 52 species reported from 90 or more counties in Illinois (89 percent) during the 2001 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.

Buntings and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers), current county counts should have the potential of averaging 5 to 10 species higher now than they did during the early years of the count.

As for goals, everyone knows that we go to great lengths to achieve two specific statewide goals: to have at least one team, but preferably two or more teams (and five or more observers), in

Annual Comparisons

Criteria	2001	2000	1999	Highest Total
Number of Species	257	266	262	269 (1996)
Number of Birds	520,970	533,335	588,646	593,680 (1996)
Number of Participating Counties	101	101	100	102 (2 yrs)
Number of Observers	1,430	1,448	1,479	1,611 (1997)
Number of Party Miles Walked	2,459	2,425	2,287	2,628 (1995)
Number of Party Miles Driven	23,942	23,295	23,305	23,942 (2001)
Total Number of Party Miles	26,401	25,720	25,592	26,401 (2001)
Number of Party Hours Walked	3,120	3,070	3,218	3,457 (1997)
Number of Party Hours Driven	1,957	1,996	1,932	2,140 (1998)
Total Number of Party Hours	5,077	5,066	5,150	5,565 (1997)
No. Species in 90 or more Counties	52	53	54	55 (1996)
Counties with 100 or more Species	69	77	74	80 (1997)
Counties with 20 or more Observers	19	20	19	24 (1998)
Highest Species total in single county	184	190	202	205 (1983)
Average # species/participating county	113	117	122	122 (1999)
Average # species for all 102 counties	112	116	120	120 (1999)

Table 1.