



The 2012 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count

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The 2012 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count marks the 42nd Spring Bird Count.

Bewick's Wren, Brown County, 2012/ May. Photo by Michael P. Ward.

New Approach (2 DAYS)

In 2013, we tried something new. Several goals are associated with the Spring Bird Count and one is to sample the bird communities throughout Illinois. While we generally accomplish this goal in many counties, a few counties are infrequently covered during the count and some counties with very few censusers; thus the decision to add one more day to the Spring Bird Count in 2013. It provided for greater coverage of the state and in general more data, however it did create a greater burden on compilers. Results on Spring Bird Count 2013 with two days are forthcoming.

Spring Bird Count days will now be on the Saturday or the Sunday that falls between the 4th and the 10th of May. The 2013 dates were May 4 and May 5. The goal is not to have censusers go to the same location in consecutive days, but rather to do different counties on each day.

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2012 Results

A total of 471,597 birds of 222 species were detected. The spring of 2012 in Illinois set many records associated with an extremely warm March. This early warmth resulted in a much earlier phenology for many plants, and begged the question of whether birds would also arrive early. The SBC data suggest that either birds did not arrive early. If anything, they arrived late or simply did not stop in the area. Many participants commented on the low numbers of warblers and thrushes. While there are many possible reasons for the low numbers, one possibility is the early warmth created a situation where plants and insects emerged earlier, and once certain migrants arrived, their food resources were missing so they did not stop in Illinois.

The extremely warm spring created a very odd situation in which the only two new species for the count were species more likely to be observed at 6° as opposed to 76° degrees. The historic 2012-2013 winter irruption of Snowy Owls resulted in one being present in DeKalb County.

In addition Common Redpolls were reported from Will County. Some other interesting observations to note from this past year are listed below. While the all-time high counts are interesting, it is also important to note the species that were recorded in very low numbers.

- A Purple Gallinule was found in Putnam County.
- More Mute Swans were recorded this year than ever before.
- Only 12 Upland Sandpipers were located.
- Black-necked Stilts were detected in 13 counties a new county high record.
- A record number of counties (4) found Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.
- Acadian Flycatchers were widespread with the most ever counties detecting them and at record levels.
- Eurasian Collared-Doves continue their invasion with detections in 65 counties.
- Bald Eagles were detected in 67 counties, a new record high.
- Bell's Vireos were found in the most counties ever (32) and at record numbers.
- Henslow's Sparrows were in 43 counties, the most ever and a record number were found (263).
- Warblers and thrushes were again low this year in many counties throughout the state. For example, more Swainson's Thrushes were found in Union County in 1999, than were found in the entire state this year.
- A Swainson's Warbler was detected in Franklin County.
- It was the "year" of the Dickcissel in the Midwest and a record number of counties found a record number of individuals.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrows continue to expand slowly; 30 counties reported them this year.