

The 2002 Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count

by Vernon M. Kleen

Introduction

The 31st Annual Statewide Spring Bird Count was conducted Saturday, 4 May, 2002, the earliest possible day in May it could be held. Comments about count day included, "...*What a beautiful day we had for the count! It could not have been better...*" (Velda Christensen, Iroquois County) and "...*If one could put in an order for a perfect birding day weather-wise, it would be exactly what we had here on Count Day! Perfect!...*" (Arlene Brei, Boone County). The day began with temperatures in the upper 30s and lower 40s in the north to upper 40s and lower 50s in the south then climbed to the upper 60s to mid 70s statewide (approaching 80 in isolated areas). The sky was clear or mostly clear all day throughout the state, and winds were reported as light (usually less than 10 mph) and variable, but most notably from the south or southwest.

As usual, all participants were asked (by an advance directive through their county compilers) to make accurate counts (not guesses) of all individuals of every native bird observed during the day and to record the exact number of hours actively spent searching for the birds and the number of miles walked and driven while pursuing the birds so that the data could be compared with that of previous years. In addition, documentation of all unusual or extralimital bird observations was expected.

Two of the Spring Bird Count's specific goals have always been to have at least one team of birders, preferably two or more teams (and five or more observers), in every county every year; and to obtain a

confirmed list of 100 or more species from every county every year. These goals may be a challenge for some counties, but, at least they are goals that are achievable. This year, part "a" of the first goal was 97% successful; reports were received from all but Saline, Lawrence, and Grundy counties; part "b" of the first goal was only 65% successful since 36 counties had 4 or fewer observers and 17 of those counties had only one or no parties at all in the field. The second goal was 69% successful as 70 counties reported 100 or more species. If all counties were equally blessed with an abundance of high-quality habitat and one or more highly-skilled birders, the latter goal would be much more easily achieved.

Compilation of the results this year was different from that of most other years. The Computer Section of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources had handled all the data entry and retrieval since about 1974; however, this year all data was entered onto spread sheets on my home computer and obviously took considerably longer to complete than in other years. Now that I have the system down (perhaps Microsoft Works' Spread Sheets are not the best way to enter the data), I hope it will proceed more quickly next year. [*Should anyone have a mechanism that would make it possible to computerize and compare data from year to year, please let me know - especially if you are willing to assist.*]

Results

Highest County Counts.

Since the count was held on the earliest day possible, one would

expect that the southern counties would fare better in their species totals than the northern counties; however, it's become apparent that the northern counties do better no matter what the date because of lingering winter residents as well as early spring migrants, and, because at least one individual of most later migrant species can be found in most northern counties on count day. Even though this year's statewide species total was 8 better than last year, the best county total this year was 177 (Lake County) compared with 184 (Cook County) in 2001 and the record of 205 (set in 1983). Cook County was "2nd" best this year with 175 species and was followed by Massac and Will counties (168), Du Page and Union counties (166), and Champaign County (160). Other counties achieving 150 or more species included: Clinton (155), Knox (159), La Salle (152) and Winnebago (151). Twelve more counties reported 140 or more species. The species totals for most of these counties was very similar to those reported last year. Six (55%) of the 11 counties with 150 or more species were in the northern quarter of the state; 3 (27%) were in the central half; and 2 (18%) were in the southern quarter. In 2001 and 2000, there were, respectively, 11 and 17 counties with 150 or more species reported.

Table 1 provides the annual comparison of the "statewide" results; it compares 2002 with 2001, 2000 and the "record" year. Although there were no new records set in 2002 for any category in this table, the number of party miles driven and the combined total