



Illinois Ornithological Society

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Illinois Ornithological Society

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President's Message

More than 100 years ago the very first Christmas Bird Counts took place, and a count in Glen Ellyn, Illinois was one of them. That count included a number of "prairie hens," birds that you can't find in northern Illinois anymore. Christmas counts today are beginning to log Eurasian Collared-Doves, a naturalized species that would not have been seen back at the start of the 20th century. And so the record of 100 years of birders counting birds in mid-winter shows the effect that human beings have had on bird populations.

The record also captures natural events. By looking at the numbers over many years one can see the ebb and flow of the northern limit of the Carolina Wren population as it responds to weather conditions. Invasion years by northern birds like Northern Shrikes and "winter finches" stand out in the accumulated record. The article in this issue of *Meadowlark* tells you what we learned from last year's efforts in this annual counting ritual. You may want to go back to previous years' CBC articles and refresh your memory on what happened over the last decade.

Now there are some 60 different Christmas Bird Counts taking place in Illinois, giving you ample opportunity to participate. Your efforts will be much appreciated by the compilers of the counts, and your efforts will help achieve IOS's objective to keep a permanent record of Illinois bird life. A year from now you'll be able to read in *Meadowlark* what you and your fellow counters found on a statewide level. And 100 years from now, ornithologists and birders will be using the data you are collecting today to understand what is happening to bird populations and distributions.

But also remember that a Christmas count is fun. There's camaraderie, the excitement of finding a bird lingering north of its usual wintering range or one that's unusual or rare in our state, and the enjoyment of our regular winter residents. I know I'm always cheered by the burst of color a cardinal brings to a winter's day of birding!

— Geoff Williamson

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