

along a shrubby creek and more Horned Larks on the airport grounds. Perhaps the best area was a wet weedy patch at the airport's southwest end where Joe Suchecki had seen a Short-eared Owl the week before. I pished an immature White-crowned Sparrow and a Savannah Sparrow, which represented the second time that species had been recorded for this count.

Just as the winter light began to fade I thought I had spotted a bald-faced hornet nest. But wait! It was an owl, a Barred Owl which had just come out of a spruce in a small corner woodlot at the prairie's edge. Quite a few Du Page birders I met at Jim and Kate Frazier's countdown party thought this was a great find. I thought Kate's chili recipe was a great find, too! As always at these countdown parties, the best birds and high counts were announced, then immediately put on the Du Page County bird alert. I wondered how many people would go after the Savannah Sparrow versus the owl.

Clinton Lake.

18 December. 5:45 a.m. I had to make a choice. Drive straight down to Clinton Lake, about 180 miles away, or get a few hours sleep at home after the Fermilab countdown party. I chose four hours of sleep and woke at 2 a.m. to head to the Clinton Nuclear Plant Energy and Environmental Center east of Birbeck in DeWitt County. I arrived at 5:45 a.m., promptly went back to sleep, and awoke when the 6:30 a.m. arrivals drove into the parking lot. Myrna Deaton, the compiler for the Clinton Lake count, quickly gave out assignments and maps. Mike Donahue of Danville and I were to cover the north valley and branch of Clinton Lake. Since I liked to drive fields in search of longspurs and Horned Larks, we also got plenty of open fields, a habitat disappearing on the Chicago area counts.

Where we could, we transected the woodlands and valleys south of Solomon. Each time we performed hunt-and-peck birding, getting out

and sampling different habitats, often not walking more than 100 yards in each area, reconnoitering, and then driving on to the next spot. The chatter of the Carolina Wrens was a welcome addition to a northerner's CBC list of species. So was the Tufted Titmouse. The woodlands had flickers, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and an occasional Red-headed Woodpecker. American Tree Sparrows were the most common field and roadside sparrow. We looked for more unusual sparrows but could only come up with seven Song Sparrows and later in the afternoon, Swamp Sparrows.

Donahue seemed apprehensive about driving so many open stark brown and black fields in search of longspurs. Our efforts soon paid off, however, when we spotted a flock of mixed blackbirds and starlings. After the flock arose and reeled to a field close by, two all-black birds with white eyes remained in a tree by the road's side. I noted the purplish hoods on each bird and exclaimed,



White-crowned Sparrows on a fence row were seen in mid-state during one of the nine Christmas Bird Count treks taken by David Johnson during the 1994/95 season. Drawing by Karen Becker.