

The 2008/2009 Illinois CBC Season

By Paul Sweet

The 2008/2009 Illinois Christmas Bird Count season was a study in contrasts. Seven counts reported high temperatures below 20 degrees F, while 14 reported highs of at least 50 degrees F, including several counts in the northern part of the state. Windy conditions were common – 29 counts reported peak winds of over 20 mph, while 13 reported winds of at least 30 mph.

A total of 63 counts were reported in Illinois during the 2008/2009 Christmas Bird Count season, with 166 species reported on the counts and three additional species reported only during the count period. Four counts exceeded 100 species; Rend Lake tied last year's state record with 114. There were 1095 field observers who put in 3313 party-hours, covering 20,583 miles. All of these totals were down somewhat from last year. Two-hundred eighty-eight feeder observers contributed an additional 478 hours. Fermilab again had the most field observers with 96, and Waukegan had the most feeder observers with 68.

No new species were added to the state's CBC list this year. There were, however, a number of notable observations. Several lingering fall migrants put in an appearance, winter finches were present in reasonable numbers, and gulls, while nowhere near last year's display, were still worth mentioning.

Ducks through Herons

Trumpeter Swans continue to increase. This year they were found on 12 counts, with a high of 10 at Rushville. Tundra Swans were reported on 4 counts. One Blue-winged Teal was seen at Evanston-North Shore. One Harlequin Duck was reported count-week at Calumet-Sand Ridge, while Calumet and Collinsville reported count-week Surf Scoters. White-winged Scoters were reported on 4 counts, with Waukegan the only Lake Michigan count to report them. A lone Black Scoter at Waukegan was the only one seen on count day – Calumet-Sand Ridge had a count-week bird. Long-tailed Ducks showed a surprising pattern – eight counts reported them, with the count-week bird at Calumet-Sand-Ridge the only



Seven Northern Saw-whet Owls were reported on six counts during the 2008/2009 Christmas Bird Count Season. This photo of a Northern Saw-whet Owl was taken at Decatur, Macon County on 6 February 2009 by Travis A. Mahan.

one on Lake Michigan. Sixteen of those reported on count days were downstate, with an impressive 8 at Rend Lake, and one at Clinton-Savanna on the Mississippi River. The 10,681 Common Goldeneyes at Rend Lake constituted a new state high.

Ring-necked Pheasants were reported on 29 counts, but only 299 were reported, significantly below last year's 417. Wild Turkeys were also down somewhat, with 1776 reported on 43 counts. At Newton, there were 77 Greater Prairie-Chickens. Northern Bobwhite was reported on 19 counts, and Gray

Partridge went unreported this year.

Rend Lake had the only Red-throated Loon, as well as two of the year's three Common Loons – the other one was at Baldwin Lake. Horned and Pied-billed Grebes were present in typical numbers, while only 4 counts reported American White Pelicans. Double-crested Cormorants were only reported on 13 counts, although in typical numbers. Springfield reported the only Great Egret, while Black-crowned Night-Herons were found on 4 counts – 3 of them in northern Illinois.

Raptors through Cranes

Black and Turkey Vultures were both reported in reduced numbers – Black Vultures were at their lowest level in 15 years. Bald Eagles were reported on a record 55 counts this season, with an all-time high state total of 2315. Accipiters were present in typical numbers, with Clinton Lake reporting the region's only Northern Goshawk. After a banner fall in 2008 at Illinois' two hawk watches, Golden Eagles put in a notable appearance, with 6 seen on 5 counts. Twelve Merlins were seen on 10 counts, and 12 Peregrine Falcons were seen on a record 11 counts. A Prairie Falcon was at Arklands Pyramid – only the 8th time that species has been reported on Illinois CBCs.