



Diary of a Mad Counter

The Challenging Adventure of a Christmas Bird Count Marathon

The Christmas Bird Count program, coordinated by the National Audubon Society, provides some of the few truly long-term data used to document avian population trends. Additionally, with the large number of counts conducted across North America each year, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) program also contributes avian population data from a large geographic area. This combination of long-term and large-scale data makes the CBC program an important source of information for the scientific monitoring of avian populations (see bibliography). Participation in this program is certainly one of the best ways for citizens to contribute to scientific research, and thereby help monitor the health of our early-winter bird communities.

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Marathon Facts

Miles Traveled	6322
Birds Counted	101,066
Species Sighted	115
Hours Counting Birds	236.5
Hours Driving	85.5
Hours Slept	107.25

I have been participating on CBCs for more than two decades, totaling 180 counts in my lifetime. For many years, I have taken my passion and enthusiasm for CBCs to an extreme by doing 8 to 11 counts per year and serving as the compiler for seven of these since 1997. (*Editor's note: As a point of reference, in the 102nd CBC, only 21 participants out of a total of about 25,000 did eight or more counts. That's less than 0.1 percent.*) During the fall

of 2002, I decided to take my CBC participation to the next level—to really have fun, collect data, and challenge myself—to do a CBC marathon. I wanted to do 23 CBCs in a single season—one every day during the count period, which runs from December 14 through January 5. As far as I could determine, 16 counts had been the most ever conducted by one person in a single year. If true, then my efforts would represent a new all-time record!

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As I discussed my goal with fellow birders and biologists, I was met with the same two responses over and over: 1) “Are you insane?” and 2) “This is both logistically and physically impossible.” I also mentioned that I was still going to compile my usual seven counts. At this point, people told me they now knew the answer regarding my sanity. Nevertheless, I remained undaunted, being fairly certain of my sanity and always ready for a challenge. I was encouraged after discussing my goal with Chan Robbins and Paul Sykes, two of the most prolific Christmas counters ever, at the North American Ornithological Conference in late September. They both thought I was nuts, but they thought the idea was great. The decision was made—I would attempt to do 23 CBCs in a single count season.

For the next two-and-a-half months, I sent e-mails and called many count compilers throughout Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin trying to schedule a CBC for each day. I limited myself to these Midwestern states because each count had to be within driving distance—eight hours—from

Table 1. CBC results from my field parties.

Count	Date	# Species	# Individuals
Cedar Rapids	12-14-02	53	909
Davenport	12-15-02	60	11,591
Springbrook	12-16-02	51	2449
Lost Nation	12-17-02	47	1437
Clinton	12-18-02	53	2874
Horseshoe Lake	12-19-02	66	5676
Union County	12-20-02	77	15,727
Chautauqua N.W.R.	12-21-02	61	8634
Muscatine	12-22-02	46	3418
Princeton-Camanche	12-23-02	44	1909
Chicago Lakefront	12-25-02	31	2973
Andalusia	12-26-02	61	4522
Western Mercer County	12-27-02	56	2281
North Linn	12-28-02	45	1631
Thorn Creek-Park Forest	12-29-02	33	3126
Mermet Lake, Massac County	12-31-02	66	5873
Jackson County	01-01-03	60	19,653
Yellow River Forest	01-03-03	43	1839
Middle Fork River Valley	01-04-03	50	2034
Van Petten	01-05-03	45	2510
TOTAL 20 CBCs		115	101,066

the previous one or from my home base in the Quad Cities area of Illinois.

Unfortunately, given the relatively late start, I was logistically only able to schedule 20 CBCs (Table 1). I couldn't find a

scheduled CBC in my vicinity on three days: December 24 and 30, and January 2.

Following are excerpts from what might be called the “Diary of a Mad Counter”...



Marathon Route At-a-Glance

Home base: Quad Cities, Illinois. RT = Round-trip.

December 14	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Cedar Rapids, IA
December 15	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Davenport, IA
December 16	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Springbrook, IA
December 17	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Lost Nation, IA
December 18	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Clinton, IA
December 19	Quad Cities, IL, to Horseshoe Lake, IL
December 20	Horseshoe Lake, IL, to Union County, IL, to Chautauqua N.W.R., IL
December 21	Chautauqua N.W.R., IL, to Quad Cities, IL
December 22	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Muscatine, IA
December 23	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Princeton-Camanche, IA

December 14, 2002: The 103rd CBC count period began today. I had a restless night of sleep in anticipation of the odyssey I was about to undertake. At 4:00 A.M. I started the 90-minute drive to my first scheduled count circle, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Conditions were fairly mild with no wind, but heavy fog. Nevertheless, I was confident that I would easily be able to accomplish the marathon.

During the morning, I counted alone and in heavy fog. By early afternoon, the fog cleared and it was sunny and warm with little wind. I joined Weir Nelson's field party for the afternoon. Overall, it was a good day. My group recorded 53 species (Table 1). By far, the best bird of the day was a Gray Catbird, my first ever on a CBC.

December 15, 2002: This was the first of the counts that I compile—the Davenport, Iowa-Illinois, CBC. I was still very enthusiastic about my marathon attempt and felt it would be easy to complete. At 4:30 A.M. I was on my way to meet the rest of my field party, Steve Hager and Brad Cosentino.

We had another perfect day, with warm temperatures and little or no wind. Our results were good, but waterfowl and gull numbers were somewhat less than normal. My group identified 60 species (Table 1). Weather conditions remained mild with little wind. The "bird of the day" for my party was a House Wren. Again, this was the first time I had ever encountered this species on a CBC.

December 16, 2002: I was a little tired this morning. At 4:30 A.M. I began the 75-minute drive to the Springbrook, Iowa-Illinois, CBC. The weather had changed substantially; temperatures were much colder, and a stiff wind was blowing. Ulf Konig and I definitely felt the wind chill this morning.

We encountered 51 species (Table 1), which is reasonable given that waterfowl in our territory were virtually non-existent. Our key site, the Green Island State Wildlife Area (an extensive wetland complex), was nearly 100 percent frozen; few waterfowl were present. Cold temperatures and a strong wind persisted all day. While returning home in the evening, I was really feeling tired and wondered how easy would it be to complete this challenge after all.

December 17, 2002: Today was my fourth CBC of the year—Lost Nation, Iowa. I was physically tired, but mentally, I was looking forward to the day's count and the continuing marathon. Brent Langley would help me cover my territory. We departed at 3:45 A.M. under cold, damp, and very breezy conditions.

The weather remained the same as we experienced a typical Midwestern winter day. The strong wind suppressed bird activity and made it very difficult to hear the birds. My group identified 47 species (Table 1). As we returned home, I was really looking forward to sleep.

December 18, 2002: Brent Langley and I left for the Clinton, Iowa-Illinois, at

4:00 A.M. to meet Ryan Schmitz at 5:00 A.M. I also compile this count. The temperature was very warm and breezy.

During the entire day, we dealt with extremely adverse weather conditions. Although it was warm, the wind was 20 to 30 mph and we experienced periodic torrential rain (two to three inches) and severe thunderstorms. Consequently, bird activity was greatly reduced, and we spent the day soaked and chilled by the wind. Needless to say, we were glad to see the day end. Amazingly, given the conditions, we still recorded a decent number of species, 53 (Table 1). The best bird was an American Pipit—another CBC first for me.

I arrived back home at 7:00 P.M. and took a hot shower to warm up. I was physically exhausted but had to pack for the next three days, which would be spent in southern and central Illinois. By 10:30 P.M., I began the seven-hour drive to my next CBC.

December 19, 2002: I drove all night to get to the Horseshoe Lake, Illinois-Missouri, CBC. The drive was exhausting, and I found it extremely difficult to stay awake. At about 3:30 A.M. I drove through periodic heavy rain, forecasted to continue off-and-on all day. I began to wonder if this extreme CBC endeavor was a good idea. At 5:30 A.M. I joined Vern Kleen to begin the count.

Rains were heavy for the second consecutive day. Once again I spent the entire day soaking wet and chilled to the bone due to moderately strong winds.

Marathon Route At-a-Glance continued

December 25	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Chicago Lakefront, IL
December 26	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Andalusia, IL
December 27	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Western Mercer County, IL
December 28	RT Quad Cities, IL, to North Linn, IA
December 29	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Thorn Creek-Park Forest, IL
December 31	Quad Cities, IL, to Mermet Lake, Massac County, IL, to Jackson County, IL
January 1	Jackson County, IL, to Quad Cities, IL
January 3	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Yellow River Forest, IA
January 4	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Middle Fork River Valley, IL
January 5	RT Quad Cities, IL, to Van Petten, IL



Regardless of the terrible weather, my field party had a fairly good day with 66 species (Table 1). Higher species tallies are possible in southern Illinois more so than to the north as some migratory birds winter in the region.

December 20, 2002: After a mere five-and-a-half hours of sleep, my first in 45 hours, I was still physically tired but rejuvenated by the brief rest and ready to continue the marathon. It was clear—a complete contrast to yesterday—but

colder and with a moderate wind. Vern and I were joined by Jim Funk to begin the Union County, Illinois CBC.

Because of the weather, today was much more enjoyable than yesterday. Our results were also much better; we

Table 2. Cumulative species identified and frequency of occurrence during the 2002-2003 CBC marathon.

Species *	Total # Counts (%)	Species *	Total # Counts (%)
Common Loon	1 (5)	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	7 (35)
Pied-billed Grebe	2 (10)	Downy Woodpecker	20 (100)
Double-crested Cormorant	2 (10)	Hairy Woodpecker	18 (90)
Great Blue Heron	15 (75)	Northern Flicker	18 (90)
Greater White-fronted Goose	3 (15)	Pileated Woodpecker	12 (60)
Snow Goose	3 (15)	Eastern Phoebe	1 (5)
Ross's Goose	1 (5)	Loggerhead Shrike	1 (5)
Canada Goose	19 (95)	Northern Shrike	2 (10)
Trumpeter Swan	2 (10)	Blue Jay	19 (95)
Tundra Swan	1 (5)	American Crow	20 (100)
Wood Duck	3 (15)	Horned Lark	14 (70)
Gadwall	8 (40)	Carolina Chickadee	5 (25)
American Wigeon	3 (15)	Black-capped Chickadee	15 (75)
American Black Duck	11 (55)	Tufted Titmouse	17 (85)
Mallard	20 (100)	White-breasted Nuthatch	18 (90)
Northern Shoveler	4 (20)	Brown Creeper	19 (95)
Northern Pintail	6 (30)	Carolina Wren	14 (70)
Green-winged Teal	5 (25)	House Wren	1 (5)
Canvasback	4 (20)	Winter Wren	10 (50)
Redhead	3 (15)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	15 (75)
Ring-necked Duck	3 (15)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4 (20)
Lesser Scaup	9 (45)	Eastern Bluebird	12 (60)
Bufflehead	3 (15)	Hermit Thrush	7 (35)
Common Goldeneye	12 (60)	American Robin	15 (75)
Hooded Merganser	3 (15)	Gray Catbird	1 (5)
Common Merganser	11 (55)	Northern Mockingbird	4 (20)
Red-breasted Merganser	3 (15)	Brown Thrasher	4 (20)
Ruddy Duck	4 (20)	European Starling	20 (100)
Bald Eagle	18 (90)	American Pipit	1 (5)
Northern Harrier	10 (50)	Cedar Waxwing	7 (35)
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6 (30)	Yellow-rumped Warbler	6 (30)
Cooper's Hawk	8 (40)	Eastern Towhee	4 (20)
Northern Goshawk	2 (10)	American Tree Sparrow	19 (95)
Red-shouldered Hawk	3 (15)	Field Sparrow	7 (35)
Red-tailed Hawk	19 (95)	Vesper Sparrow	1 (5)
Rough-legged Hawk	7 (35)	Savannah Sparrow	1 (5)
American Kestrel	20 (100)	Fox Sparrow	6 (30)
Ring-necked Pheasant	8 (40)	Song Sparrow	20 (100)
Wild Turkey	9 (45)	Lincoln's Sparrow	1 (5)
Northern Bobwhite	2 (10)	Swamp Sparrow	17 (85)
American Coot	4 (20)	White-throated Sparrow	19 (95)
Killdeer	7 (35)	Harris's Sparrow	1 (5)
Solitary Sandpiper	1 (5)	White-crowned Sparrow	7 (35)
Wilson's Snipe	3 (15)	Dark-eyed Junco	19 (95)
Ring-billed Gull	14 (70)	Lapland Longspur	7 (35)
Herring Gull	13 (65)	Snow Bunting	2 (10)
Thayer's Gull	5 (25)	Northern Cardinal	20 (100)
Rock Dove	19 (95)	Red-winged Blackbird	16 (80)
Mourning Dove	17 (85)	Eastern Meadowlark	3 (15)
Monk Parakeet	1 (5)	Rusty Blackbird	6 (30)
Eastern Screech-Owl	12 (60)	Common Grackle	10 (50)
Great Horned Owl	16 (80)	Brown-headed Cowbird	11 (55)
Barred Owl	14 (70)	Purple Finch	5 (25)
Long-eared Owl	6 (30)	House Finch	19 (95)
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1 (5)	American Goldfinch	19 (95)
Belted Kingfisher	16 (80)	House Sparrow	20 (100)
Red-headed Woodpecker	12 (60)	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	4 (20)
Red-bellied Woodpecker	19 (95)		

* Species taxonomic order and nomenclature follows A.O.U. (1998) and I.O.S. (1999), except for Common Snipe, which was changed to Wilson's Snipe in 2002.

recorded 77 species (Table 1), including a good diversity of waterfowl.

By the time the compilation was completed, I was ready for bed—but first I faced a five-hour drive to central Illinois, the site of my next CBC. I had planned to drive to Havana, Illinois, get a hotel room and sleep for two or three hours, and then drive another hour to Richard Bjorklund's house (the meeting location for the Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge CBC). However, when I arrived in Havana at 2:00 A.M., I found that the one hotel in town was closed. Extremely tired and unable to drive any farther, I pulled into a rest area and slept for a couple of hours. At 4:30 A.M., I awoke and continued the drive to the next count.

December 21, 2002: I arrived at the Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, Illinois, CBC at 6:00 A.M. and was assigned to Dan and Angella Moorehouse's field party. The weather was seasonably cold with a slight wind. I was extremely tired, which made the cold that much more biting. Nevertheless, I was enthusiastic about the day's count.

My field party had a good day, identifying 61 species (Table 1), including an impressive diversity of waterfowl. Although the day was cold and windy, it had been mild enough recently that Lake Chautauqua was largely open.

We finished the compilation at 7:00 P.M., and even though I was thoroughly exhausted, I still had a two-and-a-half-hour drive to get home. While fighting to stay awake, I began to question my sanity for attempting this odyssey. I finally got to bed around 11:00 P.M. The three-day CBC road trip was over. It had been 42 hours since I had last slept in a bed.

December 22, 2002: Today was the Muscatine, Iowa-Illinois, CBC, the third count I compile. I got four and a half hours of sleep, which re-energized me both mentally and physically. By 4:30 A.M. I was on my way to meet Steve

Freed, my partner for the day. We had a 45-minute drive to get into my territory, and when we got there it was already extremely windy and cold.

We had to deal with 20 to 30 mph winds all day and the resulting severe wind-chill factor. Waterfowl and gull numbers were much lower than normal. My group had a fairly poor day with only 46 species (Table 1).

December 23, 2002: The Princeton-Camanche, Iowa-Illinois, CBC was today, my 10th consecutive count and the fourth CBC I compile. Even though I managed to sleep for six hours, the most sleep I've had since December 15, I still was feeling fatigued. At 4:30 A.M. I drove a half hour to get into my territory. Conditions were seasonably cold with a stout wind.

For the eighth day in a row there was substantial wind, resulting in my lowest species total to date, 44 (Table 1). The count marked the midway point in my CBC marathon attempt.

December 24, 2002: An off day! I gloriously slept in. I began wondering if the folks who questioned my sanity at the outset of this adventure have been right. Of course they aren't...I think?

December 25, 2002: I felt very refreshed following a day off and ready to begin the second half of my marathon. At 3:15 A.M. I began the three-hour drive to the Chicago Lakefront, Illinois, CBC to join Joel Greenberg's field party. While driving early on this Christmas morning, I couldn't help but think: "I really need to get a life!" A fairly strong wind was blowing, and an hour west of Chicago I started encountering heavy snow squalls.

Periodic snows continued through the early morning hours of the count. The weather was characterized by a gusty wind blowing in off Lake Michigan. This, combined with a lack of natural habitat within our territory (Chicago's Lakeshore Drive and the downtown), resulted in the fewest number of species

recorded by one of my field parties in the past 20 years of CBCs, 31 (Table 1). Nevertheless, it was extremely interesting and challenging to participate on a CBC within the heart of a major city. An additional reward was a new species for my life list—Monk Parakeet.

December 26, 2002: The Andalusia, Illinois-Iowa, CBC was today, the fifth count that I compile. After a long day yesterday, I felt pretty tired this morning. At 4:15 A.M. and still a half-hour away from the circle, this was the coldest morning yet, but thankfully, there was little wind.

After nine consecutive CBCs with substantial winds, the weak wind and seasonably mild temperatures were a welcome break. It was a very good day, with 61 species (Table 1). Although physically tired, I was once again looking forward to continuing the challenge.

December 27, 2002: At 3:15 A.M. I was out to meet Steve Hager, my field partner for the day's count—the Western Mercer County, Illinois-Iowa, CBC, the sixth I compile. We had a one-and-three-quarter-hour drive to get into our territory.

For the second day in a row, the weather cooperated, with seasonable temperatures and light wind. Although waterfowl were scarce, we were still able to identify 56 species (Table 1). Though it was only three days since my day off, I was already experiencing physical fatigue—with two distant counts coming up back-to-back.

December 28, 2002: After only four hours of sleep, I was up at 3:30 A.M. and off for a two-and-a-half-hour drive to join Weir Nelson's field party for the North Linn, Iowa, CBC. The weather forecast was favorable.

Considering that this CBC circle lacks a major water body, and therefore usually produces low waterfowl diversity, still we were able to tally 45 species (Table 1). The third consecutive day of seasonable temperatures and light winds

greatly enhanced our results. However, I was extremely tired and looking forward to getting a few hours of sleep before heading back to the Chicago area for tomorrow's count.

December 29, 2002: At 3:15 A.M., and after five hours of sleep, I was off on a three-hour drive to the southern suburbs of Chicago for my 15th CBC of the season—Thorn Creek-Park Forest, Illinois. By day's end I would have completed three-quarters of the counts in this mentally and physically grueling endeavor.

Although the weather was very cooperative, with unusually mild temperatures and light wind, the results were again dismal, 33 species (Table 1). For the second time this year, my group failed to observe at least 40 species; the territory I covered at Thorn Creek was completely devoid of all habitat types except open agricultural land. In an alarming trend, these open fields are disappearing even here, being replaced by massive suburban subdivisions that have virtually no vegetation and are largely paved over.

During my drive home, I was thoroughly exhausted. After five consecutive counts, I was looking forward to having tomorrow off. Again I suspected that those who had questioned my mental stability for attempting to complete this CBC adventure were probably right!

December 30, 2002: I was home in bed most of the day! At 10:30 P.M. I left home for a seven-and-a-half-hour drive to extreme southern Illinois for two days. The weather forecast called for periodic rains. Two hours north of Mermet Lake I began encountering heavy rainsqualls and high winds.

December 31, 2002: Ten hours of sleep yesterday left me rested and eager to continue the marathon. Today's count was the Mermet Lake, Massac County, Illinois-Kentucky, CBC.

As predicted, the count was conducted during intermittent torrential rains (two to three inches) along with occasional gusty winds. Temperatures, however,



remained mild, which was nice, since we spent the whole day drenched. Once again, a fairly good diversity of waterfowl resulted in a rather successful day given the conditions (66 species, Table 1).

After the compilation at Frank Bennett's house, I left Mermet Lake at 7:00 P.M. and drove 90 minutes north to Carbondale, Illinois, for tomorrow's count. By 10:00 P.M. I was sound asleep in my hotel room. Do I know how to celebrate New Year's Eve, or what? Like I said, I really need to get a life!

January 1, 2003: At 4:15 A.M. on New Year's Day I joined Vickie Lang's field party for the Jackson County, Illinois, CBC. There was very little wind this morning and no rain, though it was heavily overcast with threatening precipitation.

The temperature was mild, the wind remained light, and we managed to avoid rain during the count. My field party had a successful day, recording 60 species (Table 1). Following the compilation in Carbondale, I began the six-hour drive back to the Quad Cities at 8:00 P.M. The two-day trip to southern Illinois and the long drive home had sapped my energy, and thoroughly convinced me that I was indeed out of my mind when I decided to attempt this marathon.

January 2, 2003: There was no count today. I had a respite before the odyssey entered its final stage with three consecutive counts that will end the 2002-2003 CBC count period.

January 3, 2003: Having caught up on sleep yesterday, at 3:00 A.M. I began the four-hour drive north to join Fred Leshner's field party for the Yellow River Forest, Iowa-Wisconsin, CBC. This was my northernmost count for the season. Still very tired, at last I was in the home-stretch of my adventure.

The weather was absolutely perfect for a CBC—mild temperatures, light wind, and clear skies. However, avian diversity tends to be low this far north during the winter. As expected, even with optimum weather conditions, our field party observed only 43 species (Table 1). I arrived home at 11:00 P.M. thoroughly exhausted.

January 4, 2003: After a mere two hours of sleep, I began the four-hour drive to the Middle Fork River Valley, Illinois, CBC at 3:00 A.M. Needless to say, I was extremely tired and found this to be one of the most difficult, even painful, drives of the entire marathon. After three long weeks of

nearly constant CBCs and very little sleep, my overall fatigue was evident. Mike Ward would be my field partner during this count.

My group had a good day, recording 50 species (Table 1). The weather was seasonably cold, and all day we contended with a moderately strong wind. However, the weather became a real factor during the drive home. Near both Peoria and Galesburg, Illinois, I encountered sleet, snow, and freezing rain. The interstate was so slippery that at one point I could not go faster than 25 mph. Consequently, the drive home lasted six hours instead of four hours. I finally arrived home at 11:00 P.M., physically drained.

January 5, 2003: Finally. The last day of the CBC count period arrived, my 20th count of the season, the Van Petten, Illinois, CBC. This is the seventh CBC I compile. Steve Hager and Brad Cosentino joined me for the final episode of my 2002-2003 marathon. At 3:15 A.M. we began the one-and-three-quarter-hour drive to our territory. After getting only three hours of sleep last night, I was truly glad to be near the end of my grueling, yet incredible, journey.

The weather during this final count was damp and dreary, but with little or no wind. With waterfowl fairly scarce, we were only able to record 45 species (Table 1). The best bird of the day, and perhaps of the entire CBC season, was a Solitary Sandpiper.

As darkness fell and the count ended, the approaching night was deathly still with not a breath of air moving. As we scanned the darkening grassland at the Green River State Wildlife Area, trying to locate a Short-eared Owl, I could not help but reflect on the amazing adventure I had just endured. Some of my fondest memories of this CBC odyssey, other than the birds themselves, will be the friendship and camaraderie shared with all the dedicated birders I met and worked with along the way. These folks made my experience enjoyable, and I thank them all.

When I got home I compiled the data from the day and literally passed out.

January 6, 2003: It's over. I slept until 3 P.M. I was mentally and physically drained and experiencing a bit of a let down. I had fallen into a rhythm of being constantly on the move, and now it will be another year before I can do a CBC again. Though I'm sad it's over, I'm glad it's over, too.

I had little time to ponder my escapade, as I needed to prepare for my next count—the midwinter bald eagle survey, which would take me back out into the field for three days.

Epilogue: During the marathon, the number of species identified by my field parties ranged from a low of 31 to a high of 77 and averaged 52.4 per count (Table 1). The total number of birds recorded ranged from 909 to 19,653 (Table 1). Overall, my groups observed 115 total species and 101,066 individual birds throughout the 20 CBCs (Tables 1 and 2). I drove 6322 miles and accumulated 331.25 hours of effort (this included travel time and miles, as well as daily compilation time). Consequently, I averaged 316 miles and 16.5 hours of effort per count. In an interesting time comparison, I spent 85.5 hours driving to and from the counts, 236.5 hours counting birds, and a mere 107.25 hours sleeping.

In conclusion, I am certainly not encouraging or even suggesting that people attempt a Christmas Bird Count marathon. However, I hope that those who read this article will be inspired to actively participate as much as possible in a program I am so passionate about. In the years to come, I believe that “citizen scientists” will play an ever-increasing and important role in the wildlife research and monitoring that is vital if we are to preserve the earth's biodiversity. As for undertaking a Christmas Bird Count marathon, I agree, a person has to be crazy...but next year, I go for 23!

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