

Grosbeak numbers were only approximately a third of last year's numbers (446 versus 1375) and Evening Grosbeak continues to decline (181 versus 291). This is the lowest number of Evening Grosbeaks counted since 1951–52 and is significantly less than the record of 3030 counted in 1981–82. The finch family also had several members that remained essentially unchanged in numbers from last year, including House Finch, Red Crossbill, and American Goldfinch. The rest of the finches had significant increases: Purple Finch (558 = 3.3 times last year), White-winged Crossbill (1574 = 10.0 times last year), Common Redpoll (5160 = 2.6 times last year), and Pine Siskin (4134 = 6.4 times last year).

## IOWA

*Chris Caster*

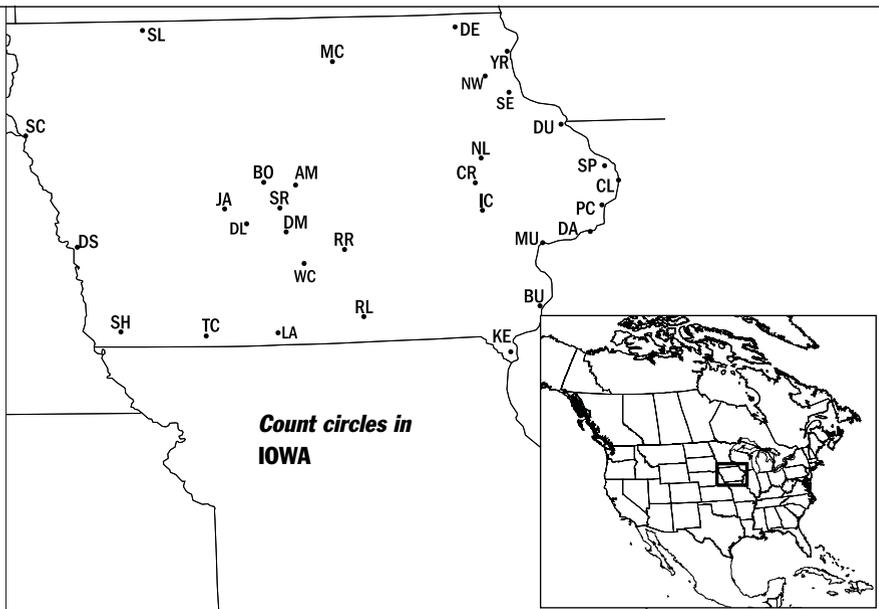
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The 2008–2009 Christmas Bird Count included 33 counts from Iowa. As usual, Keokuk (90) led the way with the highest tally. Other high counts included Saylorville (76), Rathbun (75), Davenport (74), and Red Rock (70). Like last season, winter came early and often, so there wasn't much open water during the count period. Precipitation events occurred nearly every other day, making conditions difficult. Nearly all counts had snow cover, and in the northeast it was significant. Amazingly, the species total was 136, slightly above the 10-year average.

Participants noted many good birds this year, including three species new to the count. Strong southerly winds on December 14th brought record late Tree Swallows to the Iowa City and Rathbun counts. Always a great bird in Iowa, a record late Cinnamon Teal was at Sioux City. Maybe most amazing was an Indigo Bunting, found across the border in Missouri on the Keokuk count December 15th. Eight Bohemian Waxwings in Ames were the most since 1986–87. Other very good birds includ-



ed a Turkey Vulture at Iowa City, an American Pipit at Clinton, and Prairie Falcons at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge and Lamoni. The most notable miss was surely Greater White-fronted Goose, as it had been reported on each of the last 10 counts.

Predictably, waterfowl numbers were greatly reduced. Canada Geese barely rebounded from last season's seven-year low. Snow Geese were below 30 birds for the second straight year. Trumpeter Swans were found in good numbers, but only two Tundra Swans were reported. Mallards were found at less than half their average, and American Black Ducks were quite scarce. Divers fared generally better than puddle ducks. Canvasbacks were the most numerous waterfowl, and more than 98 percent of them were at Keokuk. Common Goldeneyes and Common Mergansers were the next most plentiful, although in somewhat below-average numbers. Six Long-tailed Ducks were on three counts, but the only scoter was a Surf Scoter at Keokuk.

Tougher to find than last season, Gray Partridge were reported from just four counts. Ring-necked Pheasant numbers were down somewhat. Three Ruffed Grouse were at Decorah. American White Pelicans were at another record high and reported from six counts. Bald Eagles were found in large numbers. Single Northern Goshawks and Golden

Eagles were reported from four and three counts, respectively. American Kestrels numbers were the second lowest in 20 years. It was a good year for Merlins as they were reported on 10 counts, but only one Peregrine Falcon was found, at Burlington. It was a tough winter for any species requiring water, and Wilson's Snipes were no exception. Gull numbers were also below average. Two Thayer's, one Lesser Black-backed, and five Glaucous gulls were reported. Short-eared Owls had another good count, but all other owls were found in average or lower numbers.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers flew off the chart this season, and Northern Flickers also set a new record high. It was a good count for Northern Shrikes, although well short of last season's record. Horned Larks posted their best count in eight years, but Black-capped Chickadees had their lowest count in 20 years, and Tufted Titmice weren't far behind. Red-breasted Nuthatches fell off substantially from last year's irruption. Due to an exceptional berry crop in 2008, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, and Yellow-rumped Warbler were all found in record numbers. Twenty Northern Mockingbirds was unprecedented, with an amazing 10 at Lamoni. A Brown Thrasher was at Decorah, but no Gray Catbirds were reported. Sparrows performed fairly well, although Swamp Sparrows had the lowest

count in 18 years. Six Eastern Towhees and six Spotted Towhees were reported. A remarkable 12 Lincoln's Sparrows were at Boone. Dark-eyed Juncos, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings were abundant. Icterids were plentiful, with Brown-headed Cowbirds counted in record numbers. It was also a good count for finches. It was the highest Common Redpoll total in nine years. Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches made a good showing. Although this winter's invasion hadn't yet occurred, three White-winged Crossbills were reported. House Sparrows were at their lowest numbers in more than 20 years. They have been in steady decline since setting a high in 1989-90. Eurasian Tree Sparrows numbers reached a new high, with Princeton being the most northerly count.

## MISSOURI

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Missouri's 26 Christmas Bird Counts netted 147 species this season, one less than the record set last year. Three counts were done in windy conditions, two others in rain or sleet. Squaw Creek and St. Joseph in the northwest had some snow on the ground.

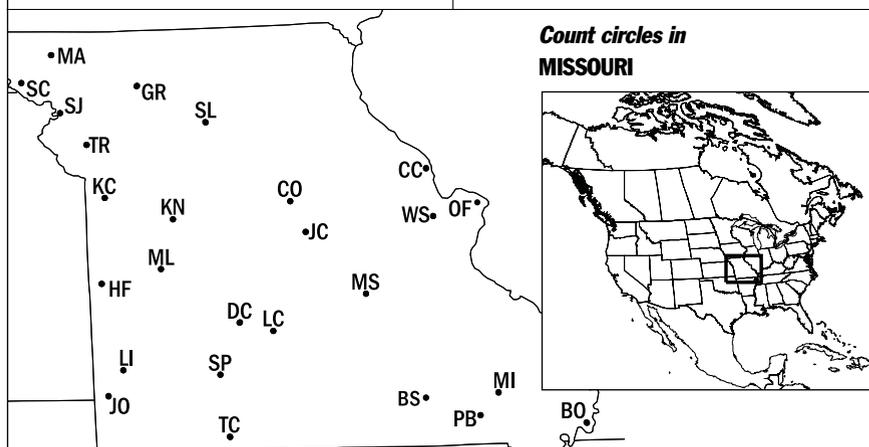
New this year was that the Orchard Farm count of 48 years was discontinued. The count circle "moved" 11.6 miles to the east-southeast so as to include the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and to avoid overlaps with two long-running Illinois counts, Elsah and Pere Marquette.

About half of the new Confluence CBC is land with little birding potential in the urban and suburban portions of northern St. Louis city and county. The remaining portion, however, contains 12 percent water and much more public land than does Orchard Farm, some with great potential, e.g., Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Jones Confluence State Park, and Columbia Bottom Conservation Area. Another difference is that 15 percent of the new circle lies in Illinois and was included in the count, whereas 27 percent of the Orchard Farm circle lies in Illinois and has never been included in the count.

Species that occurred in high numbers on Missouri counts include 374 Trumpeter Swans on 8 counts (337 at Confluence), 1875 Common Mergansers on 12 counts (1260 at Montrose Lake), 326 Horned Grebes (322 at Swan Lake), three Golden Eagles on 3 counts, 15 Merlins on 8 counts, 464 Bonaparte's Gulls on 3 counts, 22,600 Ring-billed Gulls on 20 counts (19,200 at Confluence, a state record), 46 Eastern Phoebes on 9 counts, five Northern Shrikes on 4 counts, 13 Sedge Wrens on 4 counts, four Common Yellowthroats on 3 counts, 100 Eastern Towhees on 23 counts, 55 Le Conte's Sparrows on 6 counts, 7000 Lapland Longspurs on 11 counts (400 at Liberal), and 206 Pine Siskins on 12 counts (116 at Columbia). Unusual species include three Great Egrets (Mingo), two Osprey (Clarence Cannon, Taney County), one Northern Goshawk (Squaw Creek), one Sora (Columbia), one Barn Owl (Big Oak Tree), three House Wrens (Mingo), one

Gray Catbird (Poplar Bluff), two Pine Warblers (Mingo), two Indigo Buntings (Confluence, Mingo), two Dickcissels (Big Oak Tree, Clarence Cannon), and one Common Redpoll (Squaw Creek). Bald Eagles were seen on all 26 counts. The new Confluence count added species not usually seen on Missouri CBCs: two Tundra Swans, one Laughing Gull, one Thayer's Gull, two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and one Glaucous Gull. A count week Lesser Black-backed Gull was also seen at Trimble. Species occurring in low numbers include Greater White-fronted Goose (only 199 birds, but on a record 10 counts), Ring-necked Duck (630), Northern Bobwhite (63), Red-breasted Nuthatch (7), Snow Bunting (5), and Eurasian Tree Sparrow (101, largely due to absence of the Orchard Farm count). Species not seen this year include Blue-winged Teal, Least Sandpiper, Greater Roadrunner, and Greater Prairie-Chicken.

Documentation of Brewer's Blackbirds continues to be a problem. The Missouri Bird Records Committee requires that all reports of Brewer's Blackbirds on CBCs be documented because the species is rare in winter in Missouri and it is difficult to distinguish from the somewhat more probable Rusty Blackbird. Brewer's Blackbirds were reported on eight CBCs this year (182 birds) but documented on only two (42 birds). I'm obliged to delete the report for species that require documentation but for which none is provided. The unfortunate ramification is that if the identification really was in error, then the birds observed were probably Rusty Blackbirds, a species that is showing one of the fastest declines in CBC data throughout the continent. (Eight counts reported a total of 1365 Rusties.)



## ARKANSAS

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As far as weather went for the 109th Christmas Bird Count in Arkansas, three counts had winds exceeding 15 miles per

hour, two counts had light rain, and two had heavy rain. One count had fog.

Heavy weather caused a rescheduling of several counts, resulting in days with fewer observers. The second weekend's close proximity to Christmas caused a reshuffling of many counts, with few occurring the second weekend.

Numbers of parties and miles set 35-year lows, but number of observers and hours remained normal. Number of individuals (938,571) dropped 85 percent. Overall number of species, 166, was a 35-year record. A total of 21 counts participated, with 12 counts exceeding 90 species; Holla Bend N.W.R. had the high species count at 120. Three counts set new highs: Crooked Creek Valley (77), Conway (112), and Lake Georgia Pacific-Felsenthal N.W.R. (98). Crooked Creek Valley had the most new species (6) and Holla Bend N.W.R. had the most new highs (8).

When discussing the region's bird highlights, numbers are "normalized" by party hours. Broad groups: geese were 253 percent above the 35-year average, dabblers were 100 percent, divers were 51 percent, shorebirds were 36 percent, and gulls were 68 percent. Semi-hardy lingerers were the highest in five years, and grassland species and upland game-

birds were the highest in eight years. Irruptives were 35 percent below the 35-year average and blackbirds were 91 percent below that average. Semi-hardy waterbirds were lowest in five years, raptors were lowest in 10 years, westerners were lowest in 12 years, and frugivores were lowest in 15 years.

Turning to individual species, the only "missed" regular-occurring bird was American Black Duck. Setting new 35-year highs were Greater White-fronted Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Northern Shoveler, Pied-billed Grebe, Snowy Egret, Sandhill Crane, Dunlin, Laughing Gull, Eastern Phoebe, House and Sedge wrens, Gray Catbird, Palm Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow, Dickcissel, and (alarmingly) Brown-headed Cowbird. In contrast, 35-year lows were set by Little Blue Heron, Eastern Screech Owl and Brewer's Blackbird (both for the second year in a row), European Starling, Great-tailed Grackle, and House Sparrow.

Regarding species of concern, Loggerhead Shrike has had three of its lowest tallies in 35 years within the last five seasons. Rusty Blackbird had four of its nine highest years within the last four seasons. Eurasian Collared-Dove rapidly increased between 1998 and 2002 but has had a more gradual increase to present.

Species showing up on only one count each included Trumpeter and Tundra swans, "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk, Thayer's Gull, and "Oregon" Junco, all at Holla Bend N.W.R.; Blue-winged Teal and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at Little Rock; Common Merganser and Sora at Fort Smith-Moffett; Pacific Loon and Nashville Warbler at Arkadelphia; Eared Grebe, Cattle Egret (cw), Black-legged Kittiwake (cw), and Dickcissel at Pine Bluff; Anhinga, Little Blue Heron, and Great-tailed Grackle at Texarkana; Green Heron and Red-cockaded Woodpecker at Lake Georgia Pacific-Felsenthal N.W.R.; "Kridler's" Red-tailed Hawk at Bayou DeView; Sandhill Crane at Wapanocca N.W.R.; Lesser Yellowlegs and Long-billed Dowitcher at Lonoke; Baltimore Oriole at Hot Springs Village; and Common Redpoll at Crooked Creek Valley.



**Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*), Arkadelphia, Arkansas.**  
Photo/Kelly Chitwood

The birds-of-the-year for the state's 109th count season are the first Arkansas CBC reports of Glaucous Gull at both Conway and Little Rock, and the second state record Broad-billed Hummingbird at Conway.

To the compilers and volunteers, you deserve a "thank you" for all your hard work.

## LOUISIANA

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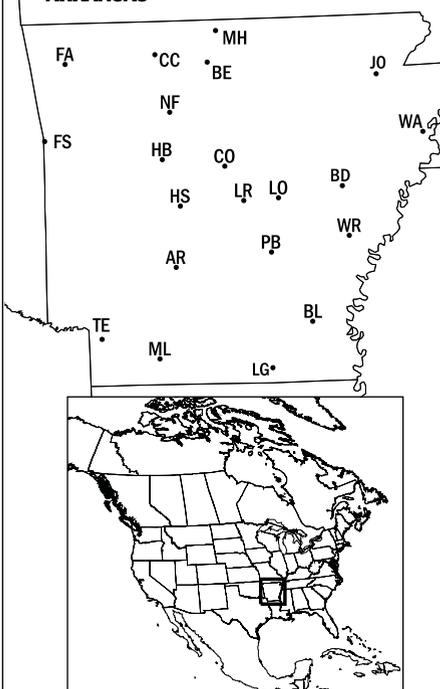
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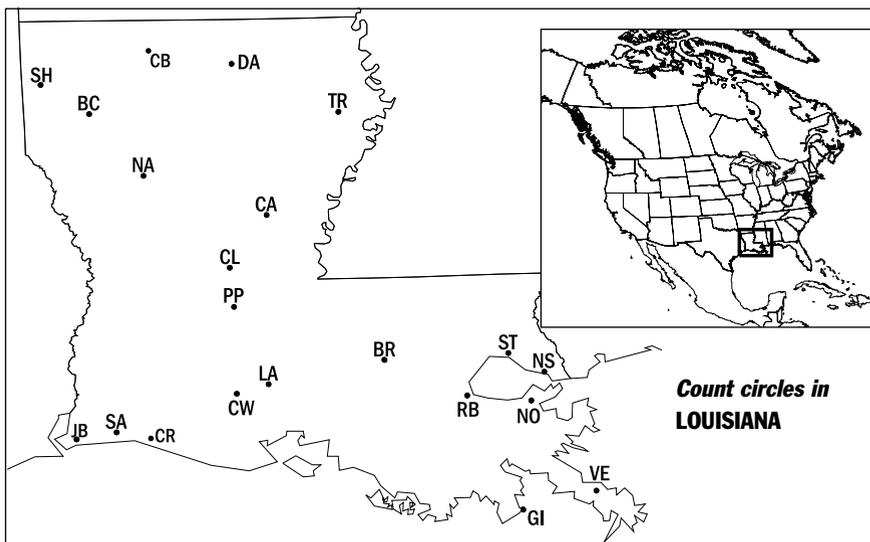
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For the first time in memory, a non-tidewater count recorded the most species seen on a Louisiana Christmas Bird Count. Top honors went to Crowley with 150 species. Lafayette, also lacking tidewater, came in a respectable second, at 146 species. Those two counts, sampling the rich rice-growing prairie region, are always productive, but the change is really a reflection of the diminishing fortunes of our southwest coastal counts. The state's bell-weather count for most of the last 50 years has been Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in coastal Cameron Parish, our only count to break 200 species. Hurricane Rita devastated the circle in 2005, and in 2008 Hurricane Ike's 10- to 15-foot surge swept the circle clean of much of the vegetation that had recovered since Rita. The numbers for Sabine (141), as well as nearby Johnson Bayou (100) and Creole (110), reflect that devastation, as well as the difficulty of recruiting participants to travel to count birds in a barren landscape.

### Count circles in ARKANSAS





Just 21 counts statewide accounted for 1348 party hours and 243 cumulative species, plus the usual Monk Parakeets in New Orleans and three additional count week species: a Greater Roadrunner east at D'Arbonne, a **Bell's Vireo** at Reserve (again), and a very unusual **Western Tanager** in New Orleans. Bossier-Caddo-Bienville recovered first place for north Louisiana counts with 128 species. St. Tammany tied Sabine for coastal honors with 141.

The bad news for Northern Bobwhite continues, with only a single count, Lafayette, reporting 11. But we tallied 350 Anhingas on 17 counts, amazing for a species that was rare here in winter until quite recently. Or what about 95 Inca Doves on 13 counts and 1080 White-winged Doves on 12 counts? The White-wings just edged out the 1066 Eurasian Collared-Doves on 17 counts.

No stunning vagrant turned up this year. Those that deserve top billing include three **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** for Crowley, a **Swainson's Hawk** in Lafayette, two **Whimbrels** at Grand Isle, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Sabine, a **Franklin's Gull** way north at Shreveport, **Least Flycatcher** at Venice, lingering **Say's Phoebes** at Catahoula and Crowley, a **Wood Thrush** along with an "**Audubon's Warbler**" at Grand Isle, a **Magnolia Warbler** also at Crowley, **Clay-colored Sparrow** at Venice, one **Pheuticus** sp. and a **Blue Grosbeak** at Crowley, an unusual inland **Painted Bunting** in Lafayette, five **Yellow-headed**

**Blackbirds** up at Cheneyville, an **Orchard Oriole** at Reserve, and a **Bullock's Oriole** at Creole.

Seven species of flycatcher was pretty good, but 12 species of warbler somewhat lackluster. Crested Caracaras, another species intent on becoming routine, were somewhat surprising on the immediate coast at Creole and Johnson Bayou. Four Broad-winged Hawks, one each at Grand Isle and Sabine, and two at Venice, continue recent trends. Thirteen piping Plovers at Grand Isle made a good showing, but most of our wintering population is missed by the count circles. Eight Wilson's Plovers made a good count at Sabine, though not unexpected. The best ducks were seven Surf Scoters on three coastal counts, and two Long-tailed Ducks at New Orleans. Common Ground-Doves were all inland. Only Venice recorded Groove-billed Ani and Chuck-will's-widow, where most expected. Grand Isle tallied the only Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Other warblers included **Prairie** at Venice and count week at New Orleans, **American Redstart** at Johnson Bayou, and **Ovenbirds** for Grand Isle and Venice. St. Tammany tallied a Summer Tanager, as did Baton Rouge count week. Eighteen Harris's Sparrows at Bossier, the only ones tallied statewide, made for a good count. It was gratifying to see the 11 Smith's Longspurs at Shreveport make the CBC tally. There was a lone **Dickcissel**, but it was new for Baton Rouge. Three Baltimore Orioles

or Baltimore/Bullock's made a good showing. Purple Finches staged a small incursion with seven on four counts, but Pine Siskins made a bolder statement, with 286 on nine counts.

#### **NORTH DAKOTA/SOUTH DAKOTA/ NEBRASKA/KANSAS/OKLAHOMA**

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The winter weather was definitely a major negative factor in this season's Christmas Bird Counts—at least in the Northern Plains. In the Dakotas, frigid, snow-bound conditions were responsible for the cancellation or rescheduling of many of the counts, especially in North Dakota. Ron Martin, for example, postponed and rescheduled the Garrison Dam count *five* times. Many compilers used the word "blizzard" to describe conditions encountered on count days. Also in North Dakota, J. Clark Salyer N.W.R. participants were treated to temperatures ranging from -33 degrees Fahrenheit to -4 degrees, and Icelandic S.P. lived up to its name with temperatures ranging from a low of -15 to a "high" of -10! In the Southern Plains, however, the weather was seasonal, and there were few cancellations and only a handful of postponements.

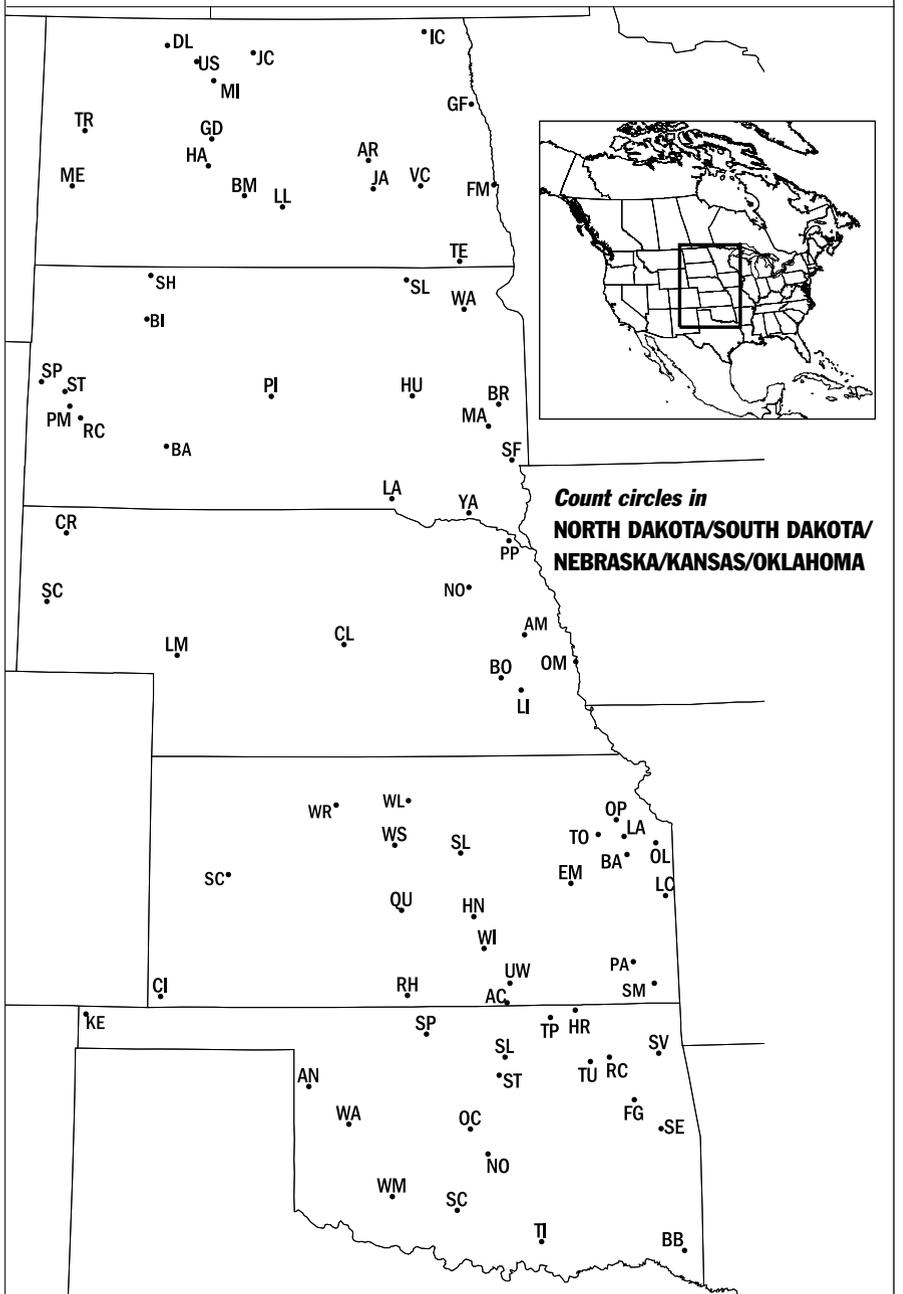
North Dakotans completed 17 counts this year. Garrison Dam and Minot tied for top species honors this year, with both counts tallying 45 species; Bismarck-Mandan and Jamestown were not far behind with 44 each. Many compilers noted that in addition to the harsh counting conditions presented by the weather, deep snows limited access to many parts of many count circles. One compiler lamented that "we were limited to what we could see from our car or living room windows." This was a good year for Purple Finches and Pine Siskins, and there were a few Hoary Redpolls reported around the state as well. There was, however, only a moderate invasion of Snowy Owls, with birds reported from Arrowwood (2), Des Lacs N.W.R.

(2), Grand Forks-East Grand Forks (cw), Hazen (cw), J. Clark Salyer, and Long Lake. In spite of the nasty early-season weather conditions, there were a few lingering waterfowl species of note, including Fargo-Moorhead's Bufflehead (cw), Canvasback, Common Merganser (cw), and Northern Pintail. Garrison Dam reported Gadwall and Long-tailed Duck, while Grand Forks also reported a count week Bufflehead, and Jamestown counters spotted Canvasback, Gadwall, and Northern Shoveler. Finally, the Varied Thrush from Icelandic; the White-winged Crossbill (cw) from Jamestown; the (overdue) Common Raven, Pine Grosbeak, and *both* crossbills at Minot; and the tardy Brown Thrasher found at Upper Souris rounded out the more interesting finds reported statewide this season.

Sixteen counts were completed in South Dakota this year; Pierre far outdistanced the competition with 71 reported species. As in North Dakota, this was a great season for Purple Finches and Pine Siskins in South Dakota, with both species being recorded statewide; Purple Finches were found on 9 of the 16 counts, and siskins on 12. Common Redpolls, however, were only reported from Bison, Brookings, Huron, Sioux Falls (cw), Shadehill, Sand Lake N.W.R., Spearfish, and Waubay N.W.R.; Hoaries were absent. A statewide survey of some of the more interesting birds includes Northern Saw-whet Owl from Bison, Northern Goshawk (cw) from Brookings, Chestnut-collared Longspur at Lake Andes. Pierre birders found 14 species of waterfowl, seven gull species, count week Sandhill Crane, plus Northern Goshawk and count week Northern Saw-whet Owl. Elsewhere, counters at Piedmont had the local specialty species such as Black-backed Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Canyon Wren, plus Bohemian Waxwing and Red Crossbill. Rapid City reported 13 waterfowl species and Varied Thrush in addition to the local specialty Lewis's Woodpecker, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Canyon Wren. Sioux Falls tallied



**Leucistic Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), Fort Gibson Reservoir, Oklahoma.**  
**Photo/Jeri McMahon**



Northern Goshawk (cw) and Red Crossbill, and Shadehill birders found Sandhill Crane and the only Gyrfalcon on this season's counts. Rounding out the remaining counts, Sand Lake N.W.R. participants found Snowy Owl (cw); Spearfish reported Lewis's Woodpecker, American Dipper, and Bohemian Waxwing; Sturgis also reported Lewis's Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, and the state's only Evening Grosbeaks; Waubay N.W.R. birders found Snowy Owl and Red Crossbill; and Yankton participants reported a very late Black-crowned Night-Heron.

Ten counts were completed in Nebraska this past season. Steve Dinsmore's Lake McConaughy count had 97 species this year, while Lincoln had 63. The Lake McConaughy count, as has become the custom, also had a nice assortment of great birds. The following were all seen on count day: American White Pelican; Trumpeter Swan; a good selection of waterfowl; eight species of gull, including Iceland, and Lesser, and Great Black-backed; Northern Saw-whet Owl; Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch; and Red Crossbill. Calamus-Loup birders also found Trumpeter Swans, and Pygmy Nuthatches were seen on both the Crawford and Scottsbluff (cw) counts. Finally, Purple Finches were located on 8 of the 10 counts this year, and Pine Siskins were reported from all 10 counts.

Kansas birders participated on 21 counts this year. Arkansas City had the



**Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*),  
Wichita, Kansas. Photo/Mike Heaney**

most species recorded on count day with 98. Without question, the blue ribbon, hands-down winner in the rare bird category in the plains states this year was the subadult male **Blue Grosbeak** found by Cheryl Miller on the Wichita count. The species is unexpected on any CBC in the United States, and last season three individuals were reported on counts, one each from Arizona, Louisiana, and Texas. The bird was photographed and seen by several CBC participants. Wow! Elsewhere in Kansas birders found the following interesting birds: Arkansas City participants found a Neotropic Cormorant, always a good bird in mid-winter in the central states, and a late American White Pelican; Cimarron National Grassland counters found local southwest specialties Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Scaled Quail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, White-winged Dove, Chihuahuan Raven, as well as McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. In eastern Kansas, Emporia recorded a late Turkey Vulture, as well as Smith's Longspur, Lawrence reported the only Common Redpoll from the state, while Linn County counters found a Common Yellowthroat, and the Olathe count hosted Trumpeter Swan. Oskaloosa-Perry Lake participants also tallied a late American White Pelican and two Surf Scoters. In central Kansas, Quivira N.W.R. birders had count week Tundra and Trumpeter swans, White-faced Ibis, and Sandhill Cranes, while just to the south on the Red Hills count, Sandhill Cranes lingered as well. The Salina count reported an out-of-range and out-of-season Pinyon Jay, and an even more out-of-season oriole sp. Rounding out the more interesting birds, Topeka birders reported the state's only Long-tailed Duck this year as well as Trumpeter Swan; Udall-Winfield had Smith's Longspur; and Wichita had Trumpeter Swan, White-winged Dove (cw), a Pine Warbler attending a feeder, the state's only Red Crossbill flock, and oh, yes, that Blue Grosbeak! A *Spizella* sparrow that looked for all the world like a Clay-colored was seen well at Webster

Reservoir, and Purple Finches were scattered around the state and recorded on 8 of 21 counts, while Pine Siskins were present on 15 of the state's counts.

Oklahoma birders completed 19 counts in the 109th CBC. This year, eight counts passed the century mark, with John Shackford's Oklahoma City leading the pack with 125 species, and Tishomingo N.W.R. taking a close second with 124. Around the state, counters noted many good birds. A late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was the highlight of the Broken Bow count, while Fort Gibson reported a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. In far-western Cimarron County, Kenton birders found a Green-tailed Towhee and Lesser Goldfinch, while Norman had a White-winged Crossbill that stayed long enough for many observers to enjoy and add to their state lists. In Oklahoma City, both Yellow-billed and Pacific (cw) loons provided excitement, as did a wayward Lesser Goldfinch, and the Long-tailed Duck (one also at Tulsa); the Northern Goshawk and the California Gull just added to the thrill. Birders on the Stephens County CBC were treated to a Neotropic Cormorant, while Spavinaw observers found Long-billed Dowitcher. Tishomingo N.W.R. birders had to "settle" for dowitcher sp. The White-tailed Kite on the Wichita Mountains count stayed for quite some time, much to the delight of all who were able to see the bird.

Besides the dowitchers, a few other good waders were found this season, with Greater Yellowlegs reported on 10 counts and Lessers on 2. Spotted Sandpipers were found at Broken Bow and at Norman, a flock of 10 Western Sandpipers was reported on the Salt Plains N.W.R. count, and a flock of six American Avocets was found at Tishomingo.

As has become my custom, let me conclude by expressing my appreciation to all the compilers who check and recheck their individual count's raw data. This ensures data accuracy and controls the continued excellent quality of the Christmas Bird Counts. Thank you for your continuing efforts!