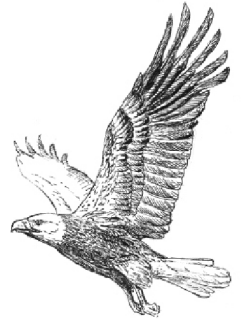




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 35, No 1

Spring 2024

Saturday, March 16 Field Trip to Princeton Marsh for migrating waterfowl and early spring migrants. Meet at Lock and Dam 14, Le Claire Iowa at 8:00am. We will look for diving ducks en route to Princeton Marsh. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Sunday April 14 Field Trip Cone Marsh. Meet at the Marquette Street Boat Ramp, Davenport at 7:00am. Cone Marsh southwest of Muscatine is great for viewing waterfowl and shorebirds. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Saturday April 27 Stroll Thru Springtime, Black Hawk State Historic Site, Rock Island. Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park. Bird Walk 7:00-9:00am Program 9:00-10:00am Wildflower Walk 10:00-Noon

Saturday May 4, Illinois Spring Bird Count. Contact Tim Murphy 309-764-9779 or for further information. <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/> Coordinated by Illinois Natural History Survey.

Saturday May 11, Field Trip Dorrance & Illiniwek Parks. Meet at the ball diamond parking lot at Dorrance Park, Port Byron, Illinois at 7 a.m. This field trip in the past has yielded outstanding numbers of migrating and breeding warblers, tanagers, orioles, and woodpeckers. For questions, contact qcaudubon@gmail.com.

Sunday June 2, Field Trip Mississippi Pallasades States Park and Lost Mound Wildlife Refuge, Savanna, Illinois. Meet at Shuler's Grove Park, Rapids City at 6 a.m. for carpooling. This is an all-day field trip that will include a stop for lunch. This field trip features late waterfowl, breeding warblers, forest and grassland birds. For questions, contact qcaudubon@gmail.com.

Thank you, Kevin Schuchmann, for this picture of Wild Turkeys taken in Clayton County during the 2023-2024 Christmas Bird Counts. More photographs from this year's CBCs, and a summary article are featured throughout this issue.



Audubon

The Quad City Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society

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From My Perch

Recently we completed our annual "Membership Drive". Really our drive simply consists of sending a reminder letter asking if people would want to be a local member of Quad City Audubon without joining National Audubon. If you join National Audubon and live within a zip code circle, you are automatically a local member. Many of you though carry dual membership. Thank you for doing so.

In addition many local members contribute extra money to us. Many more thanks for that. Membership is the only assured income that our chapter has. We do no other fundraisers and would be hard pressed to do so. We simply don't have the level of involvement that would allow us to plan and carry out many fundraising efforts. Thus the membership dues are exceptionally valuable.

How do we spend your money? Traditionally we like to support local conservation projects. We especially value projects that either increase or seek to preserve native habitats. We value projects that enhance bird populations. Purple Martin Houses have been an emphasis of ours lately. They are fairly expensive but this is a bird that is essentially totally dependent on human-supplied housing. They are a bird in decline as well. Plus, if you have a well-maintained and well-placed Purple Martin house, you will most likely have Purple Martins.

We value projects that contribute to our knowledge of birds and thus have helped to fund research by Dr. Brian Peer on Prothonotary Warblers and Jon Stravers on Red-shouldered Hawks and Cerulean Warblers.

We value projects that enhance public awareness and participation in birding activities. We supply bird feed for the Credit Island Feeder. We funded construction of a feeder in Sunset Park in Rock Island. We have supported birding activities at Nahant Marsh through purchases of binoculars and are currently planning to fund birding backpacks for public libraries.

Of course, at our membership meetings we have programs that promote a variety of environmental topics and birds as well which we hope are educational and entertaining (one can attend in person or via Zoom). Plus, we have regular field trips where we actually see and hear birds. Everyone is invited. Feel free to attend.

Tim Murphy
President - Quad City Audubon Society

Mission Statement

The Quad City Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds; a better understanding of the natural world; stewardship of natural areas and habitats; fellowship; improvement of community awareness of environmental issues; and education of youth for the benefit of future generations.

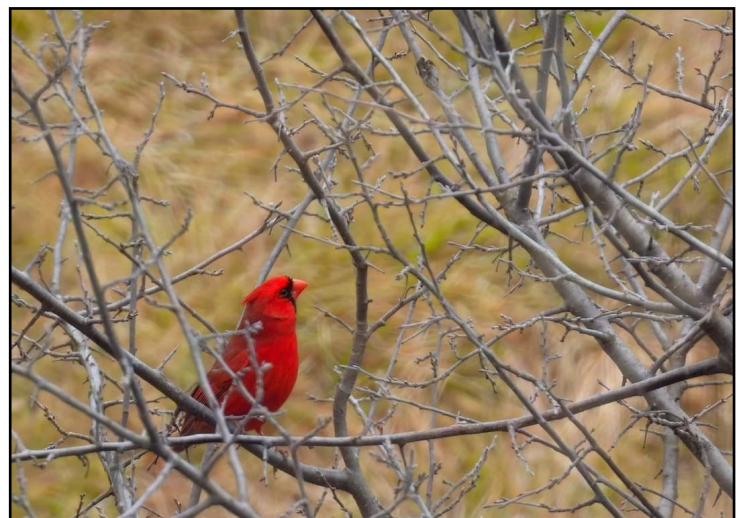
Thanks to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*. The next deadline is May 15th, 2024. Submissions are gladly accepted. Send to: Jason Monson, (309) 221-1177, jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at:
www.quadcityaudubon.org.



At left, Tom Ellsworth photographed this Carolina Wren on the Louisa Y Christmas Bird Count.

At right, Kevin Schuchmann photographed a Northern Cardinal in Clayton County, Iowa.



Spring Bird Count May 4

One of my more favorite events of the year is the annual Illinois Spring Bird Count. Originating in 1972, the Count attempts to identify and count all the birds in Illinois on a Saturday in May from the 4th to the 10th. It is organized on a county by county basis with each county having a compiler. A list of county compilers can be found at <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/county-compilers/>. The SBC is currently organized by the Illinois Natural History Survey and lots of information can be found on their website.

I am the compiler for Rock Island County, Bill Bertrand, Mercer County, Randy Nyboer, Whiteside County, and David Johnson, Henry County. We could always use people to help count and one can do so in a variety of ways.

1. One could simply watch their feeders and keep track of the number of birds that are observed. (One would report the most birds of any one species seen at one time at a feeder).
2. One could keep track of birds in their yards, neighborhood or local park. (Please contact you compiler in advance to avoid possible double counting).
3. One could join a field party. Most field parties start around dawn and bird until they have covered their assigned territory. Each field party should have a person who is fairly skilled at bird ID but others in the party can be helpers. An extra set of eyes, a compiler of sightings or a driver can be very helpful to a field party. Further though a field party is generally a full day event most people are able to accommodate those that are unable to commit to a full day of birding.
4. One could contact their compiler about allowing a field party or individual to count birds on private property. Obviously a lot of prime habitat is privately owned and many species go uncounted due to lack of access.

The Illinois Spring Bird Count is, as are Christmas Counts, citizen science at its best. Over time the counts provide valuable information documenting how bird populations have changed over time. This may be the bird populations as a whole or their timing regarding Spring migration. Finally, these counts are being replicated in an attempt to inventory a great many animal and plant populations.

So contact a compiler if you would like to get involved. But regardless, grab some binoculars, download ebird to help identify bird calls and enjoy the season.

Tim Murphy
President - Quad City Audubon Society



Above: Bald Eagle, photographed by Kevin Schuchmann in Clayton County, Iowa during this year's Christmas Bird Counts.

Below left: immature Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Mercer County.

Below right: Rough-legged Hawk. Bald Bluff.

Both hawk photos courtesy of Steve Hager, also taken during the 2023-2024 CBC season.



Summary of the 2023-2024 Local Christmas Bird Counts

Jason L. Monson – Kelly J. McKay – Mark A. Roberts – Cathleen D. Monson

The local Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season began on opening day of the count period, December 14th, 2023, with the Louisa Y Count. Ten participants among 4 field parties recorded 70 species and 5,198 individual birds. With this, it's third year, Louisa Y saw many new species added to the cumulative list, including: Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Sandhill Crane, Red-shouldered Hawk, Killdeer, Great Blue Heron, Rusty Blackbird, Pine Siskin, and Eastern Phoebe. Given the unseasonably warm weather and no snow cover, open country birds were in short supply, with only 11 Horned Larks observed on count day. Many species saw high numbers for this count, although blackbird numbers were low. In three years of Christmas Counts, the Louisa Y Circle has a cumulative species list of 88, fifty of which have been present on every count.

The Bald Bluff CBC was held on December 16th. Now in it's 11th year, 7 participants in 5 field parties tallied over 10,000 birds and 75 species. While diversity was a bit low for this count, numbers were relatively high compared to previous years. As with Louisa Y, open county birds were in low supply, with only Horned Lark (15) and Lapland Longspur (10) observed. In general, blackbird numbers were low. At the same time, European Starling numbers (5,719) were high. 24 Red Crossbills were observed, as were 3 Common Redpoll: a first for Bald Bluff. This relatively young count has a cumulative species list of 115, with 45 species present every count year.

The following day (December 17th), 21 participants in 9 field parties, and a single feeder watcher documented 96 species and over 240,000 birds on the Davenport CBC. Observers were treated to some very good birds this year: Mute Swan (3), Wood Duck (6), Black Scoter (1), Lesser Black-backed Gull (2), Common Yellowthroat (1), and Great Egret (1). Unlike Louisa Y and Bald Bluff, Davenport had no shortage of blackbirds, with Brown-headed Cowbird (5,749), Common Grackle (31,016), and Red-winged Blackbird (127,760), as well as 50,512 European Starlings. These four species accounting for over half of the birds observed on count day.

In spite of persistent high winds throughout the day, 9 observers in 5 field parties participated in the Andalusia-Buffalo CBC on December 18th. Adverse weather didn't prevent participants from observing some excellent birds that day, including: American White Pelican, Red-shouldered Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Common Redpoll, and Red Crossbill. Blackbirds were still relatively abundant, with 28 Brewer's Blackbirds, 145 Rusty Blackbirds, 1,618 Brown-headed Cowbirds, and 16,837 Common Grackles counted. 39,827 total birds and 86 species were reported.

Thirteen participants in 6 field parties teamed up to count nearly 28,000 birds the next day (December 19th) during the Clinton-Savanna CBC. Eighty-six species were observed. Notable species seen included 2 Greater Scaup, 1 Long-tailed Duck, 724 Sandhill Cranes, 1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 9 Fox Sparrows, 1,286 Trumpeter Swans, and 897 Tundra Swans.

On December 21st, 12,836 individual birds and 85 species were recorded by 15 observers in 7 field parties on the Princeton-Camanche CBC. Participants were treated to some real finds that day with 1 Black Scoter, 2 Long-tailed Ducks, 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 2 Northern Shrikes, and a Gray Partridge. Swan numbers, while not record-breaking, were respectable, with 843 Trumpeter and 823 Tundra Swans counted.

The Western Mercer County CBC was held on a rainy December 22nd. Twelve participants in 6 field parties braved the difficult weather to count 13,766 birds and 81 species. Sparrows were well represented on this count, with large numbers of White-crowned (75), White-throated (119), and Swamp Sparrows (115) tallied. In addition to some large numbers, a few noteworthy sparrow species were documented as well, including: 29 Fox Sparrows, and singles of Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow. Additionally, observers reported other notable species such as 1 Wood Duck, 6 Tundra Swans, and 1 Northern Shrike.

(continued on page 5)



Above: Tufted Titmouse



Right: Hermit Thrush

Both photos courtesy of Steve Hager during the 2023-2024 Christmas Bird Count Season.

Summary of the Local 2023-2024 Christmas Bird Counts

(continued from page 4)

On December 23rd, twenty-two observers in 7 field parties, and 7 feeder watchers tallied 91 species and over 11,000 individual birds on the Muscatine CBC. Participants were treated to some truly remarkable birds that day, such as 2 Peregrine Falcons, 7 Eastern Towhees, 1 Merlin, 2 American Goshawks, 1 Wood Duck, 1 Northern Shrike, 1 Northern Mockingbird, and 1 Lincoln's Sparrow.

Ten participants in 5 field parties started out the New Year counting nearly 20,000 birds amongst 67 species during the Eastern Mercer County CBC on January 1st. As with some previous counts, the persistent lack of snowfall and no accumulated snow of any kind led to very low numbers of open-country birds, with only 28 Horned Larks and 11 Lapland Longspurs counted that day. Blackbird numbers were low, except for Red-winged Blackbirds, which accounted for over half of all birds counted that day at 11,503 individuals. Some impressive numbers of birds, and noteworthy species were seen, including 400 Northern Cardinals, 96 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 327 American Robins, and a Northern Shrike. Now in its 13th year, the Eastern Mercer County CBC has documented a total of 97 different species, 38 of which have been present every year.

The Buchanan County CBC was conducted on January 2nd. In spite of having only 6 participants in 3 field parties, observers were able to see some impressive species: 1 Red-shouldered Hawk, 1 Northern Bobwhite, 1 Merlin, and 1 Northern Shrike were among the noteworthy species encountered on count day. A total of 3,939 birds and 58 species were documented.

Seven field observers in 4 parties tallied 4,586 birds during the Northwest Clayton County CBC on January 3rd. Fifty-nine species were observed. Participants were treated to some excellent finds that day, including: 2 Ruffed Grouse, 1 Killdeer, 1 Wilson's Snipe, 2 Northern Shrikes, and 1 Golden Eagle.

The following day (January 4th), seven participants in 4 field parties documented 7,364 birds and 77 species on the Southeast Clayton County CBC. Impressive numbers of waterfowl were recorded, with field observers encountering 40 Northern Shovelers, 467 Gadwall, 312 Green-winged Teal, and 532 Ring-necked Ducks. Additionally, there were some noteworthy species that day, such as 2 Golden Eagles, 4 Northern Shrikes, and a single Merlin.

The final day of the count period, January 5th, five field parties consisting of 10 observers counted over 10,000 birds and a total of 64 species on the Van Petten CBC. Early morning owling yielded some impressive numbers with 11 Northern Saw-whet Owls, and 3 Long-Eared Owls. Persistent birding the rest of the day brought out some remarkable species, treating participants to 1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and 2 Field Sparrows.

Every Christmas Bird Count Season presents its own set of challenges. Blizzards, ice storms, blowing and drifting snow, as well as the occasional pandemic can plague even the most determined birders. This year was the least wintry of seasons for many years. While the roads were clear, and we spent less time donning gloves and hats, we were presented with a host of other obstacles. High winds, heavy rains, and a lack of snow created a sometimes difficult and often unusual scene for many of us from December 14th through January 5th. Nevertheless, the many participants on these 13 local counts observed an impressive 409,027 individual birds along with 126 cumulative species this season. While we observed some seasonally unusual birds (Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, and Wood Duck, to name a few) other, ordinarily abundant winter birds, such as Dark-eyed Junco, American Tree Sparrow, Bald Eagle, and Snow Bunting seemed harder to come by. The compilers would like to extend their gratitude to the continued support of so many of you that have joined us for years, and to the first-timers and new birders who may have taken a chance on their first Christmas Count. Without you, we couldn't do it. Thank you all, so much, for your support. We look forward to seeing you next year!



Left: White-breasted Nuthatch

Right: White-throated Sparrow

Both photos courtesy of Steve Hager during the 2023-2024 Christmas Bird Count Seasons