

seems we were going to have to make a *subjective* decision after all. Fasten your seat belts, please.

We are left with five birds, each with a total score of 12 points: Eurasian woodcock, red-necked stint, brambling, northern lapwing, and long-billed murrelet. I'll eliminate the woodcock first. You'll recall that its identification was partially based on bones. According to Peterjohn's *The Birds of Ohio*, however, "This skeletal material was deposited in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, but it is no longer in the museum's collections and its whereabouts is unknown." Oops. Next to go is the lapwing, because apparently no photographs were obtained. If they had been, this bird would have graded out at 13 points, and would thus be the undisputed winner. At least this offers some measure of revenge against a bird that had the gall to leave 20 minutes before I got there. Hah. Next to go is the red-necked stint, a species that is now pretty much annual a few hours' drive away on the Atlantic coast. Sorry, comrade. Now we are down to two challengers, the brambling and the long-billed murrelet. And since I've always felt some distaste for feeder birds, especially those that make me wait thirteen hours before I see them, it seems we have a winner. And finally—in reverent hushed tones of course—we present the Bird of the Century, the Seneca County long-billed murrelet, seen and studied by some 300 people from 12 November to 18 November 1996.

We've come a long way in the 1900s, from shooting our last passenger pigeon (for eating corn) and capitally punishing our only Harris's hawk (for harassing poultry); all the way to a weeklong group hug and learning-fest over a drably-plumaged Asian alcid. I don't know what that passenger pigeon would tell us if he could speak, but I think he might at least acknowledge that we are headed in the right direction on our perpetual road trip. That it might be too late for his kind, but not for ours. And that's a pretty good way to start a new century, I should think.



The 1990s were good years for vagrant bird species. In fact, two species tied for the Bird of the Decade—northern lapwing and long-billed murrelet. Forced to abandon his professedly objective criteria, the author crowned this long-billed murrelet the Bird of the Century. This bird was cooperative for over 300 onlookers and stayed at the Beaver Creek Reservoir, Seneca Co., from 12-18 November 1996. Photo by Vic Fazio.

The 1999-2000 Christmas Bird Counts

by Ned Keller

This year, the 100th year for the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, we report the results from 62 count circles. Two of them are centered outside Ohio, but include substantial portions of their areas in Ohio. Five of the counts are "unofficial" counts. These counts are conducted along the same lines as the official counts, but for various reasons the participants choose not to report them to the National Audubon Society. We want to thank the compilers of all the counts, official or otherwise, for taking the time and effort to send their results to us for this report.

Each column in the report is headed by the name and date of the count. The number in parentheses corresponds to the numbered circle on the accompanying map. We have dropped the regional groupings this year. With the increased number of count circles, we could no longer fit the results onto two sets of pages (a northern group and a southern group); and instead of trying to find three geographic ranges that made sense, we just lumped all the counts into one alphabetic listing. We have added two additional columns, for total individuals on all counts, and for number of circles reporting each species.

We received documentation for many particularly rare birds. Those records are marked by an asterisk in the report. As always, we report the information sent to us as received by the compilers, even when documentation was omitted. We did, however, drop a few obvious exotics, and corrected a couple of obvious errors. We included reports of trumpeter swans, even though they are almost certainly part of the introduced population. This species is likely to become established at some point, so we might as well start keeping track of how many winter here.

This past year, Ohio counters found a total of 1,087,541 individual birds of 147 full species, plus three more species during count weeks. Seventeen of those species were represented by only a single bird, and five more species appeared on only a single count. At the other end of the spectrum, 14 species were found on all 62 counts. The most common species, European starling, was represented by 196,010 individuals.

Counters at Millersburg found 89 species to lead the state this year, followed by Toledo with 87 species, Elyria-Loran with 83 species, Cuyahoga Falls with 82 species, and Cincinnati, Gypsum, and Mansfield with 80 species each.



Northern harriers were tallied on 45 CBCs in Ohio. This male was photographed at Killdeer Plains WA, Wyandot Co., by Len Powlick during the winter season.

Northern Gulls Invade Dayton by Dave Dister

On Friday evening, 15 January 1999, I received a phone call from Charlotte Mathena regarding a drake harlequin duck reported from Sidney along the Great Miami River (GMR). Wow, I thought, this is super! I had been planning to bird the Lakefront from Toledo to Cleveland over the weekend, and I could just include a short detour on my way north. Saturday morning, despite the long drive ahead, I decided to take the time to first check the GMR at several spots in downtown Dayton.

Much of the river was still frozen, though much thawing was expected later in the day. My first stop was beneath a low dam, where rapids kept the water open. I scanned the gulls on a nearby icy bar, and a very large pale bird came into view. It was uniformly whitish over most of its plumage—was it a glaucous gull? Then I noticed light-brown flecking overall—yes, a first-winter glaucous gull! A nearby herring gull was approximately the same size, so it clearly wasn't an immature Iceland gull. Wow! As far as I knew, a glaucous gull had never been seen in the Dayton area.

Excited, I drove next to a point half a mile downstream, where the Mad River empties into the GMR. More gulls were there, among them a dark-winged individual. It was very large, with a very black back and wings at rest, and pink legs...it had to be a great black-backed gull, and an adult at that! This is too much, I thought, and looked around for other birders, but there was no one nearby. As I continued to scan to my left, two more large pale gulls were evident at the edge of the ice—two more first-winter glaucous gulls! I couldn't believe it...I was in downtown Dayton, not the Maumee River rapids in Toledo!

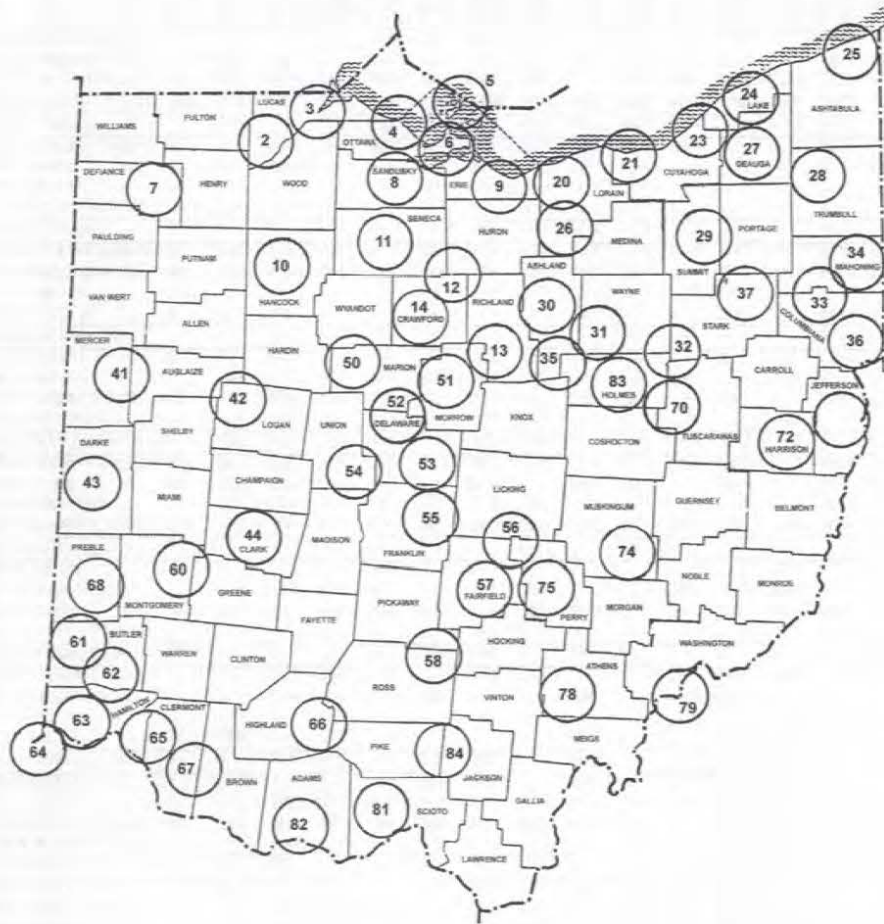
After checking a few spots further downstream, I drove home and made a flurry of mostly ineffective phone calls. Frustrated, I decided everyone was in Sidney checking out the harlequin duck. They would have wanted to know about an unprecedented accidental showing of four northern gulls in southwest Ohio, I was sure. I left the area, somewhat reluctantly heading north to bird the Lakefront via Sidney, where I located the stunning harlequin duck. After an underwhelming birding trip to Lake Erie, I called Charlotte when I got back to Dayton. Fortunately, she and several others got the word in time to see the great black-backed and two of the three glaucous gulls.

The great black-backed gull *Larus marinus* and the glaucous gull *Larus hyperboreus* are considered accidental visitors away from the Ohio shores of Lake Erie (Peterjohn 1989). There are approximately four records of single glaucous gulls in central and southern Ohio prior to this sighting (here I regard US 30 and south as representing central and southern Ohio). Within this same area, there are approximately 22 sightings of great black-backed gulls, most of which were of single birds. In relative frequency, therefore, the great black-backed is five times more likely to be seen than the glaucous gull in the central and southern counties.

The northern gull invasion of the century in southwest Ohio may not easily be eclipsed, especially in light of proposed development along the GMR in downtown Dayton and elsewhere along urban riverfronts. The paddleboat and casino mentality has no patience with esthetics and critical winter staging areas for wayward larids. Gravel and sand bars are considered wastelands by all too many urbanites inhabiting such riparian areas. If they only knew what they were missing...

REFERENCE

Peterjohn, B. 1989. *The Birds of Ohio*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
See Don Burton's article in Vol 22, No 2, last winter's *The Ohio Cardinal*, for a description of unusual weather conditions that may have influenced these sightings. —Ed.



The 1999-2000 Christmas Bird Count areas. Numbers within circles correspond to count numbers in the preceding article. The circle without a number indicates the Steubenville count from which we received no report.