

## Winter 2007-2008 Overview and Reports

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Although winter may be thought of as the season that produces the fewest species, reporters shared records of 187 species from December 2007 through February 2008. That's 45% of the 420 species *ever* recorded in Ohio (as determined by the Ohio Bird Records Committee), not a bad winter season total at all. One of these was a waif – European Goldfinch – and a few others fall into the realm of hypothetical until good documentation is provided. Nine species were reported that are listed on the Ohio Bird Records Committee's Review List.

Although rife with potential inaccuracies, the Internet has made sharing bird records much easier and created new ways of tracking bird observations. From December 2007 through February 2008, Ohio observers on the Ohio Birds listserv alone filed over 1,100 reports. Combined with the written reports that we received, Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data, and other sources of information, more field data about our birds can be assembled than ever before.

Of course, it is necessary to carefully vet reports for accuracy, particularly CBC records. Despite

publishing some inaccurate records and misidentifications, CBCs are a wealth of solid data about wintering birds. Because of their long time span – the inaugural CBC dates to 1900 – one is able to use this information to decipher long-term trends. This is especially true of common, easily recognized species or species such as winter finches that are sought after and of great interest to wintertime birders. I examined large stores of CBC data, and used it in this seasonal report to illustrate changes in Ohio species.

The Ohio Division of Wildlife's bi-weekly waterfowl survey (ODOW WWS) is also a valuable source of information. The survey covers seven areas of Lake Erie in northwestern Ohio, mostly in Ottawa and Lucas counties, from 01 Sep to 01 Jan.

Winter is becoming an especially important season to monitor. As temperatures continue warming, we expect our avifauna to change, and this will include more winter records of the hardy and half-hardy species (defined by their ability to persist though our winter season). This season, record late dates were set for Great Egret, Green Heron, Osprey, Virginia Rail, Sora, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Least Flycatcher, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Six species of warblers turned up – Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Pine, Palm, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat – but none were totally unexpected and all have many prior winter records.

Several sharp observers

documented identifiable subspecies, like the “Oregon” subspecies of the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis oreganus*). Subspecific variation may represent the early stages of speciation, and there is much to be learned about regional populations by observing the distribution of these regional variations. Some distinctive subspecies – like Dark-eyed Junco – have been split before, and may someday be again. An impressive 10 Palm Warblers were reported this winter, yet no subspecific identification was provided for them. There are two distinctive subspecies: the typical Ohio migrants, which are the dull “western” or nominate subspecies *Dendroica palmarum palmarum*, and the rare – for us – “eastern” subspecies *D. p. hypochrysea*, which is much brighter and more extensively yellow on the underparts. For the most part, these two forms breed and winter in separate regions, and it is still important to gather data about their distribution.

Although Ohio no longer seems to experience the big winter irruptions of yore, a decent number of boreal species did visit. It was a good year for Northern Shrike, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Common Redpoll, and Purple Finch. Lesser numbers of Pine Siskins, along with a handful of Evening Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills, were reported. Especially exciting among this crowd were two well-documented Bohemian Waxwings, and the Pine Grosbeaks in the Oak Openings that carried over from the fall season.

Gulls are another excellent avian indicator of human-induced changes

to the landscape, and this was a good winter for laridophiles. At least 13 of the 19 gull species ever reported in Ohio were found, many in excellent numbers. Our Lake Erie is a real standout environment for enthusiasts seeking the members of this challenging group. Record numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull, a European vagrant first recorded in Ohio in 1977, were tallied. White-winged gulls also appeared in good numbers, at times dazzling observers with their abundance at traditional Cleveland hotspots.

In analyzing the long-term picture of most of the species reported this winter, I was encouraged to see that seemingly more species were up than were down. Perhaps not everyone will rejoice at the growth of all of these species, but most increases are certainly welcome. Cumulative record-high totals were recorded on statewide CBCs for Canada Goose, Double-crested Cormorant, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Cooper’s Hawk (ties previous high), Red-shouldered Hawk, Merlin, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Pipit, Eastern Towhee, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, and American Goldfinch.

The following species were recorded at the second highest numbers ever: Wild Turkey, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Downy Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow,

Lapland Longspur, and Common Grackle.

Several patterns stand out when looking at these successful species. For forest-dependent species, long-term regeneration and maturation of wooded habitats is no doubt increasing their numbers, as with Hairy and Pileated woodpeckers. In the case of the Wild Turkey, active reintroductions by the Ohio Division of Wildlife have accelerated recovery. The exponential explosion of Double-crested Cormorant numbers is likely linked to improvement in water clarity in the Great Lakes, which ironically is largely an artifact of the introduction of non-native invasive zebra and quagga mussels. With the raptors, there seems to be two major factors: the inherent adaptability to adjust to human-induced habitat alterations and the continued long-term recovery from DDT, dieldrin, and other pesticides. We have probably experienced other invasions of Northern Saw-whet Owls, but it took the concerted efforts of focused researchers to bring this phenomenon to light, as they did last fall/early winter.

And finally, we have the vultures. These two species bear watching in future winters. Neither is especially winter-hardy, and southern Ohio represents the northern limits of where they normally overwinter. Vultures are big, conspicuous, easily identified and undoubtedly CBC censuses paint an accurate picture of their winter abundance. If some bird populations are to shift northward as a result of global warming, one might expect these two to be at the forefront of that group. A number

of the other record-breakers cited above are birds that might be termed “half-hardy” and often bail out or perish in severe winters. It will be interesting to watch future winter trends of these species as well.

Everyone loves a rarity, and a number of those excited birders this winter. The following noteworthy species were reported: Western Grebe (currently lacking documentation), Northern Gannet, an unidentified *Plegadis* ibis, California Gull, White-winged Dove, Eurasian Collared-Dove (but, are we really excited over this?), Rufous Hummingbird, Harris’s Sparrow, Dickcissel, Pine Grosbeak, and Hoary Redpoll.

Taking a big-picture view, I believe it is important to critically study and evaluate *common* species, not just rarities. We have far more data and a much better understanding of common, well-established species than we do for most rarities. Significant evidence of changes to the environment will in most cases be better supported by shifts in established bird populations than with rare species well out of range. However, it is the rare birds that generate an inordinate amount of interest and attention. This isn’t to say they aren’t important. Trivializing the first record of Ross’s Goose in Ohio in 1982 would have been a mistake. That bird was the vanguard of what has become a regular wave of these little Arctic-nesting geese, with the numerous Ohio records reflective of the overall population boom. Records of western hummingbirds in the east have exploded, evidence of changing

environmental factors influencing their wanderings. Ohio's second recorded hummingbird species, Rufous Hummingbird, didn't show up until 1985. But I encourage birders to take note of and share information on *all* of our species. Contributing records that can be compiled and published in journals such as *The Ohio Cardinal* helps to create long-lasting databases that enable scientists to better document the effects on birds resulting from large-scale environmental changes, human-induced or otherwise. I extend a big thanks to the nearly 400 reporters who selflessly shared their winter season records of both the common and the rare, thus allowing for reports like this one to be compiled.

The following conventions are used throughout all seasonal reports. Common names that have been underlined are on the Ohio Bird Records Committee (OBRC) Review List, meaning that observers should send supplemental documentation of these species to the OBRC for consideration. **County names** are in bold and italicized. Taxonomic order and nomenclature follow published guidelines from the North American Check-list Committee of the American Ornithologists' Union (1998: 7th edition), including published supplements complete through the 48th Supplement. The following abbreviations are used in these accounts:

CBC = Christmas Bird Count (held 14 Dec 2007 to 15 Jan 2008)

*et al.* = *et alia*, "and others"

*fide* = "on the authority of"; typically a record submitted by a third party

LEWB = Lake Erie Western Basin

m. obs. = multiple observers

NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

OBRC = Ohio Bird Records Committee

ODOW = Ohio Division of Wildlife

WA = Wildlife Area

WWS = Winter Waterfowl Survey

### **Greater White-fronted Goose:**

At least 137 individuals were reported from 13 counties. The largest concentration was at Killdeer Plains WA (*Wyandot*), where up to 20 birds were seen. Like many of the Arctic-nesting geese, white-fronts are on the increase.

### **Snow Goose:** About 334

individuals were reported from 16 counties, evidence of their increase in winter numbers in recent years. Noteworthy was a bird in *Athens* in late January (Lynda Andrews, Caitlin Knight); there are relatively few reports from unglaciated Ohio. The largest concentration was 190 in *Clinton* on 16 Feb (Larry Gara). Of those reports that mentioned color morphs, slightly over half were blue morphs.

**Ross's Goose:** Records of this small goose have risen dramatically since the first report in 1982. This season, 10 individuals were found in seven counties: Clinton, Cuyahoga, *Delaware*, *Licking*, *Montgomery*, *Ottawa*, and *Warren*. Several were well photographed. Observers should be aware of the possibility of hybrids with Snow Goose. Ross's Goose has been recently removed from the OBRC Review List.

**Cackling Goose:** Cackling fever has struck Ohio with a vengeance,



*Even at long-range, the Lilliputian size of this Cackling Goose is obvious when contrasted with the maxima subspecies of Canada Goose. Taken at Clear Fork Reservoir in Richland County on 18 Jan by Cheryl Harner.*

and observers are on the watch for this micro-goose, which was split from Canada Goose in 2004. This winter, 22 birds were reported from eight counties. Highs included six in **Wayne** on 10 Dec (Su Snyder, Samuel Weaver), five in **Pike** on 27 Jan (Doug Overacker), and three others in **Wayne** on 22 Dec (Jim McCormac, Jen Sauter). Cackling Goose has been recently removed from the OBRC Review List.

**Canada Goose:** Reported abundantly statewide. Exceptional concentrations were 10,874 on the Ottawa CBC on 05 Jan, 2,500 in **Clark** on 24 Feb (Doug Overacker), and at least 1,500 in **Mahoning** on 10 Dec (Craig Holt). All told, 116,841 individuals were reported

statewide on CBCs. The total wintering population may exceed one-quarter million birds.

**Brant:** A late migrant, also unusual in that it was away from the Lake Erie shoreline, was found in **Mahoning** on 15 Dec (Craig Holt; Bob & Denise Lane).

**Mute Swan:** This jumbo invader appears to be gaining traction, as evidenced by 53 in **Stark** on the Quail Hollow CBC, held 29 Dec, and 25 in **Columbiana** on 05 Jan on the Salem CBC. Many individuals and small groups were reported from around the state, and 153 were reported collectively on CBCs. The ODOW WWS detected 15 in the LEWB.

**Trumpeter Swan:** Reported in small numbers from the usual release sites in northwestern Ohio, but still infrequently reported away from these areas. Appears to be largely holding its own, but not aggressively expanding. Strongholds include Killdeer Plains WA in *Wyandot*, where up to 22 were tallied, and Ottawa NWR in *Ottawa*, where at least 37 wintered (ODOW WWS).

**Tundra Swan:** The biggest assemblages were 344 in *Ottawa/Lucas* on 05 Jan (ODOW WWS), 260 in *Erie* on 22 Dec (ODOW WWS), and 182 in *Trumbull* on 08 Dec (Carole Babyak); the latter record represents migrants. A flock of 47 was found in *Clark* the same day (Doug Overacker), and smaller groups were reported at several other locales in early December. ODOW WWS detected 550 in the LEWB.

**Wood Duck:** Relatively few widely scattered individuals were reported. The largest concentration was 15 in *Hamilton* on 26 Feb (Jason Cade). CBCs statewide reported a total of 53 individuals.

**Gadwall:** One of our hardier dabblers; many individuals were reported statewide. Noteworthy concentrations included 134 in *Erie* on 17 Dec (Lake Erie Islands CBC), 133 in *Hamilton* on 21 Jan (Robert Foppe) and 75 in *Stark* on 29 Dec (Ben Morrison). ODOW WWS detected 530 in the LEWB and 225 elsewhere.

**American Wigeon:** The gravel pits at Camp Dennison in *Hamilton* produce significant waterfowl concentrations, and 120 wigeon

added to the bounty on 26 Feb (Jason Cade). Much smaller numbers were reported throughout the season and statewide where open water occurred. ODOW WWS detected 50 in the LEWB and 148 elsewhere.

**American Black Duck:** A good southern Ohio midwinter concentration was 75 in *Pike* on 27 Jan (Doug Overacker). Widely reported in small numbers statewide, with occasional larger concentrations. Statewide CBCs reported nearly 3,000 individuals. ODOW WWS detected 17,550 in the LEWB and 5,644 elsewhere.

**Mallard:** Reported statewide, as usual, and in good numbers wherever open water could be found. Exceptional were 1,200 in *Pike* on 27 Jan (Doug Overacker). ODOW WWS detected 53,350 in the LEWB and 39,660 elsewhere in the state.

**Blue-winged Teal:** By far the least hardy of our ducks (with many departing for the Neotropics in winter), so records in this season are always noteworthy. Two were in *Scioto* on 29 Dec (Portsmouth CBC), five in *Van Wert* on 15 Dec (Van Wert CBC), and eight in *Preble* on 14 Dec (Preble CBC).

**Northern Shoveler:** This half-hardy dabbler has been on the upswing as a wintering species. Peterjohn (2001; p. 75) notes, "winter residents are regularly observed only at Castalia." The winter 1992-93 issue of *The Ohio Cardinal* 16(2), p. 38, states, "The 52 reported from Castalia 2/1... represents a truly colossal total for winter." This winter, at least 500



individuals were reported from 14 counties. Exceptional were 80 in **Licking** on 15 Dec (Buckeye Lake CBC), 75 in **Clark** on 05 Dec (Brian Menker) and 70 in **Hamilton** on 12 Jan (Brian and Gale Wulker).

**Northern Pintail:** About average numbers for the winter season, with migrants filtering back into the state towards the season's end, as usual. Some of the larger concentrations included 90 in **Hamilton** on 26 Feb (Jason Cade), and 32 in **Tuscarawas** on 15 Dec (Ed Schlabach). ODOW WWS detected 100 in the LEWB and 226 elsewhere.

**Green-winged Teal:** These elfin-sized dabblers often tarry into winter, and typical small numbers were reported throughout the season. Scattered individuals can be expected where open waters support good waterfowl concentrations. Four at the tundra-like preserve of the Wilds in **Muskingum** on 19 Jan (Jim McCormac) were truly tough. ODOW WWS detected 200 in the LEWB and 15 elsewhere.

**Canvasback:** Small numbers were recorded on inland water bodies, with 70 in Hamilton on 26 Feb noteworthy (Jason Cade). As always, Lake Erie is the place for winter Canvasbacks. In **Lake**, 164 were seen on 20 Jan (John Pogacnik), and at least 100 were in **Lorain** on 24 Feb (Paula Lozano). The Maumee Bay region of western Lake Erie always supports the biggest concentrations, reflected by the 4,040 counted on the Ottawa NWR CBC on 05 Jan.

**Redhead:** About average numbers were reported throughout inland Ohio, wherever open water could be found. The largest midwinter concentration was 400 tallied on the Ottawa NWR CBC, **Ottawa/Lucas**, on 05 Jan. Migration was in progress by late winter, as evidenced by 364 in **Hamilton** on 28 Feb (Robert Foppe). ODOW WWS detected 203 statewide.

**Ring-necked Duck:** Wintering numbers seem to be on the increase. This season, flocks ranging from a few birds up to several dozen were reported from at least one-quarter of Ohio's 88 counties. Exceptional were 363 reported on the Cincinnati CBC on 30 Dec, and 250 in **Muskingum** on 05 Jan (Ben Morrison). A quick look back to winter 1987-88 reveals reports from eight counties totaling 337 individuals. This winter, 1,523 were reported just on CBCs. ODOW WWS detected 1,359 statewide.

**Greater Scaup:** Confusion with the quite similar Lesser Scaup somewhat clouds the waters when trying to accurately ascertain the status of scaup. The ODOW bi-weekly aerial waterfowl flights (WWS) of western Lake Erie provide excellent records of waterfowl numbers, but lump the two species of scaup as they are essentially identical from high in the air. Open Lake Erie waters are where peak numbers of Greater Scaup occur, but only 58 were reported definitively on CBCs, nearly all from Lake Erie. But, 1,718 scaup species were reported on the ODOW WWS, again mostly from Lake Erie. Many of the unidentified

birds were likely Greater Scaup.

**Lesser Scaup:** For the most part, only small numbers scattered throughout the state where open water occurred. Noteworthy were an estimated 5,000 in *Lucas* in Maumee Bay on 01 Dec (Doug Overacker). Migration had begun by the season's end, as evidenced by 150 in *Hamilton* on 26 Feb (Jason Cade). ODOV WWS detected 25,000 "scaup species" in Maumee Bay and 226 elsewhere.

**Harlequin Duck:** A lone female on the banks of the Ohio River in *Clermont* on 26 Feb was an exceptional find (Donald Morse, m. obs.). Surprisingly, there were no reports from Lake Erie, where this sea duck would be far more expected.

**Surf Scoter:** Small numbers were reported from large inland reservoirs and along Lake Erie. Singles were found in *Ashtabula*, *Clinton*, *Erie*, *Lucas*, *Richland*, and *Warren*. Seven were found on the Lakewood CBC in Cuyahoga on 29 Dec. John Pogacnik reported at least three flybys in *Lake*. Mussel beds (presumably the introduced Zebra and/or Quagga Mussels) off Rocky River and Sims Park in *Cuyahoga* annually attract and hold scoters, and at least one dozen were reported from these locales.

**White-winged Scoter:** Singles were reported from *Ashtabula*, *Clermont*, *Clinton*, *Darke*, *Lucas*, *Mahoning*, *Richland*, and *Warren*, and several birds frequented the Cleveland lakefront in *Cuyahoga*. John Pogacnik

reported two in Erie on 01 Dec, and observed a total of 23 flying by over Lake Erie from his *Lake* home throughout the period. Eight were found on the Maumee River in *Wood* on 04 Jan (Tom Kemp).

**Black Scoter:** Sparingly reported, with singles in *Ashtabula* and *Richland*, 11 from *Lake*, and at least a dozen from the traditional locale off Rocky River in *Cuyahoga*.

**Long-tailed Duck:** About 17 individuals were reported along Lake Erie from South Bass Island to Ashtabula. Inland records included two in *Mahoning* on 12 Dec (Craig Holt), two in *Clark* on 05 Dec (Brian Menker), one in *Richland* on 14 Dec (John Herman), and one in *Fayette* on 06 Jan (Eric Reiner).

**Bufflehead:** 2,063 were reported statewide on CBCs, with 1,340 on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 17 Dec. The waters around Kelleys and South Bass islands are a major congregation area for these tiny ducks.

**Common Goldeneye:** About typical numbers at inland reservoirs, with 100 in *Trumbull* on 07 Dec (Craig Holt) a nice number. As always, Lake Erie held larger numbers, including at least 120 in *Ashtabula* on 01 Dec (Bob & Denise Lane), 1,499 on the Toledo CBC on 28 Dec, and a whopping 2,369 on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 17 Dec.

**Hooded Merganser:** Several significant concentrations were reported on reservoirs statewide, including 180 in *Mahoning* on 12



Dec (Craig Holt), 180 in **Clark** on 07 Dec (Doug Overacker), and 60 in **Ashland** on 08 Dec (Su Snyder). The Youngstown CBC on 15 Dec tallied 228 and all told, 1,121 were counted on CBCs.

**Common Merganser:** Typical small numbers reported from inland reservoirs. As always, largest concentrations were along Lake Erie, such as 720 tallied on the Ashtabula CBC on 22 Dec, 594 on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 17 Dec, and 1,002 from the Ottawa NWR CBC on 05 Jan. In general, Lake Erie numbers seemed to be down, especially from the Maumee Bay area where large numbers normally congregate. The largest number that veteran lake-watcher John Pogacnik reported was 82 on 02 Jan, from **Lake**.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** The late fall/early winter congregations of this species on Lake Erie can be enormous, as evidenced by 15,000 at Huron in **Erie** on 01 December (Doug Overacker). The Cleveland CBC tallied 12,000 on 15 December, and CBCs overall reported a total of 15,053.

**Ruddy Duck:** Forty-seven in **Mahoning** on 14 December was a nice number (Tim & Laura Dornan); 343 in **Hamilton** on 18 Jan was exceptional (Robert Foppe). The Cincinnati area produced the most records, with 94 on the Cincinnati CBC on 30 December being the highest total of any CBC. Only 499 were reported from all CBCs combined.

**Ring-necked Pheasant:** Self-

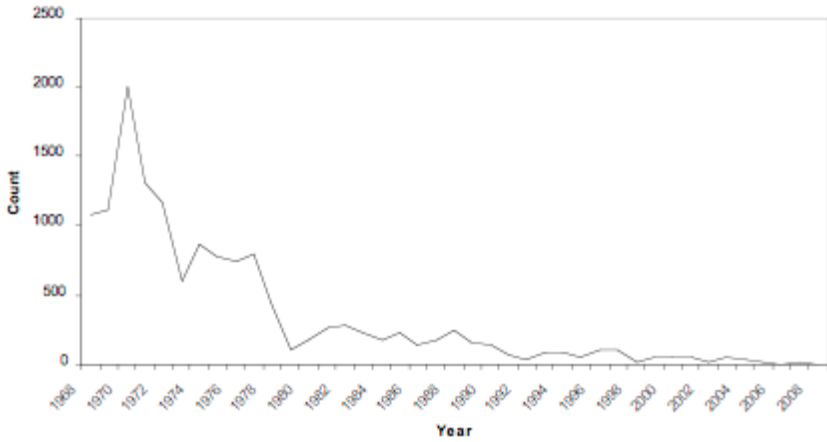
perpetuating populations are spotty, and now this species generally requires more or less constant stocking to maintain populations. Deer Creek WA in **Pickaway** and **Fayette** continues to support large populations, and a several hundred acre Conservation Reserve Program project implemented in 2006 in **Pickaway** is supporting a large population (Jim McCormac).

**Ruffed Grouse:** With populations at or near historic all-time lows, there are few reports, also in part because this secretive forest bird is hard to detect. Interesting were two reported from the Cincinnati CBC in **Hamilton** on 30 Dec. A total of only 10 was reported from CBCs statewide, with all but the Cincinnati birds being from the southeastern hill country where they are to be expected.

**Wild Turkey:** Now widely established, locally abundant, and present in every county. Of the 1,993 reported from all CBCs, Millersburg in **Holmes** led the list with a remarkable 458 tallied on 05 Jan.

**Northern Bobwhite:** Few and far between. Seven were reported in **Meigs** on 17 Feb (Tracy Morman). *None* were reported from CBCs statewide. Figure 1 shows the long-term decline of this species.

**Red-throated Loon:** One was found at Caesar Creek in **Warren** on 08 Feb and was seen at least through 17 Feb (Rick Asamoto, John Habig, Larry Gara *et al.*). Another was off Headlands Dunes in **Lake** on 09 Dec (Emil Bacik, Jerry



**Figure 1.** The decline of Northern Bobwhite in Ohio over the past 40 years, as shown by Christmas Bird Count data. The severe winters of 1976-77 and 1977-78 are often cited as being the final blow for this species, and bobwhites have never approached anything close to historic highs since then. However, a much bigger factor in their disappearance is large-scale land use changes wrought by agriculture and other development that has largely eliminated good quail habitat.

Talkington, Ray Hannikman) and a flyby was seen on 01 Jan over Lake Erie in **Lake** (John Pogacnik).

**Common Loon:** Typical small numbers – singles or groups of a few – were reported around the state into mid-December. True midwinter reports were much scarcer, and included one in **Clermont** on 01 Jan (Jay Lehman). Six seen in **Tuscarawas** on 15 Dec was noteworthy (Ed Schlabach). All told, 34 were reported statewide from CBCs with the highest total (9) on the Mansfield CBC on 15 Dec.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** Good numbers of these hardy little grebes were reported statewide nearly everywhere there was open water. Most observations were of singles or small concentrations. Thus, 154 reported on the O'Shaughnessy

Reservoir CBC on 29 Dec in **Delaware** was impressive. The previous high on this intermittently run CBC was 12 in 1976.

**Horned Grebe:** Scattered individuals or small groups were reported statewide, about typical for the season. Exceptional were concentrations of 27 in **Mahoning** on 14 Dec (Craig Holt), 60 on the Clark County CBC on 14 Dec, and an amazing 176 on the Caesar Creek/Spring Valley CBC on 14 Dec. One hundred and forty-four were present on East Fork Lake in **Clermont** on 14 Dec (Robert Foppe).

**Red-necked Grebe:** One was discovered on 17 Dec in **Clermont** (Bill Stanley), another was found on 18 Dec in **Clinton** (Rick Asamoto, Shane Egleston, John Habig, David

True), and one other was found in **Warren** on 17 Dec (Rick Asamoto, John Habig).

**Eared Grebe:** One was found consorting with eight Horned Grebes in **Cuyahoga** on 19 Dec (Dick & Jean Hoffman). Phil Chaon had discovered one – maybe from the same flock - along the Cleveland lakefront on 11 Dec.

**Western Grebe:** Interesting but unconfirmed was a report of this major rarity from the Cleveland lakefront in **Cuyahoga** on 24 Dec (*vide* Bret & Jim McCarty). Another, also lacking details, was reported from Caesar Creek in **Warren** on 27 Dec (*vide* Vic Fazio). Any additional information would be appreciated; please submit documentation to the OBRC and *The Ohio Cardinal*.

**Northern Gannet:** Always a great rarity, an immature was seen at the Huron Pier in **Erie** on 01 Dec (John Pogacnik). Another turned up on 23 Dec along the Cleveland lakefront in **Cuyahoga** (Jerry Talkington). It stayed through at least 28 Dec (Jay Lehman) and was seen by many observers. Perhaps most interesting of all was the bird that was discovered well inland on 30 Dec as it winged over a **Sandusky** cornfield (Greg Links, Brian Zwiebel, Karl Overman, Peter Kaestner).

**American White Pelican:** One was reported from **Washington** on 20 Dec (*vide* Jon Benedetti, Glenn Crippen).

**Double-crested Cormorant:** Winter numbers keep increasing, in tandem with the enormous overall population explosion of this species

in the Great Lakes (Figure 2). Small numbers were reported from scattered locales statewide through December. Two hundred and one were found on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 17 Dec. In all, 328 were reported from CBCs statewide, a record. The previous high was 226 in 2002.

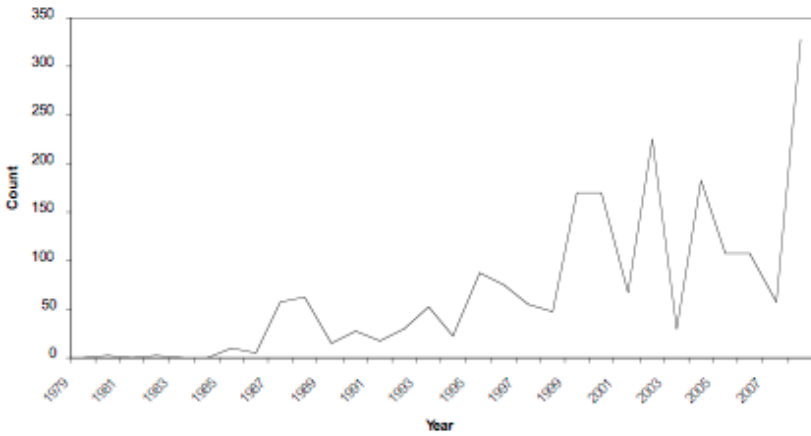
**American Bittern:** Always a noteworthy winter bird, one was found at Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve in **Erie** on 27 Dec (Ashli Maruster, Larry Gorbet). It was seen by numerous observers, and remained at least until 12 Jan. Another was found in **Hardin** on 13 Jan (Rick Counts).

**Great Blue Heron:** Seemingly typical numbers were reported throughout the state. Noteworthy was a concentration of 39 in **Delaware** on 28 Dec (Bill Shively).

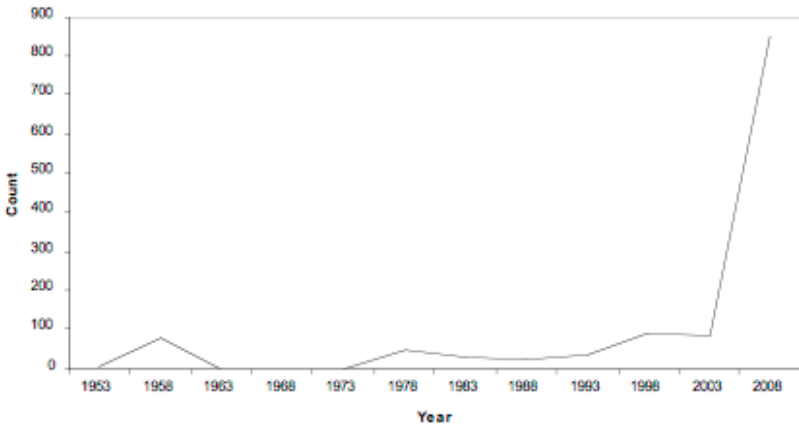
**Great Egret:** One lingered into January in **Wood** (m. obs.), another was in **Erie** on 23 Feb (Craig Caldwell), one was in **Hocking** for at least several days up to 12 Jan (*vide* Dave Horn), and one was in **Richland** on 24 Dec (Jay McGowan). John Pogacnik had one in **Ottawa** on 23 Dec, and Ray Hannikman reported seven hardy individuals flying over Lake Erie in **Cuyahoga** on 13 Jan.

**Green Heron:** Extremely rare in winter, but one was reported on the Van Wert CBC on 15 Dec.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron:** Up to 16 birds spent the winter along the Olentangy River on the campus of the Ohio State University in **Franklin**, which has become a



**Figure 2.** Winter season history of Double-crested Cormorant over the past three decades, using Christmas Bird Count data. There has been a steady upward trajectory, mirroring the overall population expansion.



**Figure 3.** Black Vulture wintering numbers over the past 50 years, from statewide Christmas Bird Count data taken at five-year intervals beginning in 1953. Winter numbers took an enormous spike in 2007-08. The two counts recording the largest numbers are Adams County and Cincinnati. The former tallied 211 last winter and 259 this winter. Cincinnati recorded 232 in winter 2005-06, 133 last winter, and 292 this winter. If mean winter temperatures continue to rise, this species, at the northern limits of its range in Ohio, will be expected to continue to increase.

regular winter locale (Bill Whan, m. obs.). Two were found at East Harbor State Park in **Ottawa** on 23 Dec (John Pogacnik). Counters on the Toledo CBC on 28 Dec found 15 in **Lucas**. Four were located at the power plant in **Ashtabula** on 14 Feb (Craig Holt). The most impressive winter roost remains in the Flats of Cleveland along the Cuyahoga River, **Cuyahoga**. An impressive 73 were counted there on 26 Jan (Paula Lozano).

**Plegadis ibis:** One was reported but went unidentified as to species near Medusa Marsh on the east side of Sandusky Bay in **Erie** on 22 Dec (John Pogacnik). This may have been the same individual reported in this area on 30 Nov by Lisa Brohl. All three North American ibis species are considered OBRC Review List.

**Black Vulture:** A scavenger on the upswing in Ohio (Figure 3). This year, a total of 851 were reported from CBCs statewide. This easily eclipsed last year's record of 685. Noteworthy concentrations were found on the Adams County CBC on 15 Dec (259 birds), Cincinnati CBC on 30 Dec (292 birds), and Millersburg CBC on 05 Jan (115 birds).

**Turkey Vulture:** Normally scarce in northern Ohio in midwinter; singles in **Lucas** on 07 Jan (Elliot Tramer) and **Mahoning** on 26 Jan (Craig Holt) were noteworthy. All told, Ohio CBCs reported 972 individuals, with the Cincinnati CBC leading the pack with 294 birds on 30 Dec. Wintering numbers

have steadily increased over the past decade.

**Osprey:** *Bona fide* records from the winter months of December, January, and February are few and far between – maybe three or four. Thus, an Osprey that was seen and described well on 01 Dec and the following day at the same locale in **Franklin** by independent observers (Paul Baicich, Tim & Laura Dornan) was significant.

**Bald Eagle:** Continues its amazing recovery from the DDT/dieldrin era. A glance back only eight years to *The Ohio Cardinal* 24(2) reveals (p. 63) “over 120 reported”. This winter, the comprehensive ODOW winter eagle survey found 649 birds, which beat the previous high of 554 in 2006. This winter's birds were composed of 426 adults and 223 immatures, with reports coming from all parts of the state.

**Northern Harrier:** Noteworthy was a communal roost of 17 at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area in **Ottawa**. Paul Gardner reported another roost of 26 at a massive Conservation Reserve Program grassland in **Pickaway** on 14 Jan. Exceptional were 38 in and around a recently restored wetland on the western edge of the Sandusky Plains in **Hardin** on 13 Jan (Rick Counts). All told, at least 189 harriers were reported from 25 counties, not including CBCs, which collectively tallied 445.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** As is to be expected, far fewer were reported than the more common and wide-



**Figure 4.** Cooper's Hawk trends over the past 40 years; data taken from statewide CBCs. Adaptable and tolerant of urbanization, Cooper's Hawks have fared well.

ranging Cooper's Hawk. Although some grains of salt needed to be ingested when utilizing CBC reports of species that can pose tricky ID issues, 126 sharpies were reported on statewide CBCs this year, as compared to 549 Cooper's.

**Cooper's Hawk:** This adaptable raptor has become a regular visitor of backyard feeders and has flourished in urban environments. Figure 4 shows the species' dramatic increase over the years according to CBC data.

**Northern Goshawk:** Certainly no invasion year, but the following solid reports of single birds were made: **Lake** on 06 Dec and another on 08 Jan (John Pogacnik), **Seneca** on 08 Dec (Tom Bartlett), **Lucas** on 14 Dec (Greg Links), **Cuyahoga** on 21 Dec (Craig Caldwell), **Summit** on 01 thru 03 Jan – raiding the backyard bird feeder! – (Karen Tanquist & Patrick Coy), and

**Montgomery** on 20 Feb (Ed & Bev Neubauer). All but two were reported as adults.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** Like Cooper's Hawk, this raptor is doing well and has been increasing, particularly in older suburban areas as neighborhood trees mature and offer better habitat. Numbers seem to be increasing in the south and east along with forest expansion and maturation.

**Red-tailed Hawk:** Continues its reign as Ohio's most common raptor, with statewide CBCs reporting 2,587 (the next most numerous bird of prey was American Kestrel, with 1,180 reported).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** Not a major invasion winter, with below average numbers being reported and traditional hotspots generally hosting poor numbers. Only 190 were reported on statewide CBCs; two



winters ago 1,010 were tallied.

**Golden Eagle:** At least two and perhaps three overwintered at the Wilds in *Muskingum*. This species has wintered in the grasslands on this massive reclaimed strip mine for at least 12 years. An immature was also reported at Killdeer Plains in *Wyandot* on 16 Feb (John Habig, Dave Collopy).

**American Kestrel:** This cavity-nesting falcon is one to watch, as numbers seem to steadily decline. Winter numbers are always bolstered by birds moving into the state from other areas, and statewide CBCs reported 1,180. Last year there were 1,654 tallied, and 1,437 the year before that. This winter's total was the lowest reported on CBCs since 1999 and is well under the average of the past 30 years.

**Merlin:** These bullet-like little falcons continue to increase. At least 33 individuals were reported from 21 counties, far eclipsing previous winter tallies from CBC data. Of great interest is the site fidelity of some of these individuals, with birds now wintering in certain favored locales for a number of years. Chief among the Merlin hotspots is Calvary Cemetery in Cleveland, where up to four individuals were documented (Lou Gardella). Other large urban cemeteries that are now traditional wintering areas include Green Lawn in Columbus, and Spring Grove and St. Joseph's in Cincinnati. One was discovered in an additional cemetery this winter, Crown Hill Cemetery in *Summit* (Sue Cudworth). Eventually, we

should see Merlins nesting again in Ohio, and likely in one of the big cemeteries where they've long been overwintering.

**Peregrine Falcon:** Relatively few reported, and most were in the vicinity of urban nesting areas such as Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown and other cities where these falcons also nest. Other individuals included one in *Ross* on 29 Dec (Dave Hess, Dave Dyer), one in *Clark* on 22 Dec (Rick Asamoto), and an individual marked with a green band at Killdeer Plains in *Wyandot* on 26 Jan (Troy Shively).

**Virginia Rail:** Being quite hardy, Virginia Rails probably attempt to overwinter, or at least linger into December, more often than is realized. Only one was reported, from the Millersburg CBC in *Holmes* on 05 Jan; it was still there on 10 Jan (Ben Morrison).

**Sora:** One was reported and well described in *Holmes* on 01 Jan (Robert Hershberger, *vide* Bruce Glick), one of perhaps a dozen winter records.

**American Coot:** Plentiful, at least through much of December, with 2,257 reported from CBCs. The Cincinnati CBC led the pack, with 793 tallied on 30 Dec. Other notable concentrations included 200 in *Trumbull* on 07 Dec (Craig Holt), and 200 in Richland on 27 Dec (Su Snyder).

**Sandhill Crane:** There was a large passage throughout much of western Ohio on 30 Nov, not previously reported in *The Ohio Cardinal*. On that date, 40 were seen over urban

Columbus (Jim McCormac), at least 130 moved through **Fayette** and **Pickaway**, and at least 1,000 other birds were reported from various mostly western Ohio locales. Numerous individuals lingered well into December in widely scattered areas. True midwinter records included 41 in **Highland** on 03 Jan (Bruce Lombardo), 43 in **Clinton** on 18 Jan (Beth Mitchell), and eight in **Franklin** on 28 Jan (Brad & Noah Sparks).

**Killdeer:** These half-hardy opportunists often linger in mild winters, but not many this season. Statewide CBCs recorded only 69, and there were few records in January, although northbound migrants were appearing by February's end.

**Spotted Sandpiper:** Laura Stiefel found one of Ohio's few winter records of this non-hardy, highly migratory species on 05 Jan, when she spotted one along the Maumee River in Perrysburg. The river here serves as the county line, and the sandpiper likely visited both **Lucas** and **Wood**. It was seen by several other observers and remained at least through 07 Jan. I believe this is the first January record for Ohio. Remarkably, another was found along the Ohio River on the Kentucky side, just across from Cincinnati, on 31 Dec (Frank Renfrow). This bird remained to at least 01 Jan, but was not known to have crossed into Ohio.

**Least Sandpiper:** One was found in **Warren** on 08 Dec (Rick Asamoto, Shane Egleston).

**Purple Sandpiper:** One was discovered at Headlands Dunes in **Lake** on 08 Dec (Brenda Baber; *vide* Ray Hannikman), and it remained through 09 Dec. John Pogacnik had two flybys over Lake Erie on 16 Dec in **Lake**, a new addition to his remarkable yard list. Another appeared on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 17 Dec, as did one on the Mentor CBC on 22 Dec.

**Wilson's Snipe:** Seventy were found statewide on CBCs, a remarkably good tally. This number has only been surpassed a few times, and the average number recorded annually for all Ohio CBCs over the past 20 years prior to this winter is 33.

**American Woodcock:** Secretive in the extreme, wintering woodcock are tough to ferret out and rare to boot. Andy Jones, Terri Martincic, and Nancy Howell managed to produce one in **Cuyahoga** on 15 Dec. Another was found on the Ragersville CBC on 26 Dec. A male was already displaying on 18 Feb in **Clermont** (Bill Stanley), and Tracy Morman observed another displaying on 21 Feb in **Meigs**, in spite of temperatures dipping to -5°C by the next morning. Kathi Hutton reported another in full display in **Clermont** on 24 Feb, and soon after many began to be reported.

**Laughing Gull:** A definite rarity in winter, but there was one report, albeit disputed. A first-year bird located at Lorain Harbor on 08 Dec was judged to be this species by five of the six observers. The lone



*The gull scene in late January at hotspots along the Cleveland Lakefront. It is enough to make a gull lover salivate, and drive neophytes crazy trying to pick out the rarities. Lake Erie attracts scores of wintering gulls, and is the reason why Ohio has thus far documented 19 species. Photo taken on 26 Jan by Andy Jones.*



**Left:** Massive visitors from the Arctic, Glaucous Gulls were found in good numbers. Note this bird's large bicolored bill. First-winter Iceland Gulls have a more diminutive all-dark bill. This first-winter bird was photographed by Andy Jones in Cleveland on 26 Jan.



**Right:** Glaucous Gulls were common at times along the Cleveland lakefront. This adult was photographed by Andy Jones on 26 Jan, during a week when nearly unprecedented numbers were recorded.



*Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue their meteoric rise; probably more were present this winter than ever before. This adult was photographed in Cleveland on 26 Jan by Andy Jones.*



*Iceland Gulls, especially adults, can pose identification problems and are tough to pick out from the masses. This adult was photographed in Cleveland on 26 Jan by Andy Jones.*

dissenter, quite a sharp birder, felt it was a Franklin's Gull. The case is unresolved.

**Franklin's Gull:** See the Laughing Gull account for one possible record. The only confirmed report was an adult in *Lake* on 15 Dec (John Pogacnik).

**Little Gull:** Only four individuals were reported, one of the lowest winter season totals in many years. One was at Lorain Harbor on 01 Dec (John Pogacnik), two were in *Lake* on 03 Dec (Ray Hannikman), and Pogacnik had one flyby over Lake Erie in *Lake* on 04 Jan.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** As always, the largest concentrations were along Lake Erie, although 200 at East Fork Lake in *Clermont* on 14 Dec was a nice inland total (Robert Foppe). Smaller numbers were noted at various other reservoirs. Peak Lake Erie concentrations reported were at least 3,000 in Maumee Bay, *Lucas*, on 12 Dec (Kenn Kaufman), and at least 3,500 at Headlands Dunes in *Lake* on 03 Dec (Ray Hannikman). Numbers had dropped significantly by late December, although the Toledo CBC on 28 Dec tallied 1,150. The Lake Erie Islands CBC had recorded 1,398 on 17 Dec; one month later, 17 Jan, Tom Bartlett found only 66 on his regular Kelleys Island census in *Erie*. There seemed to be a small influx into the Cleveland area in late January; 270 were at Eastlake in *Lake* on 22 Jan (Craig Holt), and 200 at East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in *Cuyahoga* (Ben Winger).

**Ring-billed Gull:** Widespread and commonly reported throughout

inland Ohio, where it is in no danger of losing its status as most abundant larid. A total of 109,411 was noted on statewide CBCs, the highest total of the past four years. However, the average annual tally for CBCs statewide for the 20 years prior to this winter is 135,581. The largest totals were reported on the Cleveland CBC on 15 Dec (10,043), Firelands CBC on 22 Dec (28,505), and Toledo CBC on 28 Dec (12,882).

**California Gull:** Only two positive reports. One adult was found among the throngs of gulls at East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Cleveland on 09 Dec by Chris Spagnoli, and John Pogacnik identified a 3<sup>rd</sup> year bird there on 26 Jan.

**Herring Gull:** A total of 10,094 was reported collectively from CBCs this year. This species seems to be on the decline over the long term, and winter gull-watchers should try and make careful tallies of numbers, especially at gull hotspots – although that can be difficult. The annual average reported from the last 15 years of CBCs was 13,251. The annual average for the 15 years preceding that was 36,501. Even taking into account the somewhat shaky gull data generated by CBCs, this disparity seems significant.

**Thayer's Gull:** East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Cleveland was the place for this species, but picking them out amongst the hordes of gulls was challenging. Gabe Leidy first reported one on 24 Dec; the next day John Pogacnik had two. These or others remained throughout the winter, with a high of 3 reported



on 24 Jan (Jen Brumfield). One was also reported at Headlands Dunes in **Lake** on 08 Dec (Ryan Steiner), and Tom Kemp found one in Toledo, **Lucas**, on 02 Feb.

**Iceland Gull:** Gull madness reigned at Cleveland's East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street. The first of this species reported was an individual on 22 Dec (Gabe Leidy). By 04 Jan the number had grown to 4 (Ben Fambrough). On 24 Jan, an impressive 9 were found (Jen Brumfield). The following day, 25 Jan, Phil Chaon tallied an amazing 17, probably a single-day record for Ohio. John Pogacnik recorded three flying by his **Lake** property, on 08 Dec, 04 Jan, and 19 Jan. One was at Huron in Erie on 04 Jan (Tom Bartlett), another was in Toledo, **Lucas**, on 03 Feb (Dennis Volmar), and another was seen at Conneaut, **Ashtabula**, on 08 Feb (Craig Holt). John Herman found a 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird, always quite rare inland, at Clear Fork Reservoir in **Richland** on 17 Dec, and rediscovered it on 24 Dec.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:**

First recorded in Ohio in 1977, this European species has steadily increased, and perhaps the largest numbers yet recorded were tallied this winter. Peak numbers were in the Cleveland area, and East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street led the pack. One was first reported here on 02 Dec (Bret McCarty). A week later (09 Dec) there were four (Phil Chaon). On 22 Dec, Gabe Leidy had seven at 72<sup>nd</sup> and the immediate area. Glen Crippen tallied at least 10 on 28 Dec, and on 30 Dec there were 12 (John Pogacnik). The crescendo

was reached on 12 Jan, when an incredible "around 20" were estimated (Jen Brumfield), and Phil Chaon had about the same number on 25 Jan. In **Lake**, John Pogacnik had single flybys over Lake Erie on 26 Dec, 28 Dec, 30 Dec, 01 Jan, and 02 Jan. Elsewhere, one was at Huron, **Erie**, on 08 Dec (Gabe Hostetler) and 04 Jan (Tom Bartlett). One was found on the Maumee River in **Lucas/Wood** the first week of December (Tom Kemp), and by late January/early February up to seven were found (Elliot Tramer). Far from Lake Erie was one in **Hamilton** on 18 Dec (Bill Hull).

**Glaucous Gull:** As with some of the other scarcer gulls, Cleveland's East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street was the place to be for this one. An individual was reported on 18 Dec (Ben Fambrough); on 26 Dec there were two (Ray Hannikman). By 28 Dec, there were three (Jay Lehman), and four were present on 30 Dec (John Pogacnik). By 04 Jan at least six were noted (Tom Bartlett), and they peaked on 24 January when Jen Brumfield and company tallied 11. Flybys over Lake Erie noted by John Pogacnik at his **Lake** home were seen on 08 Dec, and 03 Jan. On 13 Jan, two were located in **Ashtabula** (Craig Holt). As many as five were reported along the Maumee River in **Lucas/Wood** in late January and early February (Elliot Tramer).

**Great Black-backed Gull:** A total of 456 was noted on CBCs. This is well under the annual average of 689 for the preceding 20 years of CBC data, but this species seems to fluctuate significantly in numbers