

Winter 2008–2009 Overview and Reports

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Winter 2008-09 was colder than average for recent years, and featured plenty of snow, especially in northern Ohio. Geauga, in the heart of the lake-effect snow belt, received a whopping 175 inches of snowfall. Most of northeastern Ohio experienced enough snow to make this winter one of the top-10 snowiest on record. Midwinter also saw the coldest temperatures recorded in the past 15 years in the northern tier of counties. In contrast, snowfall in southern Ohio was at or below normal averages. This region was not immune to frigid temperatures, though, and during the statewide cold snap of 15 to 18 Jan, readings of -10 F or below were recorded in some locales. A brutal windstorm whacked the state on 11 Feb, producing winds up to 70 mph and toppling numerous trees and power lines (winter summary is based on data from <http://www.weathersafety.ohio.gov/>).

It was a tough winter, and the total species count of 184—three fewer than last winter—reflects the cold and often snowy conditions. Of course, the weather also produced some outstanding and unexpected birding, such as the gull bonanza at a few interior reservoirs. Plenty of late-season ice on Lake Erie apparently

stimulated a major inland incursion of gulls toward the end of February. Oberlin Reservoir in Lorain delighted many observers with clouds of gulls that included at least seven species. Several thousand Herring Gulls formed the dominant backdrop, but careful observers picked out several Thayer's Gulls, which are quite rare away from Lake Erie waters. Peaks of six Glaucous Gulls, 11 Iceland Gulls, and 9 Lesser Black-backed Gulls were noteworthy. Farther inland, an accumulation of Ring-billed Gulls estimated at more than 10,000 birds created a scene reminiscent of Hitchcock's "The Birds" at Hoover Reservoir in Delaware. As is always the case this far from Lake Erie, Herring Gulls were far outnumbered by Ring-billeds, but at least 100 were present. Black-legged Kittiwake and Glaucous Gull were nice finds, and, just after the season's end, both Lesser Black-backed Gull and Great Black-backed Gull were found. C. J. Brown Reservoir in Clark also hosted mobs of Ring-billed Gulls, and two Glaucous Gulls and an Iceland Gull were found in their midst.

Incredibly, two American White Pelicans, which are hardly thought of as birds of winter, spent much of the season on Grand Lake St. Mary. They had company in the half-hardy department: six warbler species turned up, including a beautiful male Black-throated Blue Warbler that dined on suet at a Mahoning for much of December (Ohio's third winter record). Four heron species? Yep, and this is a family to watch as mean winter temperatures continue to warm; we can expect to see more waders in our unfrozen waters. Given the number of extralimital western hummingbirds in recent years, it was a bit of a surprise that only one Rufous

Hummingbird appeared. Last winter, there were three, along with a record late Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Vultures may be becoming wintertime staples. Record numbers of Black Vulture were tallied on Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), and the Turkey Vulture CBC total was the second-highest on record. If this trend continues, Hinckley will have to reschedule its mid-March Return of the Buzzards festival (a February date might become more apropos).

Likewise, mobs of American Robins are now a regular part of snowy winters. Record numbers were around this season, testimony to the proliferation of exotic fruit-bearing plants.

Speaking of exotics, there was one record of a European Goldfinch visiting a feeder, as well as a free-flying Whooper Swan. We encourage observers to report such birds, even if it is obvious that they might best be categorized as waifs. One never knows when that oddity Orange Bishop might gain a foothold, and our records will help chart the invasion. We are accomplishing this with the Eurasian Collared-Dove. Long predicted to infest the state, it has been slow to materialize. This winter they were tallied on a CBC for the first time.

Raptors were a mixed bag. The meadow vole addicts like Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, and Short-eared Owl did not seem to be around in great numbers. Voles are cyclical, and it must have been a low year for their populations. Data suggest that the American Kestrel continues its slide downward. Its relative the Merlin is going the other way, with more individuals turning up each winter. Two Buteospecies are doing well—both Red-tailed and

Red-shouldered hawks were recorded in record numbers on CBCs. Barred Owl also set CBC records; both it and the Red-shouldered Hawk appear to be benefiting from increased forest maturation in Ohio. Bald Eagles continue to soar; big numbers were tallied. It was only 30 years ago that hardly any could be found in the state.

Sandhill Cranes are booming, with overall populations as large as they have been in modern times. We see the spillover in Ohio, with ever-increasing numbers of migrants that often peak in early December. CBCs reported 508 total individuals, a record.

Continuing the good news are woodpeckers. New high CBC counts were made for Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and most of the other species were not far off a record-setting pace. For the most part, these increases also relate to the overall increase and aging of our woodlands.

Bird feeding is big business, and it may be helping the species that are inveterate feeder visitors. Chickadee species, Tufted Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch were reported in record or near-record numbers.

In general, the sparrows were reported in about average numbers, but the Swamp Sparrow was a noteworthy exception. The 706 reported from CBCs crushed the previous record. Favored habitat for these chestnut-colored wetlands specialists is thick cattail stands. Such habitats create a distinct microclimate; the plant material conducts heat and this often creates warmer temperatures within the stand. Even slightly warmer mean ambient air temperatures should allow increased numbers of Swamp Sparrows to remain farther north.

This will be a species to watch in future winters.

This was not the winter of the blackbird, with one notable exception. No major roosts were reported, leading to low tallies of the flock-forming species such as Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird, and Rusty Blackbird. However, at least three Baltimore Orioles braved the Ohio winter, probably a record for a winter season.

Nothing gets birders going like rarities, and we had a few. Nice finds were Say's Phoebe, Lark Sparrow, Painted Bunting, and an incredibly tardy Bobolink. Although seemingly lacking the allure of the aforementioned species, a Warbling Vireo that frequented a Holmesfeeder may have been a representative of the quite different western group of this species—not the eastern Warbling Vireo that occurs as a common migrant and breeder.

Taking honors as “Bird of the Season” was White-winged Crossbill. Record numbers descended on the Buckeye State, and probably thousands of individuals were reported. Birders in all corners of the state turned up these odd cone-crackers, and crossbills were the dominant feature of listserv reports. Another winter finch, the Pine Siskin, also irrupted in near-record numbers, but their presence was obscured by the flashier crossbills.

As always, thanks to all of the observers who take time to contribute reports, either directly to staff of the Ohio Cardinal, on various online

forums, and as part of Christmas Bird Counts. I am especially appreciative of CBC data, which offers a wonderful data-rich tool for analyzing long-term trends, particularly with common species.

The following conventions are used throughout all seasonal reports. Common names that are underlined are on the Ohio Bird Records Committee (OBRC) review list. Observers should send documentation of these species to the OBRC. Information on the OBRC can be found at the Ohio Ornithological Society website: <http://www.ohiobirds.org>

Taxonomic order and nomenclature are those of the Check-List of North American Birds, 7th Edition (1998) as updated through the 50th Supplement (2009). This document is published by the North American Classification Committee of the American Ornithologists' Union and is available at <http://www.aou.org/checklist/north/print.php>. County names are in bold italics. Shortened names and a few sets of initials are used for locations that occur repeatedly and for one organization; these abbreviations are listed here.

CBC = Christmas Bird Count (held 14 December 2008 to 4 January 2009)

fide = “on the authority of”

NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

OBRC = Ohio Bird Records Committee

ODOW = Ohio Division of Wildlife

WA = Wildlife Area

WWS = Winter Waterfowl Survey



*Technology sometimes provides documentation of unusual birds that observers may otherwise miss. A carcass served as bait that attracted these Common Ravens to a site monitored by Laura Stalder's trail camera in **Monroe** on 12 Jan.*

Greater White-fronted Goose:

Good numbers were present throughout the season. At least 130 individuals were reported from 18 counties. High tally was 17 in **Knox** on 28 Dec (Howard Gratz). Twelve on Seneca Lake in unglaciated **Guernsey** on 28 Dec was noteworthy (Thais Tepper).

Snow Goose: Typical small numbers scattered about the state. CBCs tallied 87 on 14 counts; largest flock was 34 in **Hamilton** on 25 Jan (Ben Warner).

Ross's Goose: Although still a rarity, numbers continue to increase and this pint-sized goose is now regular and to be expected. This season, about 18 individuals were reported from 10 counties. Most reports are of singles, thus Steve Bobonick's report of three in **Clinton** was noteworthy.

Brant: Quite rare in winter and unexpected away from Lake Erie at any season. A flock of 11 on the Ohio River in **Columbiana** on 20

Dec was significant (Bob Lane and many other observers), as were two in **Muskingum** on 10 Jan, also on the Ohio River.

Cackling Goose: Numbers reported are steadily increasing; 37 were tallied on 11 CBCs, and at least 25 others were reported this season. The largest group was 14 in **Mercer** on 27 Dec (Jill Bowers). Cacklers are to be expected wherever large concentrations of migratory Canada Geese occur.

Canada Goose: Remains abundant: 133,620 were reported on CBCs this winter. This is an increase of about 8% over the previous winter. The Fremont CBC led the pack with 7,190 tallied on 03 Jan.

Mute Swan: Numbers rose to 168 individuals reported from 30 CBCs, up from the 153 reported last winter. They are turning up with greater frequency in new areas, too, such as the nine found in **Hocking** on 03 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: Seems to be on an upward trajectory, but mostly remaining in the large marsh complexes where populations were established beginning in 1996. CBCs of two years ago tallied 76 birds statewide; last year, 146 were reported, and this year the total CBC haul was 156. Occasional birds turn up in far-flung spots, such as one on 15 Dec in **Greene** (Vicki Ferguson).

Tundra Swan: Good flights occurred across much of the state during the first week of Dec. Joe Faulkner tallied 100 flying over **Perry** on 04 Dec and Lisa Brohl counted 170 in waters off South Bass Island, **Ottawa**, on 07 Dec. Many other flocks were reported, totaling several hundred birds. Small numbers wintered in the usual haunts, such as 28 at Ottawa NWR on 04 Jan (Douglas Vogus).

Whooper Swan: Craig Holt found one in **Stark** on 20 Feb, and aptly noted that its origin was suspect.

Wood Duck: Semi-hardy Wood Ducks were recorded in small numbers throughout most of the state. A total of 41 was found on CBCs.

Gadwall: One of our tougher dabblers, Gadwall routinely overwinter where open water occurs, including on Lake Erie. The 482 total reported from all CBCs was below last year's CBC total of 490, but well above the 363 annual average on CBCs over the past decade.

American Wigeon: Small numbers widely reported; 110 were totaled on CBCs, slightly above the average of 98 over the past 10 years. A stronghold is the Camp Dennison gravel pit in

Hamilton, which hosted 58 on 13 Dec (Robert Foppe).

American Black Duck: Good numbers this winter, with 3,844 found on CBCs and 2,985 recorded around Sandusky Bay — **Erie, Ottawa, Sandusky** — during the ODOW Aerial Waterfowl Surveys in Dec.

Mallard: CBC reports totaled 45,192 and ODOW Aerial Waterfowl Surveys produced 8,197 in the western Lake Erie marshes. An impressive concentration was the 2,000 in **Clinton** on 03 Jan (Ned Keller).

Blue-winged Teal: Our least hardy duck, quite rare in winter. One turned up on the Lake Erie Islands CBC in **Erie** on 14 Dec (John Pogacnik). This bird was injured, which no doubt accounts for its presence. Two probable extremely early migrants were found in **Greene** on 19 Feb (John Habig).

Northern Shoveler: Plenty lingered well into winter, as evidenced by the high count of 57 on the Cincinnati CBC on 28 Dec. A few dozen were reported widely during Jan and Feb.

Northern Pintail: Although relatively few truly overwinter, 80 was an impressive number in **Wayne** on 26 Jan (Bruce Glick). Pintail are late to depart, as reflected by the 975 recorded on statewide CBCs. That is the second highest CBC total in the past decade, far eclipsed by the 1,972 tallied on 2005-06 counts. Northbound pintail return by late Feb; 60 were in **Delaware** on 26 Feb (Sean Williams).

Green-winged Teal: Above-average numbers lingered into Dec, and early migrants were noted by the end of Feb. The 114 recorded on CBCs is the highest total ever. Paul Wharton noted 12 in **Clermont** on 22 Feb.

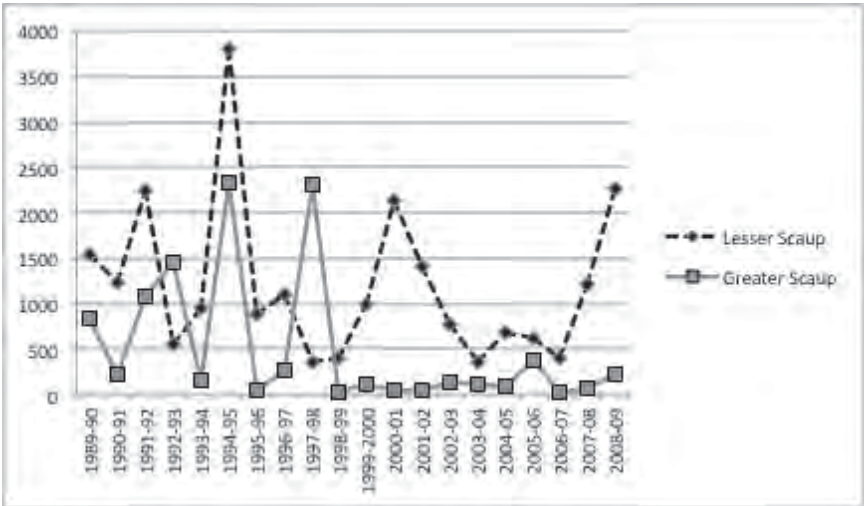
Canvasback: Numbers can vary greatly from winter to winter, depending in part upon availability of open water, especially on Lake Erie. This was a lean winter; 138 in **Lake** on 07 Dec (John Pogacnik) may have been the one-day high. Only 561 were counted on CBCs, well under the annual average of 1,538 over the past decade.

Redhead: Numbers reported were comparable to the past few years; the 558 tallied on CBCs was only seven birds off the previous year's total of 551.

Ring-necked Duck: Ring-necks are on the increase as a wintering bird, and this winter's CBC total of 897 hardly differed from last year's tally of 895. The largest concentrations were in the Cincinnati area, such as the 379 found at the Camp Dennison gravel pits, **Hamilton**, on 05 Dec (Robert Foppe).

Greater Scaup: Few were reported anywhere other than the expected Lake Erie haunts; 12 on the Cincinnati CBC (**Hamilton**) on 28 Dec were noteworthy, as were two on the Wilmot CBC on 19 Dec (**Stark**). The largest concentration — 110 birds — was reported on the Toledo CBC (**Lucas**) on 14 Dec (Figure 1).

Lesser Scaup: Maumee Bay, **Lucas**, is a globally significant stopover site for this species. The ODOW Aerial Waterfowl Survey counted 9,150 there



The shifting fortunes of Ohio's two scaup species, according to 20 years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09). Greater Scaup, which occur mostly on Lake Erie, show cyclical ups and downs until the late 1990s, when numbers seem to flatline at much lower levels. Lesser Scaup, which is far more numerous on inland waters, also shows marked peaks and valleys. It occurs at consistently much higher numbers, though.

on 24 Dec, well under the numbers tallied on the bay in other years. This survey also found 205 around Sandusky Bay — **Erie, Ottawa, Sandusky** — on the same day. The 2,718 tally reported on statewide CBCs represents a significant spike from last year's total of 2,261 (Figure 1).

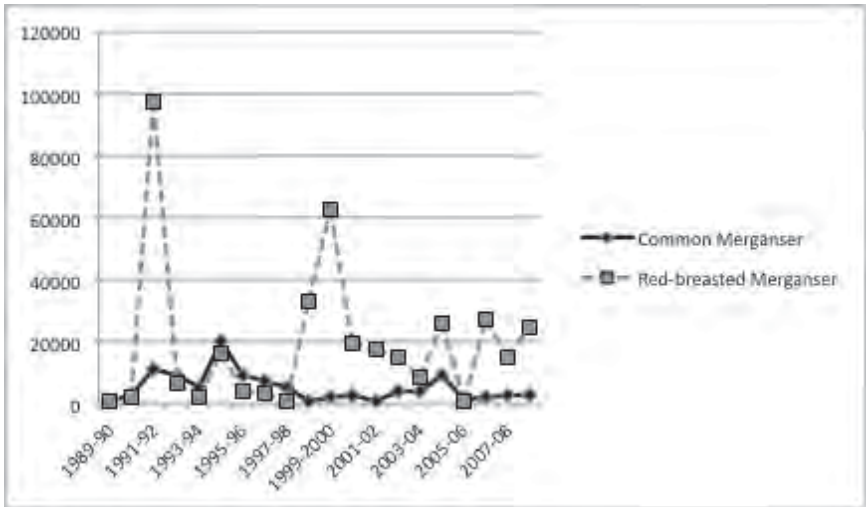
Harlequin Duck: Only two reports, both from John Pogacnik, seen from his Lake Erie yard overlook in **Lake:** one bird each on 28 Dec and 04 Jan.

Surf Scoter: Fairly typical numbers: 13 were found on CBCs. Nancy Anderson reported up to three at Sims Park in **Cuyahoga** in early to mid-Dec; Andi Wolfe found one in **Pickaway** on 01 Dec; Rob Lowry

produced one on the Scioto River in **Franklin** on 01 Feb; and John Pogacnik counted a total of seven from his **Lake** overlook in early Dec.

White-winged Scoter: Retaining its current status as scarcest winter scoter; only seven were reported from all CBCs. Three in **Montgomery** on 01 Feb were a nice find (Rick Asamoto, Shane Egleston). The biggest flock was six in **Delaware** on 15 Feb (Joe Meara); these undoubtedly represent northbound migrants. Only a few others were reported, all from Lake Erie.

Black Scoter: CBCs found 21, all from Lake Erie. About a dozen others were reported between early and mid-Dec, and all of these came from Lake Erie waters as well.



Twenty-year trends of Common Merganser and Red-breasted Merganser, based on CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09). With the exception of one enormous spike in Red-breasted Mergansers, the two species' numbers largely mirrored each other until the late 1990s. After that, mean numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers began to outpace Common Mergansers. Although there have been no huge recent spikes such as in the early 1990s and in the early 2000s, overall, numbers of both species remain high, and Lake Erie — where the vast majority are reported — is clearly an important migratory and wintering area. It would be enlightening to know which fish species they are dependent upon, but no such studies have been published.

Long-tailed Duck: An incredible 28 were found on CBCs, shattering the previous high of eight reported on CBCs in the winters of 2003–04 and 2007–08. All but one of these birds were reported from Lake Erie. The high count was 14 on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec. Elsewhere, Dave Slager found one in *Delaware* on 12 Dec.

Bufflehead: The immediate environs of the Lake Erie islands in *Erie* and *Ottawa* are a major early-winter congregation area for these little ducks, as evidenced by the 2,056 found there on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec. About normal numbers were found elsewhere, with most reports also from Lake Erie.

Common Goldeneye: The ODOW Aerial Waterfowl Survey on 14 Dec found 2,525, virtually all in the vicinity of Sandusky Bay (*Erie*, *Ottawa*, *Sandusky*). Statewide, CBCs reported 3,021, with the vast majority from Lake Erie. By far the largest tally came from the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec, where 1,683 were observed.

Hooded Merganser: CBCs statewide reported 814, matching expectations from previous years.

Common Merganser: CBCs tallied 3,445, the vast majority on counts covering Lake Erie waters between the Lake Erie islands and Toledo. Common Mergansers seem to be slowly declining (Figure 2).

Red-breasted Merganser: Numbers seemed to be up this winter, especially on Lake Erie. The ODOW

Aerial Waterfowl Survey found 20,280 “mergansers” on the western half of the lake on 24 Dec; virtually all of these birds would have been Red-breasted Mergansers. Statewide CBCs reported 24,431, the third-highest total of the past decade (Figure 2).

Ruddy Duck: About typical numbers were reported statewide; the 445 reported from CBCs was down somewhat from the previous two winters, but above the 10-year average.

Ring-necked Pheasant: The proliferation of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands throughout Ohio — there is now an area about equal to Franklin County in CRP lands statewide — has benefited this species, along with the efforts of the group Pheasants Forever. Pheasants are at least remaining stable, as evidenced by the 70 reported on CBCs — more than the previous two winters, but still under the annual average of 82 over the past decade. A 1,000-acre CRP grassland in *Pickaway* supports an enormous population; Jim McCormac tallied 55 birds there on 23 Dec.

Ruffed Grouse: Notoriously hard to get a handle on, because birders infrequently cross paths with grouse. Grouse numbers are probably at their lowest level in many decades, primarily related to a loss of optimal habitat due to forest maturation. Hunters provide the best source of grouse data, and ODOW hunter surveys indicate that their cumulative average flush-per-hour rate is 38. The only lower flush-per-hour rate was in 2007, when it was 37. In 1993, it was 110 flushes per hour.

Wild Turkey: The Wild Turkey is booming (Figure 3), and now occurs in every county, aided greatly by stocking programs. This year's CBC total of 2,424 is a record high.

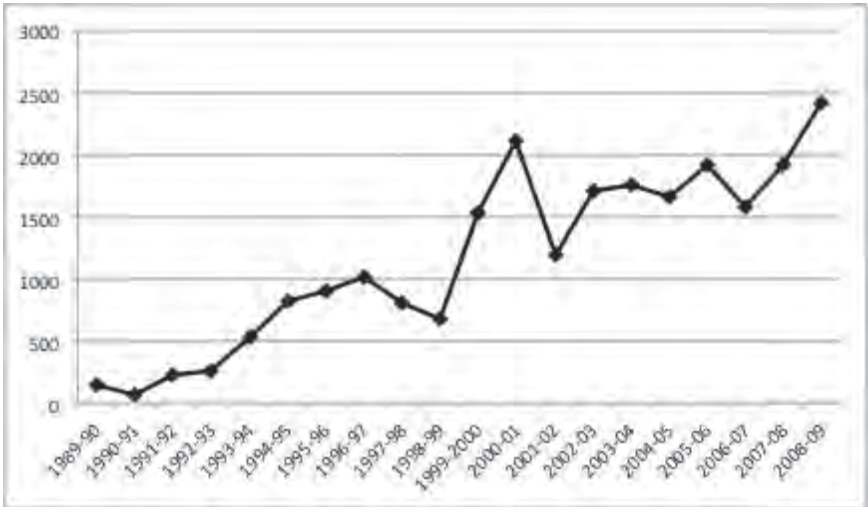
Northern Bobwhite: Faint flickers of hope for this species, which was decimated by back-to-back blizzards in two consecutive years in the late 1970s and an attendant loss of suitable habitat due to large-scale changes in agricultural practices. Last winter, *no* bobwhites were reported on CBCs. This winter, 35 were tallied, but on only three counts; the Adams County CBC — a stronghold — reported 30 of them.

Red-throated Loon: The only report was of one at Caesar Creek Reservoir in **Warren** on 19 Dec (Rick Asamoto). Shane Egleston found what was probably the same bird there on 25 Dec.

Common Loon: Loons have mostly passed through Ohio by Dec, but numbers were especially low this winter. Only 13 were tallied on CBCs, well under the annual average of 36 over the past decade. Only a half-dozen or so others were reported through Dec, and two in **Lake** on 01 Jan (John Pogacnik) was the only report from Jan to Feb.

Pied-billed Grebe: The 86 reported on CBCs was the lowest number since the winter of 1997–98. The annual average from CBCs over the past decade is 185. Noteworthy were 61 in **Clermont** on 26 Jan (Frank Frick).

Horned Grebe: Way down from last winter, when CBCs reported 232. This winter the total CBC haul was only 22. No concentrations above single figures were reported.



Wild Turkey CBC data from the past 20 years (1989–90 to 2008–09) chart a steady upward trajectory. Turkey numbers are at their highest in over a century, aided greatly by stocking programs.

Red-necked Grebe: Three reports, all of singles, which is about average: **Hamilton** on 14 Dec (Everitt Kitchen); **Cuyahoga** on 02 Jan (Jason Larson); **Jefferson** on 13 Feb (Scott Albaugh).

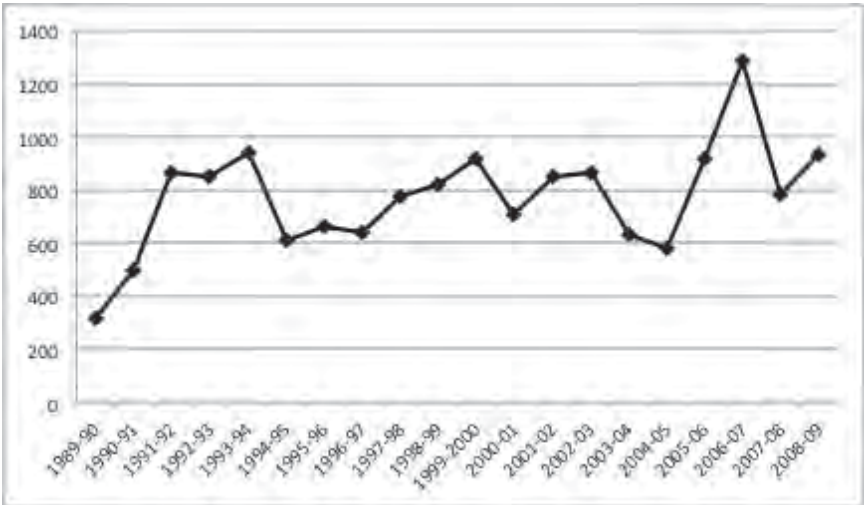
American White Pelican: Jill Bowers located two on Grand Lake St. Marys in **Mercer** on 01 Jan. She later learned that they had been present since 20 Nov. They were last reported by Steve Jones on 03 Feb.

Double-crested Cormorant: The number of winter cormorants has increased, an artifact of the tremendous population explosion of this species in the Great Lakes region. CBCs reported 149, which is well under last year's tally of 326 but slightly above the annual average of 142 over the past decade. Albert Scruggs reported 16 in **Hamilton** on 20 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: The 1,152 birds reported from all CBCs demonstrate the toughness of this wader. Only once previously — in winter 2006–07, when 1,282 were tallied — has a winter total been higher (Figure 4).

Great Egret: Gregory Bennett found a late individual on 08 Dec in **Summit**.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Just prior to the start of the winter season, John Pogacnik counted 54 along the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland. Many of these birds presumably overwintered. Chris Knoll found 11 at the outflow from the Bayshore Power Plant in **Lucas** on 07 Jan. Ken and Julie Davis reported seven along the Olentangy River in **Franklin** on 11 Jan; Dave Slager found 11 at the same spot on 11 Feb. Statewide CBCs reported a total of 72, which is about average.



Twenty years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09) for our hardest wader, Great Blue Heron. There has been a slight uptick in the mean average in recent years, but overall wintering numbers have remained relatively stable. Winter numbers are primarily dictated by the presence of open water. Increasing average temperatures in winter should lead to an increase in wintering Great Blue Herons.

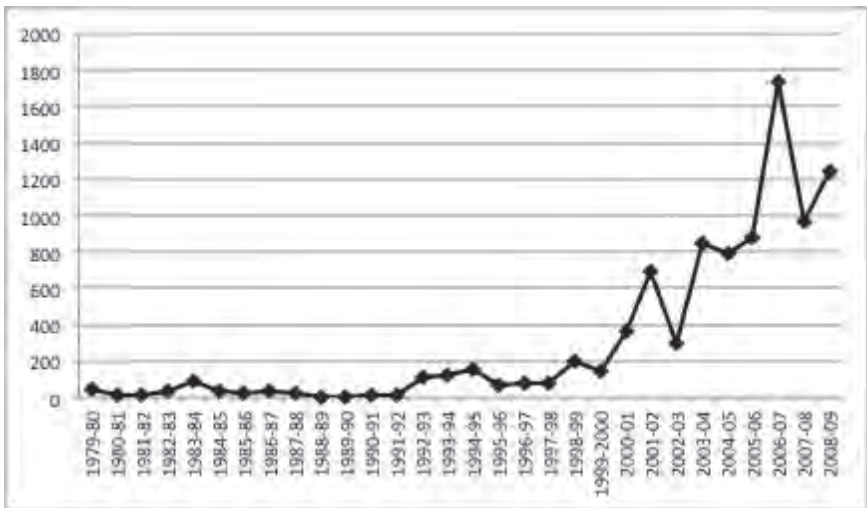
Black Vulture: The 995 reported on CBCs this winter was a new high, eclipsing last year's total of 845. The number of Black Vultures reported on CBCs has grown significantly in each of the past six winters. Strongholds include *Adams, Hocking, Holmes*, and extreme southwest Ohio, with regularly occurring smaller roosts elsewhere. Black Vultures continue to actively expand, and sightings far from usual haunts, such as one on Sandusky Bay, *Ottawa*, on 06 Feb (Kurt Wray) are becoming more frequent.



Black Vulture populations continue to grow in Ohio, including more individuals that remain in the northern part of their range in winter. Mike Williams captured this image in Hocking in Feb 2009.

Turkey Vulture: The 1,243 reported from CBCs is the second-highest total ever reported. Numbers seemed above-average even in the dead of winter and beyond the typical southern haunts. Tom Bartlett had one in *Seneca* on 23 Feb, and northbound birds were evident far and wide by the end of Feb (see Figure 5 for long-term trends).

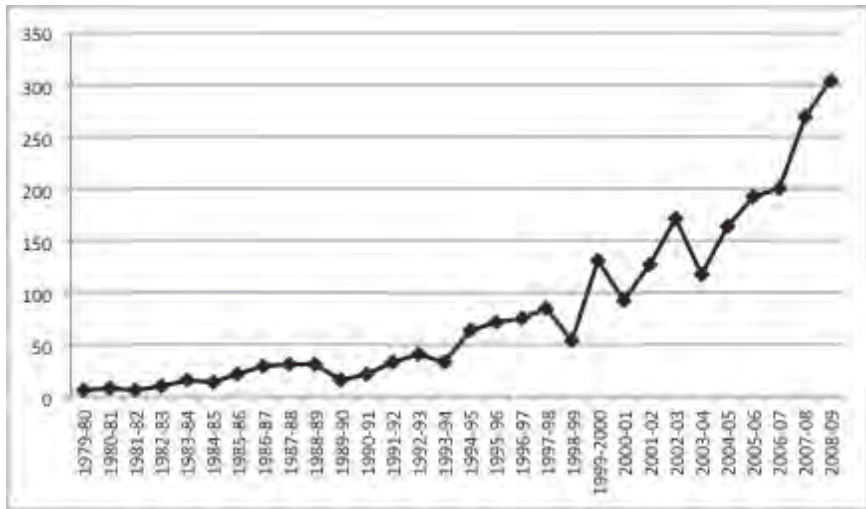
Osprey: Accidental and totally unexpected in winter; two were reported with no details: one on the Cleveland CBC on 20 Dec and one on the Ohio River IN-KY-OH CBC on 14 Dec. The latter may not have been in Ohio; the count encompasses parts of two other states. Any winter season Osprey should be thoroughly documented.



An incredible increase in wintering Turkey Vulture numbers, according to the past 30 years of CBC data (1979–80 to 2008–09). What is going on? Vultures are half-hardy, and southern Ohio is at the northern limit of their wintering range. Increasing mean winter temperatures should allow greater numbers to overwinter in Ohio. Other factors may be at work, though, including an increase in mammalian food sources and a higher incidence of roadkill.

Bald Eagle: CBCs reported 304 this winter, up by 34 birds over last winter (Figure 6). There were dozens of

years, with an annual average of 105 birds reported. Thus, this winter's CBC total of 125 was above-average



Return of the Bald Eagle, from the gloom and doom days of the late 1970s to the record CBC high of 304 this winter. The gradual purging of chemical toxins such as DDT from the environment is the primary reason for the recovery. Data from 1979–80 to 2008–09 CBCs.

listserv reports from all corners of the state, as well. A pair was discovered nest-building in **Franklin** on 14 Dec, the first nesting record in the county in modern history (Jim McCormac).

Northern Harrier: These avid consumers of meadow voles seemed down in numbers; 369 were tallied on CBCs, down from last year's count of 445. Numbers reported from traditional strongholds such as Killdeer Plains, **Wyandot**, and The Wilds, **Muskingum**, were considerably lower than in peak years (Figure 7). Noteworthy was the Ragersville CBC, **Tuscarawas**, which reported 41 (see Figure 8 for long-term trends).

Sharp-shinned Hawk: Total CBC reports of this species have remained remarkably stable over the past 20

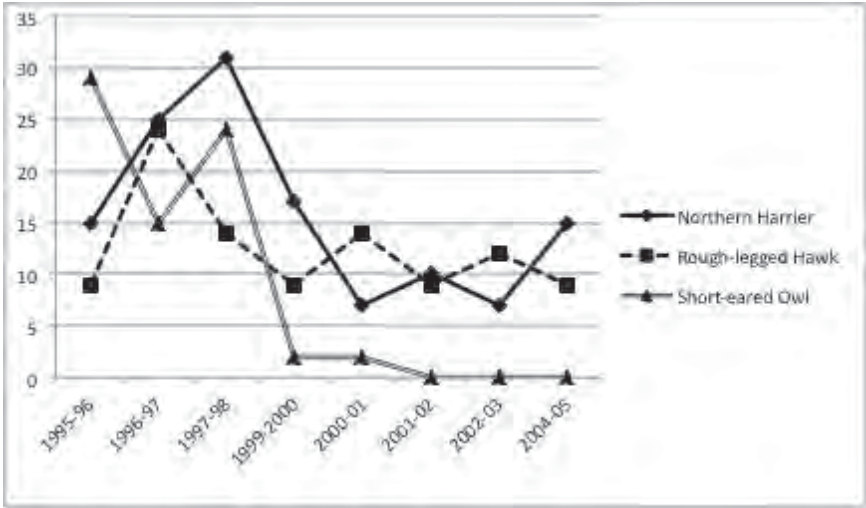
but far below that of the more adaptive Cooper's Hawk.

Cooper's Hawk: Reports always far outstrip those of Sharp-shinned Hawk, usually by a factor of three or four. This year's CBC total was 487, the third highest number in the past decade. This terror of the songbird world has adapted well to urban haunts, unlike Sharp-shinneds, which are much more closely tied to natural ecosystems characterized by large tracts of forest.

Northern Goshawk: Always a major winter rarity and one of our more frequently misidentified raptors. Four reports came in: a bird in **Columbiana** on 14 Jan (Jay Wootten); one in **Hancock** on 13 Dec and 20 Dec, and again on 11 Jan

(Robert Sams and Jeff Loughman, respectively; was this same bird?).

Red-shouldered Hawk: Numbers continue to soar upwards, with many reports from far and wide, including urban areas. This winter's CBC total



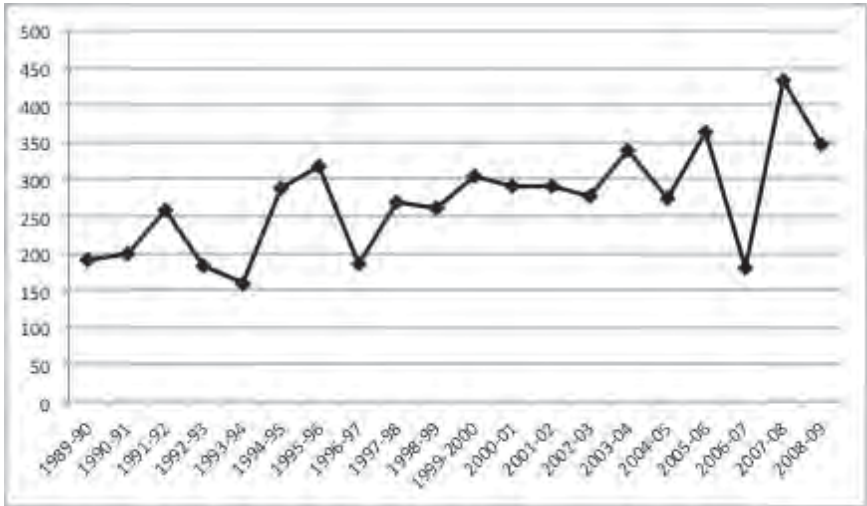
*Strip-mine grasslands attract raptors. In the early 1970s, House Bill 521 was enacted, requiring operators of surface coal mines — strip mines — to “reclaim” former mine sites. Reclamation largely consisted of smoothing the contours of the land to get rid of slag piles and high-walls, layering the surface with a thin veneer of topsoil, and planting to grasses. Virtually all of the grasses used in reclamation are non-native Eurasian species that are highly rhizomatous (spreading by shallow roots) and can grow quickly in poor soils. Chief among these species are Kentucky Fescue (*Schedonorus pratensis* [syn. *Festuca pratensis*]) and Smooth Brome (*Bromus inermis*). The end result is expansive grasslands of low diversity and almost completely comprised of non-native plants. There may be as many as 200,000 acres of strip mine reclamation land in southeastern Ohio.*

*The Wilds in Muskingum County is a facility devoted to research and propagation of a variety of large animals. Covering about 10,000 acres and surrounded by thousands of additional acres of reclamation grasslands, The Wilds is easily the best-studied and most heavily birded strip-mine site in the state. It has become well known as a raptor Mecca in winter. Possibly, the most important factor influencing raptor numbers at The Wilds are Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) populations. These small rodents are cyclical in numbers from year to year, exhibiting boom and bust cycles typical of many small mammals.*

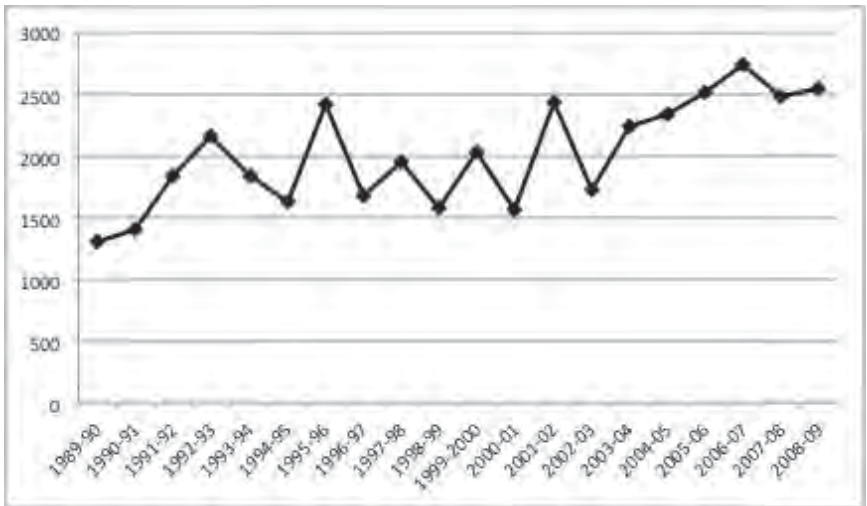
Three northern raptor species that can occur in good numbers at The Wilds are Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Short-eared Owl. In peak vole winters, such as 1997–98, as many as 55 owls were counted at The Wilds, in addition to large numbers of the other raptors. However, since those peak raptor winters of the late 1990s, there seems to have been a steady decline in wintering raptor numbers. This raises the question of whether completely artificial grasslands — in regions that never supported extensive grasslands — can sustain a natural cycle of rodent populations. There is a need for research into the relationship of meadow voles and artificial strip-mine grasslands.

Data presented above are for Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Northern Harrier from the Chandlersville CBC, which was conducted in eight out of ten winters from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. The dominant feature of the count is The Wilds and surrounding strip-mine grasslands.

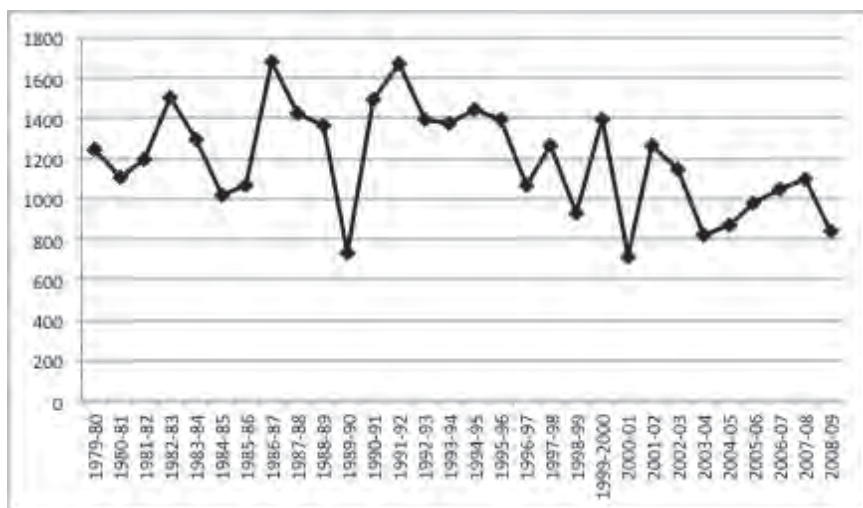
The Ohio Cardinal, Winter 2008-2009



Twenty years (1989–90 to 2008–09) of CBC data for Northern Harrier. Cyclical peaks and valleys may in part be due to fluctuating meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) populations. Slight increases beginning in the mid-2000s could be influenced by an increase in land placed in the Conservation Reserve Program.



Red-tailed Hawk numbers based on 20 years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09). Our most common raptor is becoming more numerous. Recent CBC totals are nearly double the figure of winter 1989–90. Red-taileds are quite facultative in their habitat requirements, adapting to even urban situations.



Thirty years of CBC data (1979–80 to 2008–09) for American Kestrel. This is picture of slow decline, probably in large part due to cleaner agriculture and neater rural landscapes, along with a loss of suitable cavity nesting sites.

of 310 shattered the previous high of 239 tallied in winter 2006-06. The Burton CBC led the way with 40 counted on 01 Jan.

Broad-winged Hawk: In the “for what it’s worth” department, one was reported without detail (at least none available to me) on the Beaver Creek CBC on 20 Dec. This raptor is every bit as migratory as Hooded Warbler, and virtually all of them spend the winter in the tropics of Mexico, Central America, and South America, with lesser numbers in southern Florida and the Caribbean. There are no indisputable winter records in Ohio, nor is there likely to ever be one. As Carl Sagan said, “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence,” and full documentation of this noteworthy record is needed

Red-tailed Hawk: Another successful raptor (Figure 9), as

evidenced by the 2,729 reported from all CBCs, the highest number ever, nearly double the 1,410 reported on Ohio CBCs 20 years ago.

Rough-legged Hawk: CBC reports were nearly identical to last year, with 110 reports (109 last winter). In general, observers felt their numbers were down, especially in tried and true haunts. [**Editor’s note:** Due to a typographical error, last year’s total was incorrectly stated as 190 in the Ohio Cardinal 31(2): 14.]

Golden Eagle: Seven individuals were reported — an exceptional number. Two came from CBCs, and no details were available to me: Grand Rapids–Waterville CBC on 03 Jan, and the Parkersburg WV–OH CBC on 03 Jan. The latter bird may not have been on the Ohio side of the Ohio River, and both are suspicious in that a major river, favored Bald

Eagle habitat, is a dominant feature of both count circles. Indisputable reports come from The Wilds, **Muskingum**, where an adult was reported numerous times throughout the season. Barb Hohman reported both an adult and an immature there on 06 Feb. John Kuenzli, Tom Archdeacon, and Blake Mathys found an immature at Killdeer Plains, **Wyandot**, which was seen throughout the season. John Pogacnik documented an immature in **Lake** on 06 Jan. Dave Minney found an immature in **Adams** on 15 Jan (*vide* Pete Whan) that was seen by numerous observers.

American Kestrel: Continues to decline (Figure 10). Statewide CBCs reported 900, up from last year's total of 841 but well under the twenty-year annual average of 1,156.

Merlin: These fierce little falcons are on the upswing and occupying Ohio in ever-increasing numbers. They have become fixtures at many large urban cemeteries, and it can only be a matter of time before Merlins begin nesting in such places. The 20 reported on CBCs is a record high. At least 28 other birds were reported from widely scattered locales.

Peregrine Falcon: The usual suspects in urban locales occupied by nesting pairs were widely reported, but few other Peregrine Falcons were noted.

Virginia Rail: Shane Egleston and John Habig produced one, always an exceptional winter find, at Spring Valley WA in **Greene** on 19 Jan. Egleston found two there the next day, and Habig reports that one remained on 05 Feb.

American Coot: These hardy rallids occur in varying numbers from year to year, depending upon the availability of open water. This winter, 2,445 were reported on CBCs, which is well above the 1,952 yearly average over the past decade.

Sandhill Crane: The 508 reported on statewide CBCs is a record high and correlates with the overall population increase of this species. A noteworthy flight crossed central and western Ohio between 04 and 08 Dec. Exceptional observations follow:

04 Dec – 50 in **Darke** (Regina Schieltz)

06 Dec – at least 100 in **Franklin**
(Verna Ansel)

07 Dec – at least 100 in **Logan** and **Allen** (Jill Bowers)

07 Dec – 50 in **Clinton** (Ed Roush)

07 Dec – at least 600 in **Allen** (Russ Reynolds)

07 Dec – at least 1,000 in **Hamilton**
(Ann Oliver)

08 Dec – 100 in **Greene** (Nick Boutis)

08 Dec – 88 in **Wyandot** (Charles Bombaci)

Killdeer: These half-hardy plovers were scarce; the 62 reported on CBCs was the lowest number in 14 winters. Migrants were noted by the end of Feb, right on schedule.

Purple Sandpiper: Five birds were reported, about average. Ray Hannikman found one at Mentor Headlands, **Lake**, on 04 Dec and Suzanne Wagner reported two there the following day. Lisa Brohl found one on South Bass Island, **Ottawa**, on 12 Dec, and John Pogacnik had two fly-bys in **Lake** on 21 Dec.

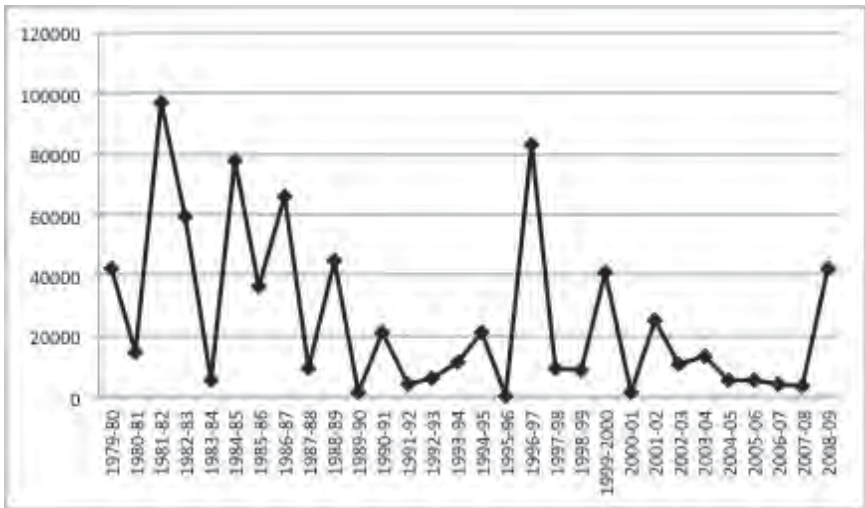
Dunlin: Four in **Lake** on 07 Dec (John Pogacnik) constituted the only report.

Wilson's Snipe: Below-average numbers were reported on CBCs: a total of only 29. Other reports include one in **Greene** on 19 Jan (Shane Egleston, John Habig); one in **Montgomery** on 08 Feb (Jonathan Frodge); one in **Butler** on 18 Jan (Mike Busam); and a remarkable 12 in **Wayne** on 01 Jan (Aden Yoder).

American Woodcock: True overwintering woodcock are quite rare, and only one that might fall into that category was reported: in **Coshocton** on 28 Dec (Adam H. Yoder). The first displaying birds were reported on 10 Feb in **Clinton** (Chris Clingman), and there were scattered reports throughout Feb of early returnees.

Black-legged Kittiwake: Kittiwakes are extremely rare away from Lake Erie (they are rare on the lake, too), but Dave Slager found one at Hoover Reservoir in **Delaware** on 01 Jan. The bird, an immature, remained through the month and was seen by dozens of birders. Another immature was sighted by Christopher Taylor on Lake Erie in **Cuyahoga** on 11 Jan.

Bonaparte's Gull: Massive numbers staged in their typical early-Dec buildup along Lake Erie. Ray Hannikman reported at least 20,000 in Fairport Harbor, **Lake**, on 02 Dec, and numerous other concentrations of several thousand birds were noted in the Cleveland area in early Dec. Far fewer



The dizzying yo-yo ride of 30 years of Bonaparte's Gull CBC data (1979-80 to 2008-09). For the most part, there is a regular cycle of peak abundances occurring every two to three years. Numbers have fallen way off beginning in the early 2000s, although this winter saw a large increase. The vast majority of Bonaparte's Gulls are found on Lake Erie, and factors influencing annual numbers are certainly varied and complex, perhaps including weather, success on the breeding grounds, and cycles of prey fish.

were reported away from Lake Erie. An impressive inland concentration was the 453 tallied on the Hoover Reservoir CBC in Delaware on 20 Dec. The 41,986 statewide CBC total is the highest count since the winter of 1996–97, but it is under the 45,146 annual average recorded in the 1980s. The annual CBC average over the past 10 years has been only 15,136 (Figure 11).

Black-headed Gull: Four reports were exceptional. Ray Hannikman found a first-cycle bird in **Lake** on 02 Dec, and John Pogacnik saw adults in elsewhere in **Lake** on 13 Dec and 01 Jan. Rob Lowry found an adult at East 72nd Street in **Cuyahoga** on 21 Dec, and what was presumably the same individual remained until at least 09 Jan (Michael Sandy, Jen Brumfield).

Little Gull: At least 10, nearly all adults, were reported from the Cleveland area — **Cuyahoga** and **Lake** — between early Dec and early Jan. Noteworthy was one found on the Toledo CBC on 14 Dec.

Franklin's Gull: At least six were reported on Lake Erie in **Cuyahoga**, **Lake**, and **Lorain** between 02 Dec and 02 Jan; the only report away from Lake Erie was one in **Warren** on 05 Dec (John Habig).



*Franklin's Gulls are occasional winter visitors, with around six reported this winter. Jason Estep photographed this bird 13 Dec at East 72nd Street in Cleveland, **Cuyahoga**.*

Ring-billed Gull: Widespread and locally abundant; 106,475 were reported from CBCs, the third-highest tally in the last decade. An exceptional inland concentration occurred at Hoover Reservoir, **Delaware**, in late Feb, when at least 10,000 were present. Also noteworthy were 2,000 at Cowan Lake in **Clinton** on 28 Feb (Jay Stenger, Mark Gilsdorf).

California Gull: Gabe Leidy and Emil Bacik found an adult at East 72nd Street, **Cuyahoga**, on 06 Dec; Leidy found another here the following day. What were probably these same two birds were reported regularly through early Feb. Jen Brumfield found one at Avon Lake in **Lorain** on 12 Dec.

Herring Gull: About normal numbers were reported, nearly all from Lake Erie. Inland, Herring Gulls are far outnumbered by Ring-billed Gulls. A tally of at least 100 at Hoover Reservoir, **Delaware**, in late Feb was an impressive inland concentration (Jim McCormac).

Thayer's Gull: Perhaps a dozen were noted throughout the winter in **Cuyahoga**, **Lake**, and **Lorain** on Lake Erie — about typical. Atypical were two that visited Oberlin Reservoir, about 13 miles south of Lake Erie, on 28 Feb (Gabe Leidy). Thayer's Gull is almost unheard of away from the lake.

Iceland Gull: About normal numbers were reported in Jan and Feb along Lake Erie in **Cuyahoga**, **Lake**, and **Lorain**. Much more rare, but to be expected, were one or two along the Maumee River near Toledo. Far more unusual was a peak of 11 on Oberlin Reservoir in **Lorain** on



Immature Thayer's Gulls can be identified in flight by experienced observers by noting subtle patterns in the flight feathers, among other features. This species is regularly observed among the large gull flocks at East 72nd Street in Cleveland, Cuyahoga, and Judy Semroc photographed this individual there on 20 Jan.

28 Feb (Gabe Leidy) and one at C. J. Brown Reservoir in **Clark** on 15 Feb (Doug Overacker, Julie Karlson, Brian Menker).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: This European species, first recorded in Ohio in 1977, continues to increase. The 19 recorded on CBCs was a record number. Many others were tallied along the Lake Erie shore throughout the winter, possibly the highest numbers yet recorded, even outpacing last winter's record numbers. Even more unusual was a peak of nine at Oberlin Reservoir, **Lorain**, on 28 Feb (Gabe Leidy); one at Clear Fork Reservoir in **Richland** in late Feb (John Herman); one at Berlin Reservoir, **Mahoning**, in late Feb (Craig Holt); and one at C. J. Brown Reservoir in **Clark** on 19 Dec (Doug Overacker, Julie Karlson).

Glaucous Gull: The nine found on CBCs was the highest total since the winter of 1989-90, when 18 were

reported. Numbers along Lake Erie probably equaled or outstripped any winter on record, and a few were found along the Maumee River near Toledo. Inland birds are much more rare, and the following were reported: two at C. J. Brown Reservoir, **Clark**, on 22 Feb (Doug Overacker) and six at Oberlin Reservoir, **Lorain**, on 21 Feb (Gabe Leidy, Dane Adams, Emil Bacik). Ken and Julie Davis found one at Hoover Reservoir, **Delaware**, on 01 Mar, and it is likely this bird was there prior to this report.

Great Black-backed Gull: About normal numbers were reported along Lake Erie. A noteworthy number was the 300 or more tallied by John Pogacnik in **Lake** on 07 Dec.

Common Tern: An exceptional find on the Toledo CBC, 14 Dec, at Bay Shore Power Plant in **Lucas**.

Pomarine Jaeger: Suzanne Wagner found an immature (which virtually all Ohio jaegers are) at Avon Lake Power Plant, **Lorain**, on 11 Dec. This cooperative bird lingered until at least 27 Dec (Su Snyder, Sally Deems-Mogyordy, Hallie Mason) and was seen by many birders. Bret McCarty reported one from Rocky River, **Cuyahoga**, on 21 Dec. John Pogacnik had two fly by his **Lake** home, on 28 Dec and 03 Jan. An impressive four birds were tallied on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec.

Parasitic Jaeger: One was reported from the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec.

Rock Pigeon: Apparently doing well. The 31,152 reported from CBCs smash all previous records.



*Great Horned Owls begin nesting quite early, and this bird, with just its ear tufts and tail visible, may be incubating eggs already on 02 Feb. Judy Semroc photographed it using a former Great Blue Heron nest at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's **Medina** Sanctuary, Medina.*

Eurasian Collared-Dove: The long-anticipated invasion is slowly building momentum. Thirteen were found on the Grand Lake-St. Marys CBC on 27 Dec. This is the first time the species has been recorded on an Ohio CBC. For a potential preview of things to come, look to the west. Indiana has recorded these doves on CBCs over the past eight winters, with a record high of 56 reported this winter. A bit farther west, Illinois counted 222 on statewide CBCs, which was actually a significant drop from the previous two winters. To our south, Kentucky has tallied them the past nine winters on CBCs, with a record of 36 this winter. It appears that this invader is sweeping into our region from the west and south, but, so far, is stalling out at Ohio's borders.

Mourning Dove: Observers rarely comment on common species such as this, which is one reason that CBC data are so valuable. This winter, 22,285 were reported on statewide CBCs, about average for the past two decades.

Barn Owl: Ten were reported from CBCs from strongholds where roost sites are known, such as the **Wayne-Holmes-Tuscarawas** region and

the **Ross-Pickaway** area. Less expected was one in **Ottawa** on 27 Dec (John Pogacnik) and another in **Union** on 08 Feb (*vide* Annette Webb).

Eastern Screech-Owl: CBCs provide a good barometer for this common but secretive species, because many counters make special efforts to find them. The 269 total reported was about average for the past decade. The Grand Rapids-Waterville CBC on 03 Jan led the pack, with 44 owls being found in their 15-mile-diameter circle.

Great Horned Owl: CBC counters did well, finding 181 — the highest total of the past seven winters.

Snowy Owl: Few and far between, with all reports coming from the immediate environs of Lake Erie. John Pogacnik reported an immature at Burke Lakefront Airport, **Cuyahoga**, on 01 Jan; it was widely seen. Dan Sanders found an apparent adult male there in early Jan; it was seen regularly throughout the season. Tom Bartlett and Sandy Tkach found one near Kelleys Island, **Erie**, on 20 Jan; Doug Vogus reports one from Ottawa NWR on 01 Feb.

Barred Owl: Apparently doing well: the 126 tally on statewide CBCs was a record high (Figure 12). As the trees in older urban and suburban neighborhoods mature, Barred Owls are increasingly moving into such haunts. This factor, coupled with the overall increasing maturation of Ohio's forests, suggests that these owls are increasing.

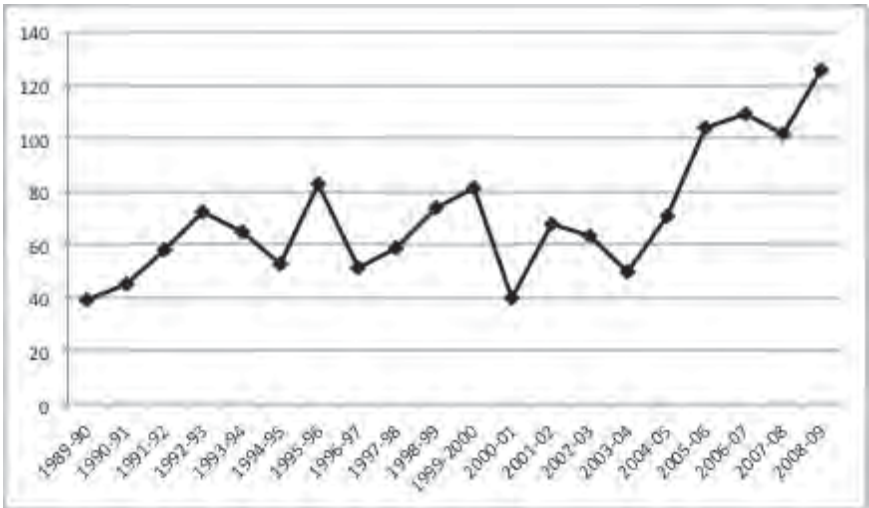


Long-eared Owl: The 17 reported from CBCs was the third-highest number ever. Nearly all were found at known roost sites. About six others were reported throughout the season, mostly from northern Ohio.

Fluffy but fierce, Short-eared Owls are regular in winter in Ohio wherever their prey can be found in sufficient numbers. Many observers find Short-eared Owls by flushing them; only rarely does one encounter a bird that can be photographed on the ground, as Douglas Ritzert did in Coshocton on 26 Jan.

Short-eared Owl: The 31 reported from CBCs statewide is about average for the past decade, but pales in comparison to the 116 found on CBCs during the winters of 1990–91 and 1995–96.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: A record nine were reported from CBCs. Kelley Williams-Sieg reports that owls



Twenty years of Barred Owl data from CBCs (1989–90 to 2008–09). Owls are hard to census, and observer effort plays a larger role than with diurnal species. Even without detailed analysis of observer effort, this graph suggests a significant increase. Ohio's woodlands are aging, too, creating better habitat and more potential nesting sites.

were still calling in the woods at her Chillicothe, **Ross**, banding station on 05 Dec, but the last capture was 26 Nov. In total, 37 owls were caught and banded in October and November. Tim Tolford caught and banded two in **Hocking** on 20 Feb.

Rufous Hummingbird: An adult female appeared at the home of JoAnn LaMuth in **Franklin** on 17 Oct and remained until 12 Dec. It was captured and banded by Allen Chartier on 14 Nov.

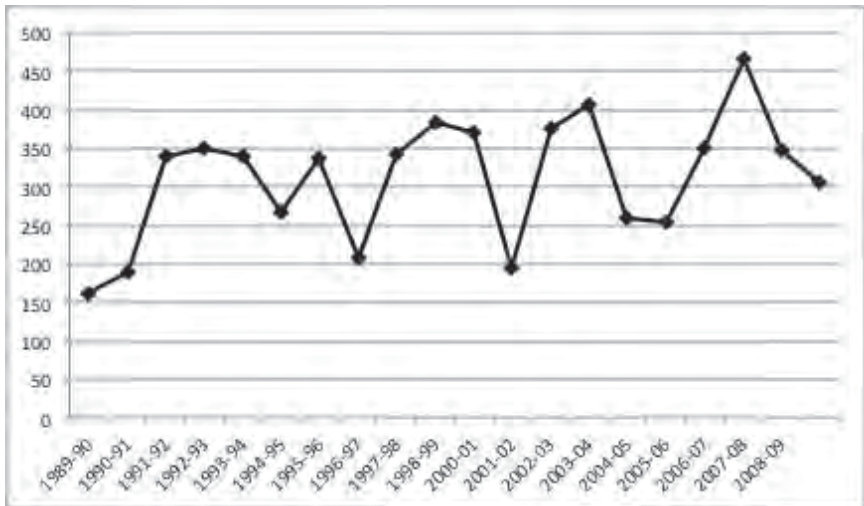
Belted Kingfisher: The 305 total reported on CBCs statewide is about average (Figure 13).

Red-headed Woodpecker: The 181 reported from CBCs is slightly above the twenty-year CBC average of 171. This species shows marked peaks every two to three winters, probably coinciding with peak acorn production years (Figure 14).

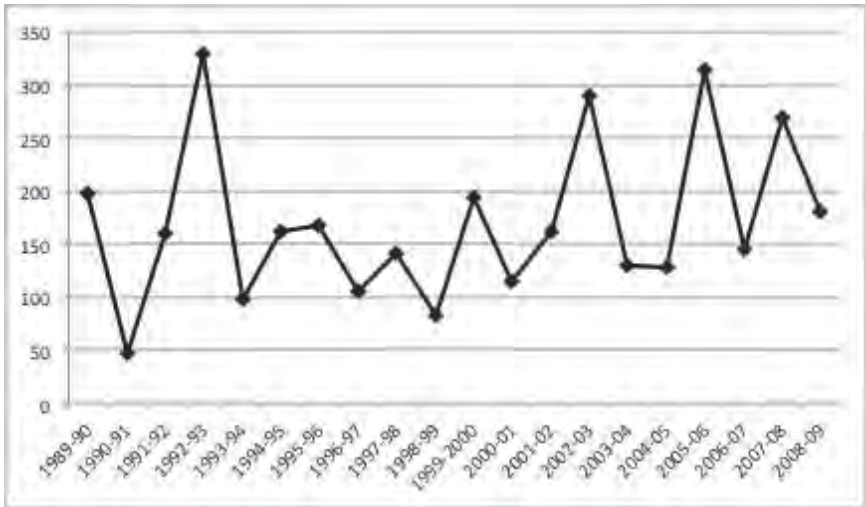
Red-bellied Woodpecker: This species has been steadily increasing for decades. This winter, a total of 4,308 was reported from CBCs, easily eclipsing the previous record of 4,215 tallied in winter 2006–07.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Our only woodpecker that can be considered to be a neotropical migrant, with some individuals traveling as far as Costa Rica. Others stick out the winter in Ohio, as evidenced by the 187 reported from CBCs — the highest number ever.

Downy Woodpecker: Our most common woodpecker, found in all types of habitats. The 5,700 tally reported from CBCs was the second-highest total ever. **Holmes** County wins the title of Downy Woodpecker Capital of Ohio: counters found 553 on the Millersburg CBC on 03 Jan.



Belted Kingfisher, 20 years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09). This water-dependent species shows a slight increase over the past two decades. If mean winter temperatures continue to rise, causing an increase in open water, this species should increase as well.



This graph represents 20 years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09) for Red-headed Woodpecker. The pattern is one of rhythmic booms and busts, which would be expected of a species heavily dependent upon tree mast, especially acorns. Oaks produce large acorn crops cyclically, typically every other year or two.

Hairy Woodpecker: This species, one of the widest-ranging woodpeckers in the Americas, is doing well in Ohio. It is more strongly associated with mature trees than is the similar Downy Woodpecker, and the increasing maturation of Ohio's forests and woodlands is helping Hairy Woodpeckers. The 1,093 reported from CBCs represent the third-highest total ever.

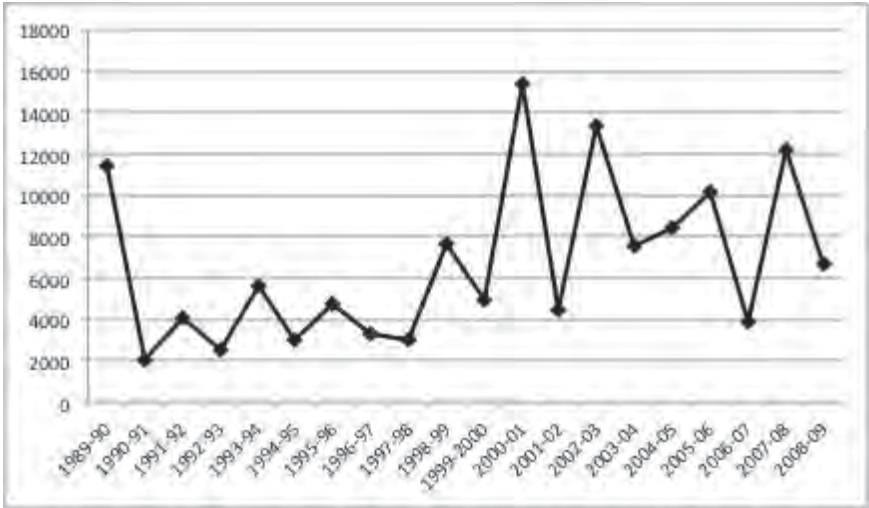
Northern Flicker: Woodpeckers in general are flourishing in Ohio, and the flicker is no exception. The 614 tallied on CBCs eclipses the previous high of 478 counted during the winter of 2005–06.

Pileated Woodpecker: Our largest woodpecker continues to increase. The 697 reported from CBCs bests the previous record of 656, reported last winter.

Eastern Phoebe: Half-hardy phoebes will attempt to winter if conditions are not too rough. CBCs statewide reported 15, which is slightly above the annual average of 13 over the past 20 winters. Contrast those numbers with the brutal winters of 1977–78 and 1978–79, when only two and one were reported, respectively.

Say's Phoebe: An outstanding find was one in *Holmes* on 14 Dec (Johnny Miller). This is only the fourth or fifth state record.

Northern Shrike: One has to go back to the winter of 1995–96, when 22 shrikes were tallied, to top the 18 found on CBCs this winter. Northern Shrikes are most frequent in the tier of counties buffering Lake Erie. Thus, the following are noteworthy: **Wyandot** on 06 Dec (John Habig, Shane



This graph of 20 years of CBC data for Horned Lark (1989–90 to 2008–09) is somewhat perplexing. After a decade of relatively flat low numbers, a pronounced boom-and-bust cycle began in the early 2000s. Nearly every other winter saw large spikes alternating with extremely lean numbers. This winter was a lean year — 6,643 individuals — which was preceded by a winter in which 12,155 birds were tallied.

Egleston, Rick Asamoto); **Delaware** on 11 Dec (Sean Williams); an incredible *two*, well-seen by excellent observers on 15 Dec in southernmost **Adams** (Rich McCarty, Mark Zloba). This is right across the Ohio River from Kentucky, where Northern Shrike was just added to the state list in 2004; **Madison** on 24 Dec (Nate Nye); **Fayette** on 04 Jan (John Habig); and **Muskingum** on 08 Feb (Lori Brumbaugh, Lou Gardella). Most of these birds were present for extended periods and seen by many observers.

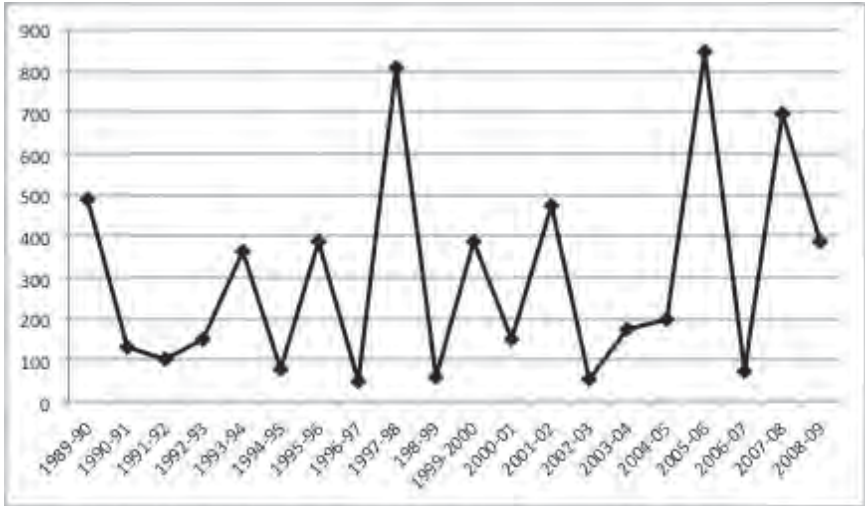
White-eyed Vireo: Dave Stover found one in late Dec in **Summit**; Sarah Winnicki relocated the bird on 02 Jan. There are at least a half-dozen prior Dec records.

Warbling Vireo: The bird first reported in **Holmes** on 19 Nov continued through at least 18 Dec. This is an incredible record; the previous

late date was 04 Nov 1990. This individual is believed to be a subspecies in the western *swainsonii* group (Kenn Kaufman pers. comm.) The western and eastern complexes of Warbling Vireo are fairly different and may someday be split. This case illustrates the importance of documenting subspecies, forms, and variations.

Blue Jay: Overall, numbers reported were about average, but in certain regions of heavily forested southeastern Ohio, numerous observers commented on large numbers of jays. There was an exceptional acorn crop in some areas that might account for these reports.

American Crow: This species is doing well; the total of 49,003 reported from CBCs is well above the annual average of 42,416 over the past decade. Any ill effects of West Nile Virus seem to have been overcome.



Twenty years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09) for Red-breasted Nuthatch, illustrating a classic boom and bust pattern of a boreal irruptive.

Horned Lark: CBCs reported 6,643, which is below-average for the past decade. Larks show a fascinating cyclical pattern of high peaks about every other year, starting in the mid-1990s (Figure 15). Last winter, CBCs tallied 12,155.

Tree Swallow: At least seven foolhardy swallows were in **Ottawa** on 07 Dec (Tom Bartlett); even more foolish was one in **Lake** on 01 Jan (John Pogacnik), which provided one of the latest records ever.

Carolina Chickadee: The 8,511 reported from CBCs was the second-highest total ever.

Black-capped Chickadee: The 5,222 reported from CBCs was the highest total in 13 winters. There was no evidence of a southward irruption.

Tufted Titmouse: Like its fellow members of the Paridae, titmice are doing well. The 7,114 reported from CBCs ties the second-largest number

ever reported. Tom Bartlett and Sandy Tkach report one on Kelleys Island, **Erie**, on 11 Feb. Titmice are scarce on the Lake Erie islands.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Numbers took a sharp nosedive after the massive irruption of last winter. A total of 386 was reported from CBCs (see Figure 16 for long-term trends).

White-breasted Nuthatch: Another record — the 5,706 reported from CBCs is the highest tally ever.

Brown Creeper: Numbers reported from CBCs and elsewhere were slightly above-average. Creepers probably tend to be underreported; they are one of the more difficult common birds to detect.

Carolina Wren: The 2,568 reported on CBCs is the third-highest total ever.

House Wren: A great winter rarity, two were reported: one well

documented on the Ragersville CBC, **Tuscarawas**, on 26 Dec and one with no details on the Brown Family Environmental Center CBC, **Knox**, on 14 Dec.

Winter Wren: An impressive 90 were counted on CBCs, the third highest total ever.

Marsh Wren: Spring Valley WA, **Greene**, has become a regular winter haunt for this half-hardy species. Jay Lehman found two here on 04 Jan; Shane Egleston reported one still present on 19 Jan. Nancy Howell found another in **Cuyahoga** on 30 Dec, and one turned up on the Wooster CBC, **Wayne**, on 01 Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: CBCs collectively reported 1,094, well under the annual average for the past two decades.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: CBCs reported 42, and at least 10 others were reported elsewhere. This number is well above average.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: One turned up on the Lake Erie Islands CBC on 14 Dec, a spectacular winter find. But, there are at least a half-dozen previous Dec records.

Eastern Bluebird: Bluebird fans can take heart: the 4,422 reported from CBCs statewide is the fourth-highest total ever.

Hermit Thrush: Secretive and easily missed, this hardy thrush is probably present in much greater numbers than suspected, especially in the unglaciated

hill country. A below-average 63 were reported from CBCs, along with small numbers elsewhere.

American Robin: Many nonbirders comment on robins, wondering why they are around in winter. They can thank non-native fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. The 31,607 reported from CBCs are about double the number reported last year. Contrast that figure with 3,978, which was the annual average reported on CBCs in the 1960s.



*Amur Honeysuckle (Lonicera maackii) is an exotic species, yet it provides food for some species, such as this American Robin photographed in **Franklin** on 14 Dec by Jim McCormac.*

Gray Catbird: The 10 reported on CBCs is about average. Seven others were reported in widespread locales.



*Wintering Hermit Thrushes are rare in northeastern Ohio. Judy Semroc photographed this individual 03 Feb at the Ravenna Arsenal Training Facility, **Portage**.*

Northern Mockingbird: The 798 reported from CBCs was well below the annual average of the past decade, but well above the annual average of the previous decade. The Millersburg CBC (*Holmes*) on 03 Jan produced a jaw-dropping 173, far eclipsing even the Cincinnati CBC in southernmost Ohio, which reported 108 on 28 Dec.

Brown Thrasher: Seven were reported on CBCs, which is about average. About five others were reported elsewhere.

European Starling: In the bad news department, a near record was set when 310,532 were tallied on statewide CBCs. One must revisit the winters of 1984–85 and 2003–04 to find higher numbers.

American Pipit: Only 70 were reported on CBCs, far fewer than last winter's total of 589. Few others were reported.

Cedar Waxwing: A great winter for waxwings: the 4,864 reported on CBCs was the fourth-highest total ever, and numerous observers from scattered locales reported good numbers.

Orange-crowned Warbler: This is the toughest of the *Vermivora* warblers, but there are only about three Jan records prior to this winter. Amazingly, two surfaced this season. One turned up on the Cincinnati CBC on 28 Dec; it may have been present for three weeks. Bob Foppe and Bill Doss relocated it on 08 Jan. Dave Slager found another in *Franklin* on 04 Jan.



Ronnie Macko photographed this male Black-throated Blue Warbler on 08 Dec. The bird was present from 05-23 Dec at Gayle Thomas' feeder in Patmos, Mahoning.

Black-throated Blue Warbler:

Only the third Ohio Dec record was made when Shari Jackson and Ronnie Macko investigated a report of an odd feeder bird in *Mahoning*. The adult male visited the feeding station until 22 Dec, easily besting the previous late record of 10 Dec 2000 from *Cuyahoga*.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: The 1,340 tallied on statewide CBCs was an impressive number, easily eclipsing last year's 866. The Beaver Creek CBC (*Greene*) on 20 Dec took top honors, counting 250. There must



An Orange-crowned Warbler appearing in midwinter in Ohio is most unexpected and may represent a very late migrant. Ohio has several winter records for this species, mostly in December. Bob Foppe photographed this bird during the Cincinnati Christmas Bird Count, 01 Jan, in Hamilton.

have been a great fruit crop of poison ivy in southwest Ohio — this is a favored winter food.

Pine Warbler: Surprisingly, the six reported from CBCs was the highest number in at least 20 years. Three of them came from a small cemetery in **Jackson** on 20 Dec, where they were observed feeding on the seeds of Woolly Panic Grass (*Panicum lanuginosum*) and Pale Green Panic grass (*P. laxiflorum*) (Jim McCormac). An impressive eight turned up in **Franklin, Muskingum, Tuscarawas,** and **Wayne**, most of which were seen for extended periods.

Palm Warbler: One turned up at a feeder in **Holmes** on 02 Jan and remained for a few weeks (Wayne Raber). Greg Links turned one up on 31 Dec in **Lucas**.

Common Yellowthroat: Kevin Kline found two in **Holmes** on 03 Jan; somewhat surprisingly, these were the only reports.

Eastern Towhee: The 641 reported from CBCs statewide is well above the 513 annual CBC average over the past 11 winters — since the name was changed from the colorful Rufous-sided Towhee to the colorless moniker it now bears.

American Tree Sparrow: These jaunty little visitors from at least 1,100 miles to our north were reported in about typical numbers: 12,995 were tallied on CBCs.

Chipping Sparrow: Always a wintertime rarity and prone to

misidentification. That said, the 47 reported from CBCs should be taken with at least one grain of salt. This would be the third-highest total in at least 25 years, and I don't have a great deal of faith in all of those earlier records. At least a dozen non-CBC chippers were reported from widely scattered locales.

Field Sparrow: There must be many more of these shy skulkers of old fields and thickets than are detected, especially in southeastern Ohio. CBC counters did well, though, collectively finding 645 — the sixth-largest count ever.



Field Sparrows fed below Ronnie Macko's feeders in Alliance, Stark, in late winter, with four birds appearing 18 Jan, then decreasing to two birds and eventually to a single bird that consistently visited the feeder.

Lark Sparrow: This bird is rare in Ohio during any season; winter records are almost unheard of. Thus, Josh Muchow's discovery of one in **Crawford** on 14 Jan was an exceptional find and probably only the fourth winter record. It lingered at least until 05 Feb.

Savannah Sparrow: Either this species is finding Ohio more to its liking in the winter or more people are misidentifying them. CBC's reported 109, far eclipsing the previous high of 62 recorded in winter 2004–05. The annual CBC average over the past five years has been 61; in the five years prior to that it was 29; and in the five years before that it was 15 — a doubling of the number of birds reported every five years. Savannah Sparrows are inveterate consumers of a variety of seeds, typically gleaned from the ground. It may be possible that a trend toward no-till agricultural practices has allowed more of them to remain north, at least in early winter.

Fox Sparrow: The 42 reported from CBCs is about average. Typical numbers were reported throughout the winter from central and southern Ohio, but they were noted as scarce in northeast Ohio.

Song Sparrow: The 8,085 reported from all CBCs is the lowest number in the past four winters, but still well above long-term averages. As always,



Lark Sparrows are regular in Ohio, but only as nesters in the sandy, open habitats of the Oak Openings region, so an individual in winter in Bucyrus, Crawford, was a real surprise. Josh Muchow documented this bird below his feeder on 12 Jan.

their familiar cheery songs were noted by mid-Feb — Song Sparrows are one of the first birds to commence “spring” singing.

Lincoln's Sparrow: A major wintertime rarity that can easily be misidentified. One was reported from the Toledo CBC, **Lucas**, on 14 Dec. Dan Kendrick reported one at an **Adams** feeder 05 Feb; it had apparently been present for an indeterminate period prior to this. There have only been two or three records of this species overwintering in Ohio, and all winter reports should be thoroughly documented.

Swamp Sparrow: Quite hardy, Swamp Sparrows should be sought in thick cattail stands in winter. Appropriate habitat can harbor surprising numbers. The 706 reported on CBCs shatters the previous record of 645 in winter 2005–06. There has been a marked upward trend in numbers reported on CBCs. Over the past decade, the annual average was 507. In the previous decade, it was 418. The annual average in the decade preceding that was 417, and Swamp Sparrow numbers were fairly stable before then.

White-throated Sparrow: The 5,887 reported from CBCs was the lowest number of the past four winters but still the fourth-highest CBC total ever. It would be interesting to know the ratio of “white-striped” to “tan-striped” morphs; few observers note this information.

Harris's Sparrow: One visiting a **Hamilton** feeder was tallied for the Cincinnati CBC on 28 Dec. The bird

was present for an unknown period preceding and following the CBC, but it was on private property that was largely inaccessible.

White-crowned Sparrow: The 3,004 tallied on CBCs was the fifth-highest CBC total ever. Robert Hershberger noted an individual of the Gambel's subspecies (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) coming to his feeders in **Holmes**. Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows differ most notably in that their lores are white. This subspecies breeds from Alaska east to Hudson Bay, and the majority of the population winters well to the west of Ohio. Individuals of this subspecies should always be reported.

Dark-eyed Junco: Juncos like Ohioans and their feeders. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, Dark-eyed Junco was the second most frequent species at Ohio feeders. The 7,066 reported from CBCs was the second-highest total ever.

Lapland Longspur: CBCs turned up 1,449, which was the third-highest total ever. Heather Raymond reported several flocks totaling "hundreds" in **Wyandot** on 09 Jan. Rick Counts noted hundreds elsewhere in **Wyandot** on 11 Feb, and by 23 Feb he noted congregations numbering well over 1,000. Also on 23 Feb, Russ Reynolds found a mixed flock of Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs estimated at 2,000 birds in **Allen**.

Snow Bunting: About average numbers were reported. Exceptional flocks include at least 1,000 in **Allen** (Russ Reynolds); 150 in **Preble** on 15 Jan (Shane Egleston); and an

impressive 450 or more visiting Robert Hershberger's feeding station in **Holmes**.

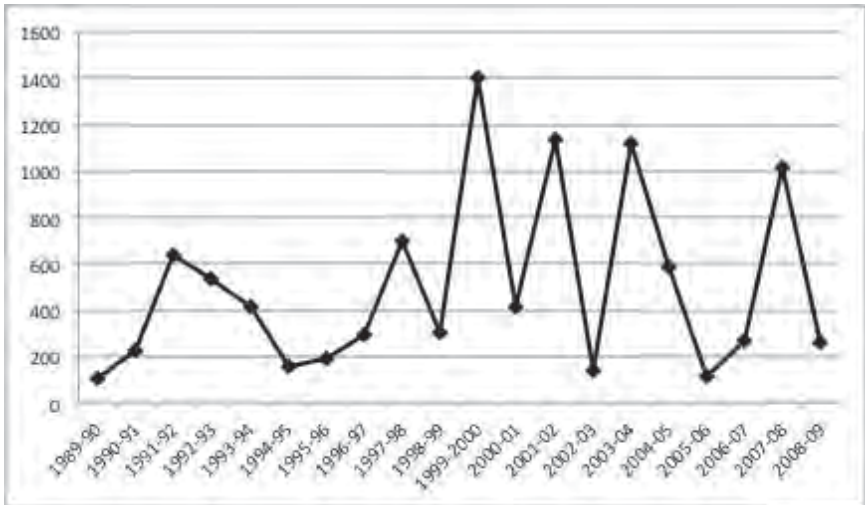
Northern Cardinal: This species was the most frequent visitor to Ohioan's feeders according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch. CBC's reported 16,985, which is about average for the past two decades.

Painted Bunting: An adult male Painted Bunting that appeared at a **Delaware** feeder in mid-Dec and remained into mid-Jan (exact dates unknown) was exceptional. It was apparently injured. Although the Columbus Zoo is only about six miles away, a check with zoo personnel by Darlene Sillick revealed that the facility had no individuals of this species.



A Painted Bunting is a jarring sight at any time in Ohio, let alone winter. Its origins may be suspect. Photo courtesy Michelle Dixon, taken 22 Dec in Delaware.

Dickcissel: Gene Stauffer identified a male at the feeders at Blendon Woods Metropark in **Franklin** on 14 Dec. It remained through Feb and was seen by scores of birders. Although they are certainly a rarity in winter, there are about two dozen prior winter records of Dickcissels that opted to forego Venezuela and vicinity.



Rusty Blackbird, 20 years of CBC data (1989–90 to 2008–09). Especially in the past decade, this species shows a regular pattern of highs and lows alternating about every other year. In part, this may be an artifact of observers' finding large blackbird roosts, but other factors may be at work as well.

Bobolink: Brian Zwiebel spotted one in the grasses at Bayshore Power Plant, **Lucas**, on 14 Dec. Brian got Greg Links on the bird in short order, and they obtained good looks and provided an impeccable description of the bird's physical appearance and call notes. It was later re-found by Matt Anderson and Dave Welch. There are two previous mid-Dec Ohio records.

Red-winged Blackbird: The 4,447 reported from CBCs is somewhat below the long-term average, and indicates that no massive blackbird roosts were found. As is to be expected, male red-wings were trickling back in by the end of the season.

Eastern Meadowlark: CBCs reported 361 statewide, which is well above the annual average of 269 over the past ten years.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: John Pogacnik picked one out of a flock of 200 blackbirds in **Erie** on 07 Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: This swamp dweller has become a species of conservation concern; its numbers appear to be in sharp decline. The 261 total reported from CBCs was only about 25% of last winter's CBC total, but all species of flock-forming blackbirds were way down this winter. The long-term pattern of winter Rusty Blackbirds, based on CBC data, is fascinating, showing strong peaks about every other winter over the past decade (Figure 17). Noteworthy were 130 in **Butler** on 14 Feb (Mike Busam, Steve Pelikan, Charlie Saunders).

Brewer's Blackbird: Matt Anderson reported one visiting his feeders in **Lucas** in late Dec. Another visited the feeder of Albert Troyer in **Richland** from 17 to 22 Jan. Four were reported on the Tiffin CBC, **Seneca**, on 20 Dec, and four on the Dayton CBC, **Montgomery**, on 28 Dec. CBC compilers should try to get documentation to validate reports of this rare and easily misidentified blackbird.

Common Grackle: Way down from last year, and no massive roosts were reported. The 8,767 reported on CBCs was only about 1/30th of the number reported last winter.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Only 1,601 were reported on CBCs statewide, the second lowest count in at least 30 years.



*Rather than spend winter in the lush tropical forests of Central America, this adult male Baltimore Oriole opted to remain in **Franklin**. This species has successfully overwintered in Ohio several times. Jim McCormac photographed this individual 21 Dec.*

Baltimore Oriole: Seeing the brilliant orange flash of a male oriole against the backdrop of Ohio's snowy winter landscape is a shock; they should be in the tropics of Costa Rica and vicinity!

Yet, an adult male appeared at the feeders of Becky Schmitt in **Franklin** in mid-Dec, and was photographed on 21 Dec (Jim McCormac). What was likely the same bird appeared on 15 Jan at feeders less than a mile away (John and Martha McCormac). This oriole was seen sporadically through Jan at these two feeding stations. A first-year male appeared on 31 Dec at a **Knox** feeding station, and remained through the season (*vide* Junior Nisley). Another apparent first-year male appeared at Richard Dolbeer's **Erie** feeders on 17 Dec but was not seen again. These sightings are hardly unprecedented; there are at least 30 prior winter records.

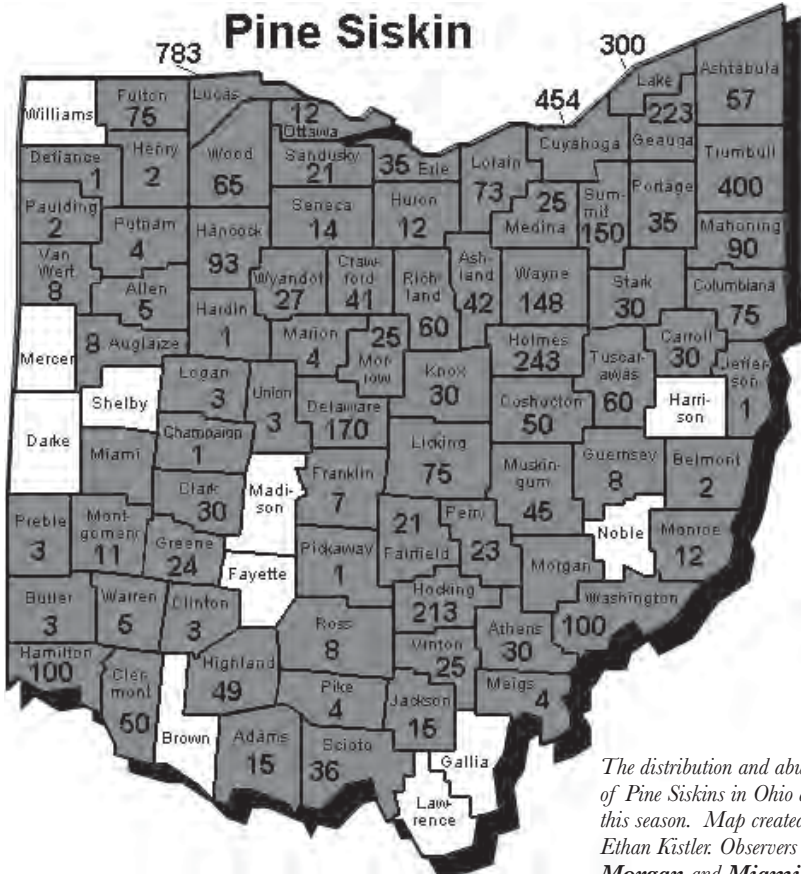
Purple Finch: The 386 reported from CBCs was almost exactly the same as the number reported on CBCs last winter. The highest numbers were reported from southernmost Ohio, such as the 94 tallied on the Adams County CBC on 14 Dec. In many northern regions, they were scarce.

House Finch: CBCs found 6,960 statewide, about average for the past decade but well below the boom years of the 1990s.

Red Crossbill: Few and far between, unlike the following species. Rick Counts had one in **Wyandot** on 02 Dec; he found two there on 07 Dec, and another on 02 Feb. Matt Anderson reported one in **Lucas** on 03 Jan. Gary Cowell found one in **Richland** on 10 Jan, and two were reported from Woodlawn Cemetery in **Lucas** on 17 and 18 Jan (Greg Links). Gene Stauffer produced one in **Franklin** on 03 Feb, and Suzanne Wagner found one in **Geauga** on 13 Feb.

winter) and there were numerous other reports of individuals and small flocks. Noteworthy was a flock of 15 in **Richland** on 02 Jan (*vide* Roger Troutman). Scott Albaugh found 15 in **Jefferson** on 11 Jan. Dan Sanders found 20 in Woodlawn Cemetery in **Lucas** on 02 Feb; their numbers spiked to 150 on 09 Feb (Robert Royle). Elizabeth Heineman had 24 at her South Bass Island, **Ottawa**, feeders on 20 Feb.

Pine Siskin: Plenty of siskins were everywhere (Figure 19). The 3,205 reported from CBCs statewide was a record high, nearly doubling the previous high CBC of 1,746, tallied in winter 1989–90. Imagine the seed bills incurred by Adam Yoder, who hosted a high count of 250 at his **Coshocton** feeders on 06 Jan. Bob Scott Placier caught and banded a strongly greenish individual at his **Athens** home on 18 Jan. Such individuals are sometimes termed



The distribution and abundance of Pine Siskins in Ohio during this season. Map created by Ethan Kistler. Observers in both Morgan and Miami reported this species but did not report the number of individuals seen.

green morphs, and comprise perhaps 1% of the overall population.

American Goldfinch: This is the fifth most common feeder bird in Ohio, according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch. All those feeders must help; the 13,628 tallied on CBCs is the second-highest total ever, nearly matching last winter's record high of 14,055.

European Goldfinch: Although they are non-native escapees, free-flying birds should still be reported. One appeared at a **Richland** feeder on 01 Jan (*vide* Cheryl Harner).



*It must have been a shock to see this exotic at the feeder, but European Goldfinch is being regularly seen in the region thanks to intentional releases in the Chicago area (where it now breeds). Dolliver Napier photographed this bird in **Richland** on 01 Jan.*

Evening Grosbeak: Would have been non-existent, were it not for one bird reported from the Buckeye Lake CBC, **Licking**, on 20 Dec.

House Sparrow: The 31,853 reported on CBCs represents a slight uptick over last winter's tally. Nonetheless, the long-term picture seems to be one of gradual decline — a situation that few birders will lament.

Errata

There were two errors in the Fall 2008 issue regarding locations. John Herman observed a Franklin's Gull at Clear Creek Reservoir, **Richland** (erroneously listed as East Fork State Park). Several records of birds observed in Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge, including Prothonotary Warbler, were reported from the wrong county; this location is in **Lucas**.

The editorial staff of the Ohio Cardinal thanks all 391 individuals and organizations who made their field data available to us through reports submitted directly to us by mail and e-mail, as well as through online resources managed by the Ohio Ornithological Society and other means.

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|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Abbott, Nancy | Brumbaugh, Lori | English, Dave |
| Adams, Dane | Brumfield, Jennifer | English, David |
| Albaugh, Scott | Busam, Mike | Esker, Dick |
| Alldridge, Laura | Butcher, Suzanne | Esker, Jeanette |
| Allen, Raymond | Cagan, Steve | Evans, Bob |
| Amos, Chad | Caldwell, Craig | Faulkner, Chris |
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| Anderson, Nancy | Chartier, Allen | Fazio, Vic |
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| Beery, Dick | Dawson-Sheldon, Dorothy | Glick, Bruce |
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| Bobonick, Steve | Delpapa, Bea | Glover, Jim |
| Bollin, Dana | Dolan, Jim | Godber, Austin |
| Bolton, Brad | Dolbeer, Richard | Gooch, Laura |
| Bombaci, Charles | Dornan, Laura | Good, Dean |
| Boone, Aaron | Dornan, Tim | Graham, Cindy |
| Bosstic, Bill | Doss, Bill | Graham, Kim |
| Boutis, Nick | Dougherty, Julie | Graham, Paul |
| Bowers, Jill | Dubuc, Paul | Gratz, Howard |
| Bowman, Margaret | Dvorak, Dave | Gray, Karen |
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| Brehmer, Marcia | Edwards, John | Hackett, Scott |
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| King, Peter | McCormac, Jim | Ostermiller, Ken |
| Kistler, Ethan | McCormac, John | Overacker, Doug |

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| Plante, Julie | Snively, Elaine | White, Rick |
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| Sedivy, Mary Ann | Warner, Ben | |