

COMMENTS ON THE SEASON

By Craig Caldwell

I can't do better than to quote the National Weather Service: "After a mild December 2011, northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania waited for winter. Even though precipitation was above normal in December 2011, most of it fell as rain. Most areas, even in the snowbelt, had recorded only a few inches of snow by the start of the new year. Several lake effect events did take place in January. The most notable lake effect storm occurred on January 13th-15th when the primary snowbelt received one to two feet of snow. Outside of the few lake effect snow storms, there were virtually no significant snow storms during the 2011-2012 winter. The snow that fell was light and melted within a few days since the cold snaps were short. Many locations ended the winter season (Dec-Feb) in the top ten of warmest winters on record." (<http://www.weather.gov/cle/2012NotableEvents>)

Though the above summary directly applies to the northern half of the state, temperatures, rain, and snow in the southern half followed the same pattern. Not one weather station registered a record low temperature, and scattered record highs into the 60s were posted during December and January. February had several records in the 60s, and three of 70° were set 29 Feb in the Columbus area. Lake Erie did not freeze, which contributed to the lake effect snows noted above. (Additional weather data are from <http://water.weather.gov> and <http://www.extremeweatherrecords.com>.)

This winter marked the 113th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Ned Keller summarizes the Ohio counts in a separate article which is accompanied by a table of CBC results. In the species accounts which follow this overview I many times note the highest number of a species found. These values are for single parties, usually birding in a relatively small area, and often are the counts from a single route within a CBC. However, I generally do not include data from an entire CBC, each of which is the result of many parties' efforts in scattered locales within a 15-mile diameter circle; those data are in the table.

Most of the species discussed in this issue were present for the entire season, and this feature is seldom noted in their accounts. These birds are either year-round residents or visitors which arrived before Dec and whose last sighting was after Feb. The date of first or last sighting, as appropriate, is provided for species which were not here all winter.

The following accounts include 190 species, two hybrids, and one entry at the genus level. This is the highest count of the last five years, the period in which the *Cardinal* has included all species with sightings. (Previously, accounts for resident species like Black-capped Chickadee and House Sparrow were sometimes omitted). Seven shorebirds were reported, about average for those years. The 15 gull species was the highest count during these five years. This number surprised me, because gull sightings are often high in the coldest winters, when frozen Lake Erie concentrates them at power plants' warm water discharges.

This winter's 10 warblers is the highest number in at least a decade, handily beating the previous recent high of six tallied in 2006-07. They and several other "warm weather" species lingered into winter, no double as a result of its being so mild. This was not a major finch invasion year but both crossbills, Common Redpolls, and Pine Siskins visited in moderate numbers.

Several of these accounts include notes on previous unusual winter records. These data are from Bruce Peterjohn's *The Birds of Ohio* (2001) and *The Ohio Cardinal* since that date, and are not individually credited. "Normal" early and late dates are from Harlan *et al.*, *Ohio Bird Records Committee Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ohio*, 2008.

Six review species were documented and the sightings are described within. Those species' names are underlined in the accounts and are attributed to those who documented their sightings. Nine review species were reported without documentation. They are Pacific Loon, Gyrfalcon, Black-headed Gull, California Gull, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Loggerhead Shrike, Common Raven, Harris's Sparrow, and Hoary Redpoll (some

species had sightings both documented and not). The review species list is maintained by the Ohio Bird Records Committee (OBRC). The Committee and this editor urge birders to report all sightings of Review List species, of Core List species found at unusual times, of nesting by birds previously not known to nest in the state, and of course sightings of birds never before found in Ohio. Information on how to document rarities is available at <http://www.ohiobirds.org/records/documentation.php>.

Data for these Species Accounts come from reports submitted directly to the *Cardinal*; reports to the OBRC; eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>); the Ohio-birds listserv (<http://birding.aba.org/maillist/OH>); National Audubon Society; The Christmas Bird Count Historical Results (<http://www.christmasbirdcount.org>) accessed 04 Dec 2012; rarebird.org (<http://rarebird.org/forum/default.asp>); and *The Bobolink*. The last is courtesy of its publisher, Robert Hershberger.

Taxonomic order and nomenclature follow the *Check-List of North American Birds*, 7th Edition (1998) as updated through the 52st Supplement (2011). 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. Locations whose counties are of the same name, for example Ashtabula (city) and Delaware Wildlife Area, usually do not have the counties repeated. County names for sites described in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus are also omitted. Shortened names and a few sets of initials are used for locations and organizations which occur repeatedly; these abbreviations are listed here. The term "*fide*" is used in some citations; it means "in trust of" and is used where the reporter was not the observer.

Abbreviations:

BRAS = Black River Audubon Society
 BSBO = Black Swamp Bird Observatory, Oak Harbor, **Ottawa**
 Caesar Creek = Caesar Creek SP, **Warren**
 CBC = Christmas Bird Count
 Conneaut = the mudflats to the west of Conneaut Harbor, **Ashtabula**
 CP = County Park

CVNP = Cuyahoga Valley National Park, **Cuyahoga** and **Summit**
 Funk Bottoms = Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area, **Wayne**
 Headlands = Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve, Headlands Beach State Park, and adjoining waters, **Lake**
 Kelleys Island = Kelleys Island and adjacent waters, **Erie**
 Killdeer Plains = Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area, **Wyandot**
 m. obs. = multiple observers
 MP = Metro Park or MetroPark, depending on jurisdiction
 NP = Nature Preserve, except as part of CVNP
 ONWR = Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, **Lucas** and **Ottawa**
 RBA = Rare Bird Alert
 SF = State Forest
 SNP = State Nature Preserve
 SP = State Park
 WA = Wildlife Area
 Wendy Park = a lakeshore Cleveland park, **Cuyahoga**

Erratum: In the Fall 2011 issue list of abbreviations I said that CPNWR (Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge) is in **Ottawa**. It is in **Lucas**.