

COMMENTS ON THE SEASON

By Craig Caldwell

This issue is Christopher Collins' first as Photo Editor. He's been working hard since late last year to select the fine assortment of images you'll see here. Welcome, Christopher!

Dec was our hottest ever by all three temperature measures: overall average, average maximum, and average minimum. It was also one of the wettest, ranking at number 113 with number 121 being the record high. The western half of the state received at least 150% of its normal precipitation; most of the southwest got six to eight inches of rain and a few stations got 10 inches. Most of the eastern half received 125 to 150% of its normal precipitation.

Jan, by contrast, had temperatures almost exactly in the middle of the historic range, but was the ninth driest on record. Only the eastern Lake Erie shore counties (*Ashtabula*, *Cuyahoga*, and *Lake*) were wetter than usual, with stations getting up to double their average precipitation. The rest of the state had as little as 25% of the usual amount though most areas were in the 50 to 75% range.

Feb temperatures and precipitation amounts reversed again. The average temperature was the 26th highest and precipitation the 20th highest of the years with data. The Ohio River Valley from *Washington* downstream soaked under five to six inches of rain and the Cincinnati area got up to eight inches. These amounts are double to triple the norm. Though the far northwest was dry (less than 75% of average), the rest of the state received up to double its usual precipitation.

We did have snow this winter, but the amount was less than usual and its duration on the ground was shorter. Lake Erie had an insignificant amount of ice, in marked contrast to the winter of 2014-15 when by mid-Feb it was 94% ice-covered.

Weather data are from the National Weather Service (<http://water.weather.gov/precip/>), the NOAA (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/temp-and-precip/maps.php> and <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/extremes/records/>).

The mild weather enabled, perhaps even encouraged, some birds to remain into winter which would usually be far south of us by Dec. The 203 species accounts is the highest winter number of the OOS era, handily beating the 190 tallied in 2011–12. Even if some of the review species aren't accepted, the final count will

remain the record, at least until the next un-wintery winter. One measure of this phenomenon is the warbler count: Eight species were seen, compared to the 6.3 average of the previous 10 years. Only the winters of 2012-13 and 2013-14 exceeded this year's count; they each had 10. Several shorebirds and sparrows also stayed late or arrived early as well.

The biggest find, of course, was not a lingering migrant or rare visitor from the north. The Kelp Gull which spent almost six weeks over-nighting at Springfield Lake, *Summit*, was far from its core range, whose northernmost extent is Ecuador. The species does wander and eBird records are scattered throughout Central America and into the U.S. "Our" bird stayed here far longer than any other seen inland, and only two others were further north (a one-day visitor to northwest Indiana in 1996 and one in Ontario in 2012). Ben Morrison's narrative of his discovery and the bird's subsequent activities follows the Species Accounts. (Possible spoiler: The Ohio Bird Records Committee has not evaluated the formal and informal reports of this bird, so the possibility remains that its identity will not be confirmed. But I consider that unlikely.)

Were it not for the Kelp Gull, Ohio's second Brambling would have been the lead story. It was certainly an easier bird identify, and vastly easier for rarity-chasers to see during the three months it spent at the Bertsch's hospitable feeders in *Medina*. (These records, too, have not been evaluated by the OBRC, but this bird's identity was never in doubt.)

This winter hosted the 116th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). For many years Ned Keller summarized the Ohio counts for the *Cardinal*. This year he passed the mantle to Mike Busam, whose article and the table of CBC results follow the Kelp Gull story. In the species accounts which follow this "Comments" section I usually note the highest number of a species found. These values are for single birders or parties, usually birding in a relatively small area, and often are the counts from a single route within a CBC. However, I seldom include counts 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.

As noted before, this issue provides accounts for 203 species; four hybrids and seven forms at the genus or family level are also included. Twelve of the 203 are review species. One spe-

cies' sole sighting report has insufficient data for OBRC evaluation, and two other species' descriptions and photos are only available from internet postings. As always, The Records Committee and this editor urge birders to formally 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>. Our thanks go to the many birders who did submit formal reports.

All 88 counties provided sighting reports. Canada Goose, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, and White-breasted Nuthatch were seen statewide. Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, American Crow, American Robin, European Starling, Dark-eyed Junco, and Northern Cardinal were each reported from 87 counties, though of course they were no doubt present in all. Seventeen species were reported from 80 to 86 counties.

Data for the following Species Accounts come from reports submitted directly to *The Cardinal* and *The Bobolink*, the latter courtesy of its publisher, Robert Hershberger; eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>); the Ohio-birds listserv (<http://birding.aba.org/maillist/OH>); Audubon (<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>) and several individual CBC compilers; and the Cincinnati Audubon Bird Sightings Log (<http://cincinnati.audubon.org/sightings-log/>). Unfortunately, rarebird.org was unavailable during my data-mining period.

Taxonomic order and nomenclature follow the *Check-List of North American Birds*, 7th Edition (1998) as updated through the 56th Supplement (2015). 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, Columbus, and Dayton 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:

Alum Creek = Alum Creek Reservoir, *Delaware*, unless otherwise noted
 Armleder Park = a Cincinnati city park on the Little Miami River, *Hamilton*
 Audubon = the National Audubon Society (<http://www.audubon.org>)
 Berlin Lake = Berlin Lake (or Reservoir), *Ma-honing* and *Portage*
 Big Island = Big Island Wildlife Area, *Marion*
 Blendon Woods = Blendon Woods Metro Park, *Franklin*
 The Bowl = a limited-access area near the *Harrison* airport
 BRAS = Black River Audubon Society
 BSBO = Black Swamp Bird Observatory, *Ottawa* (<http://www.bsbo.org>)
 Buck Creek = Buck Creek State Park, *Clark*
 Burke Airport = Cleveland Burke Lakefront Airport, *Cuyahoga*
 Caesar Creek = Caesar Creek State Park, *Warren*, unless the lake is specified; a bit of the lake is also in *Clinton*
 CBC = Audubon's Christmas Bird Count
 CCE = Crane Creek Estuary, *Lucas* and *Ottawa*, viewable from both ONWR and the CCE Trail which originates at Magee
 Chapel Drive = a road off Ohio 83 south of Cumberland in *Noble* which traverses grasslands
 Clear Creek = Clear Creek Metro Park; the eastern 2/3 is in *Hocking*, the rest in *Fairfield*
 Clear Fork = Clear Fork Reservoir (or Lake), partly in *Morrow* but most of the birding is done in the larger *Richland* Section.
 CLNP = Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve (the former Dike 14), *Cuyahoga*
 CMM = the trio of Jon Cefus, Greg Miller, and Ben Morrison
 CNC = Cincinnati Nature Center, a non-governmental entity whose Long Branch Farm and Rowe Woods units are in *Clermont*
 Conneaut = the mudflats to the west of Conneaut Harbor, *Ashtabula*
 CP = County Park
 CPNWR = Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge, *Lucas*
 CVNP = Cuyahoga Valley National Park, *Cuyahoga* and (mostly) *Summit*
 Darby Creek = Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, *Franklin*
 Deer Creek = the State Park is in *Pickaway*, the Wildlife Area is in *Fayette*, and Deer Creek Lake is in both but mostly *Pickaway*
 East Fork = East Fork State Park, *Clermont*

East Harbor = East Harbor State Park, **Ottawa**
Edgewater = the Edgewater unit of Cleveland
Lakefront Metroparks, **Cuyahoga**
Fernald = Fernald Preserve, **Butler** and
Hamilton
Findlay Reservoirs = several contiguous water
bodies east of town in **Hancock**
Funk = Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area, **Ashland**
and (mostly) **Wayne**
GLSM = Grand Lake St. Marys. The State
Park, state fish hatchery, and the eastern 20%
of the lake itself are in **Auglaize**. The rest of
the lake is in **Mercer**.
Great Miami WMB = Great Miami Wetlands
Mitigation Bank, **Montgomery**
Headlands = Headlands Dunes State Nature
Preserve, Headlands Beach State Park, and
adjoining waters, **Lake**
Holden = Holden Arboretum, **Lake**, except for
its Stebbins Gulch unit in **Geauga**
Hoover NP = Hoover Nature Preserve, **Delaware**
Hoover Reservoir = the northern 80% is in **Del-**
aware, the rest and the dam are in **Franklin**
Indian Lake = Indian Lake State Park, **Logan**
Jones Preserve = Jones Preserve at Long Point, on
Kelleys Island, **Erie**
Kelleys Island = the island and adjoining waters,
Erie
Killbuck = Killbuck State Wildlife Area, **Holmes**
and **Wayne**
Killdeer = Killdeer Plains State Wildlife Area; a
bit is in **Marion** but it's mostly in **Wyandot**
LaDue = LaDue Reservoir, **Geauga**
Lake Erie Bluffs = a **Lake** Metroparks parcel
whose popularity among birders is blooming.
Lake Hope/Zaleski = Lake Hope State Park and
surrounding Zaleski State Forest, **Vinton**
Lake Loramie = Lake Loramie SP, **Shelby**
Lorain = the dredge spoil impoundment east of
downtown in the city and county of the same
name, unless otherwise noted
Lost Bridge = a Great Miami River crossing
on Lawrenceburg Road near Elizabethtown,
Hamilton, where a covered bridge was lost
to fire in 1903
m. obs. = multiple observers
Magee = the boardwalk and immediate vicinity
in Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Lucas, unless
otherwise noted. The northern third of the
causeway is also in **Lucas**, the rest in **Ottawa**.
Maumee Bay = Maumee Bay State Park, **Lucas**,
unless otherwise noted
Medusa = Medusa Marsh, **Erie**, an informally
named and privately owned area between
Sandusky and Bay View

Metzger = Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area, **Lucas**,
not to be confused with Metzger Reservoir,
Allen
Mill Creek = Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary, a
limited-access area in **Mahoning**
Mohican = Mohican State Forest and State Park.
Many trails cross the boundaries so some re-
ports include sightings from both without
distinction.
Mohican SF = Mohican State Forest, **Ashland**
Mohican SP = Mohican State Park, (mostly)
Ashland and (slightly) **Richland**
Mosquito Lake = Mosquito Creek Lake, also
called Mosquito Creek Reservoir, **Trumbull**.
Mosquito (Creek) Wildlife Area adjoins it.
MP = Metro Park, MetroPark, or Metropark de-
pending on the system
NC = Nature Center
NF = National Forest
NP = Nature Preserve, except as part of CVNP
OBBA II = the second Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas
OBRC = Ohio Bird Records Committee
Old Highland Stone = that company's wa-
ter-filled gravel pits, **Highland**
OOPMP = Oak Openings Preserve MetroPark,
Lucas
ONWR = Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, **Lu-**
cas and **Ottawa**
Pickerel Creek = Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area,
Sandusky
Pickerington Ponds = Pickerington Ponds Metro
Park, **Fairfield** and **Franklin**
Pipe Creek = Pipe Creek Wildlife Area, in the
city of Sandusky, **Erie**
Rocky Fork = Rocky Fork State Park, **Highland**
Sandy Ridge = Sandy Ridge Reservation,
Lorain
Seneca Lake = most of the lake and the (non-
state) Park are in **Noble**, while the dam is in
Guernsey
SF = State Forest
Shawnee = Shawnee State Forest, **Scioto**, unless
otherwise noted
Shawnee Lookout = Shawnee Lookout County
Park, **Hamilton**
Sheldon Marsh = Sheldon Marsh State Nature
Preserve, **Erie**
SNP = State Nature Preserve
SP = State Park
Springville Marsh = Springville Marsh State Na-
ture Preserve, **Seneca**
SWA = State Wildlife Area
TNC = The Nature Conservancy (<http://www.nature.org>)
Villa Angela = the Villa Angela unit of Cleve-
land's Lakefront Reservation

WA = Wildlife Area

Wake Robin = a trail and boardwalk in Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve, **Lake**

Wendy Park = a lakeshore Cleveland park, **Cuyahoga**

Wilderness Road = a road which traverses Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area, **Wayne**, and adjoining farmland

The Wilds = a limited-access big-mammal breeding and research facility in **Muskingum**, also used generically to include the surrounding reclaimed strip mines

Zaleski = Zaleski State Forest, **Vinton**