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3-1999

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Dinsmore, Stephen J., "The 1998-99 Nebraska Christmas Bird Count Summary" (1999). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 25.

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The 1998-99 Nebraska Christmas Bird Count Summary

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The 1998-99 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) period included eight counts in Nebraska. Counts were scattered statewide, but most effort was in the eastern half of the state. I know of at least one additional count (Branched Oak Lake) that was run this year, but not submitted.

In the following discussion, I have attempted to discuss what I believe are the more important aspects of this year's CBC period. This includes my general impressions about some of the commoner species, mention of rarities, notable misses, and other topics.

DISCUSSION OF SPECIES

The 1998-99 CBC period in Nebraska will probably be best remembered for the extremely mild pre-count weather. Many of the reservoirs and larger lakes were completely devoid of ice during the early part of the count period. This caused many waterbirds to linger in larger than expected numbers. Three Common Loons at Harlan County were a bit tardy; this species very rarely overwinters in Nebraska. The eleven Pied-billed Grebes at Omaha were a good total; singles were west to Harlan County and Lake McConaughy. Lake McConaughy also had 2 Eared and 285 Western Grebes, the former the first January record for Nebraska. Farther east, a single Western Grebe at Lincoln was noteworthy. A lone American White Pelican lingered at Calamus-Loup. Given the mild fall, it was surprising more pelicans didn't linger into the count period. Great Blue Herons were present in expected numbers, but a single immature Black-crowned Night-Heron at Lake McConaughy was the first January record for Nebraska.

Waterfowl were well represented this year with an outstanding 26 species reported statewide. Canada Goose and Mallard were reported from all counts. Harlan County reported 228 Greater White-fronted Geese, a great total for mid-December. Good numbers of Snow Geese lingered on three counts, and observers at Harlan County managed to find 33 Ross's Geese among the Snow Geese. Among the regular waterfowl, noteworthy totals included 731 Green-winged Teal at Harlan County, 87 Canvasback and 114 Redheads at Lake McConaughy, and 12 Wood Ducks and 230 Gadwall at Omaha. Unusual waterfowl included an Oldsquaw at Harlan County and 9 Oldsquaw and a Barrow's Goldeneye at Lake McConaughy.

Bald Eagles were found on every count with the largest numbers at Harlan County and Lake McConaughy, not surprisingly the two counts with the largest bodies of water. Given the mild fall, Bald Eagle numbers were generally quite good. Accipiters were widespread this year. I was surprised at the disparity in numbers between the two expected species; 19 Sharp-shinned Hawks versus 7 Cooper's Hawks. I would have expected closer to a one to one ratio. Red-tailed Hawks occurred on all counts. They were scarcest in the west and Sandhills and most numerous in the southeast. It was an average year for Rough-legged Hawks with 23 reported, most in the Sandhills and west. Among the less common raptors, statewide totals of 4 Ferruginous Hawks, 4 Golden Eagles, 5 Merlins, and 2 Prairie Falcons were about normal.

Gallinaceous birds were a mixed bag this year. The mild weather and lack of snow cover probably contributed to the dismal count of just 43 Ring-necked Pheasants statewide. Greater Prairie-Chickens fared better. Counts of 47 at Calamus-Loup and 34 at Lake McConaughy reflect the presence of large tracts of native sandhills habitat within those count circles. Calamus-Loup also had a good total of 112 Wild Turkeys. Three Virginia Rails were at Lake McConaughy where the species is regular in winter. I would not be surprised if this species were also present in the Scottsbluff count circle in winter. American Coots were found on

TABLE ONE

Count Name	Date	Species	Total birds	Obs.	Pt.	Hrs.	Field Temp			Snow depth	Wind
							L	H	H		
Harlan County	18/12	86	29,926	7	5	40	25	46	0	NNE 20-25	
Scottsbluff	2/1	39	17,728	16	3	16.5	9	26	0	NW 25-48	
Lake McConaughy	2/1	87	16,373	13	6	54.5	5	14	2	NW 15-30	
Omaha	19/12	70	10,511	35	15	69	15	25	0	NW 10-20	
Calamus-Loup	27/12	52	9,793	10	?	?	?	?	?	?	
Beaver Valley	19/12	39	1,011	4	1	9.5	10	14	1	NW 10-20	
Loup City	26/12	36	1,203	1	1	9	20	51	0	SW 10-20	
Lincoln	19/12	74	11,273	36	14	81.5	18	21	0	N 0-23	

four counts with a high of 300 at Lake McConaughy. Despite the mild pre-count weather, shorebirds were scarce this year; Killdeer and Common Snipe were recorded on just three counts each. The diversity and number of gulls were disappointing. Only five species were reported, and only Ring-billed Gull was found in good numbers. Harlan County Reservoir had a good total of 26 Bonaparte's Gulls. Ring-billed Gulls occurred on four counts and Herring Gulls on just three counts. Lake McConaughy had 17 California Gulls and a lone Thayer's Gull.

Mourning Doves were unusually scarce this year; Omaha had 25 and 1-5 were reported on three other counts. Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl were reported in expected numbers. Barred Owls were reported from Omaha and Lincoln. This species occurs westward along the Republican River at least as far as Webster County, so perhaps one will be found at Harlan County Reservoir in the future. Single Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were found at Harlan County Reservoir and Lake McConaughy, respectively. Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were found this year, an excellent statewide total. The Downy to Hairy Woodpecker ratio was 399:42 statewide, which is about normal. Northern Flickers were numerous this year with good numbers recorded on all counts. Northern Shrikes were present in low numbers, although 12 were at Calamus-Loup. The lone Loggerhead Shrike was at Harlan County Reservoir, not an unexpected location for this species in winter. Horned Larks were generally scarce, although 1,553 were counted at Lake McConaughy. Omaha had good counts of several urban species, including 42 Tufted Titmice and 167 White-breasted Nuthatches. It was a down year for Red-breasted Nuthatches; the 6 at Lincoln were the only report. Carolina Wrens continue in the southeast part of the state, but the 2 at Harlan County Reservoir were a surprise. Six Winter Wrens at Omaha was an excellent count. Four Marsh Wrens were at Lake McConaughy where the species is regular in winter. Golden-crowned Kinglets were numerous and widespread this year with an excellent count of 67 at Lincoln. Four late Ruby-crowned Kinglets were at Harlan County Reservoir. It was a good year for frugivores; American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were numerous and Eastern Bluebirds were found on three counts.

A single Orange-crowned Warbler, possibly a late fall migrant, and 17 Yellow-rumped Warblers were at Harlan County Reservoir. Single Eastern Towhees were at Omaha and Lincoln while Spotted Towhees were reported from four counts with a high of 13 at Harlan County Reservoir. A lone Savannah Sparrow at Lake McConaughy was unusual in winter. Fourteen Fox Sparrows on three counts, all in the east, were a good winter total for Nebraska. The *zonotrichid* sparrows were well represented, especially on eastern counts. Harlan County Reservoir had the *zonotrichid* sweep, highlighted by an immature Golden-crowned Sparrow. Harris's Sparrows were found in good numbers with 183 at Harlan County Reservoir and 144 at Lincoln. Smaller numbers of White-crowned Sparrows were on four counts. There were 2,129 Lapland Longspurs at Lake McConaughy, the only count to record this species. A lone Snow Bunting was at Calamus-Loup.

Icterids were widespread in small numbers. Red-winged Blackbirds were recorded on all counts except Calamus-Loup. The Western Meadowlarks reported at Scottsbluff and Beaver Valley should probably be changed to meadowlark sp.; Eastern Meadowlark is possible in winter, especially in a mild year like this. Rusty Blackbirds were on three counts, topped by a good total of 68 at Harlan County Reservoir. Surprisingly, Common Grackles were reported from only two counts.

Great-tailed Grackles were also reported from two counts; 12 at Lincoln, a regular winter location, and a single bird at Beaver Valley.

It was clearly a poor year for winter finches. Purple Finches were reported from just two counts; the single bird at Harlan County Reservoir was a bit far west. The only Red Crossbills were 12 at Beaver Valley. Small numbers of Pine Siskins were found on six counts. American Goldfinches were found on all counts with a high of 469 at Calamus-Loup.

UNDOCUMENTED REPORTS

There were a number of reports this year that probably should have been accompanied by some supporting details. However, such details have never before been requested, so I accepted most of these sightings. Some that come to mind include a Western Grebe at Lincoln, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Calamus-Loup, and an Orange-crowned Warbler at Harlan County Reservoir. Perhaps in the future compilers could include a few brief supporting details for unusual reports. The only report I did not accept was of 10 Chipping Sparrows at Lincoln. Winter reports of this species in Nebraska should be fully documented. Confusion with American Tree Sparrow is a frequent and under-appreciated problem.

COMMENT

I believe this is the first time that Nebraska's CBCs have been summarized in other than a tabular format. I have styled this summary after a similar summary I have written for Iowa Bird Life for several years. If anyone has comments or suggestions, I would very much like to hear them. I also want to encourage CBC compilers to send in their results next year so they can be included. Please be sure to also include the data for Table 1.

Table 2. 1998-99 Nebraska Christmas Bird count Species Totals

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Common Loon	3							
Pied-billed Grebe	1		1	11				
Eared Grebe			2					

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Western Grebe			285					1
American White Pelican					1			
Double-Crested Cormorant	34			1				6
Great Blue Heron	4	1	4			1		
Black-crowned Night-Heron			1					
Greater White- fronted Goose	228							1
Snow Goose	895		1	2011				363
Ross' s Goose	33							
Canada Goose	507	8358	4588	610	3801	70	1	1831
Trumpeter Swan			12					
Wood Duck	5			12	1			
Gadwall	7		92	230				35
American Wigeon	3	22	74	57				7
Mallard	5339	6859	678	766	606	365	325	227
Northern Shoveler	56		3					9
Northern Pintail	19	3	4					
Green-winged Teal	731		92	11			1	37
Canvasback	2		87	2				
Redhead	2		114					2
Ring-necked Duck			21			1		9
Greater Scaup			9					
Lesser Scaup	7		122	14				53
Oldsquaw	1		9					

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Bufflehead	17		23			1		2
Common Goldeneye	105	83	257	97	73			66
Barrow's Goldeneye			1					
Hooded Merganser			1	2	1			5
Common Merganser	8671		889	3	60			96
Red-breasted Merganser	4		1					
Ruddy Duck			22					
Bald Eagle	63	11	53	23	14	5	7	2
adults	36	2	24	19		4	5	2
immatures	27	9	29	4		1	2	
Northern Harrier	17		13		5	3	2	12
Sharp-shinned Hawk	8	1	5	1	2			2
Cooper's Hawk	3			1				3
accipiter sp.								1
Red-tailed Hawk	21	3	17	68	25	2	14	61
Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk						1	1	
Red-tailed (Kriger's) Hawk				1				
Ferruginous Hawk	1		2		1			
Rough-legged Hawk		4	2	2	10	3		2
<i>Buteo</i> , Sp.					4			4

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Golden Eagle		2	1			1		
adults		2				1		
immature			1					
American Kestrel	7	6	15	14	9	3	4	13
Merlin	1		2					2
Prairie Falcon			2					
Ring-necked Pheasant	5	2	8	1	14	2	3	8
Greater Prairie Chicken	1		34		47	6	3	
Sharp-tailed Grouse			6		9			
Wild Turkey		69	2	46	112			
Northern Bobwhite			8		1			13
Virginia Rail			3					
American Coot	8		300	12				1
Killdeer	4		3					3
Common Snipe	3	1	9					
Bonaparte's Gull	26							
Ring-billed Gull	5103		400	210				551
California Gull			17					
Herring Gull	98		37					22
Thayer's Gull			1					
Rock Dove	74	95	37	179	65	1	3	235
Mourning Dove	1		4	5				25

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Eastern Screech- owl	10		2	4			2	2
Great Horned Owl	5	1	7	4	2	1	3	3
Barred Owl				1				3
Long-eared Owl	1							
Short-eared Owl			1					
Belted Kingfisher	3	2	2	3	1			4
Red-bellied Woodpecker	22		1	67	3	4	3	23
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker				1	1			1
Downy Woodpecker	26	6	14	177	20	10	9	137
Hairy Woodpecker	2		2	19	3	1	2	13
Northern Flicker	34	5	40	54	33	11	8	44
yellow-shafted	4	3	8	54		10	5	4
red-shafted	5	2	18			1	3	1
unspecified	25		14					39
Northern Shrike	2	1	5		12		2	1
Loggerhead Shrike	1							
Blue Jay	10	25	8	106	13	5	1	146
Black-billed Magpie	30	39	63		2	3	1	2
American Crow	634	54	33	441	1270	46	37	343
Horned Lark	36	38	1553	18			19	30
Black-capped Chickadee	128	8	43	306	44	22	13	316
Tufted Titmouse				42				

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Red-breasted Nuthatch								6
White-breasted Nuthatch	43		7	167	4	14	5	65
Brown Creeper	7		5	15	3	3	3	23
Carolina Wren	2			5				4
Winter Wren				6				
Marsh Wren			4					
Golden-crowned Kinglet	19		9	8	13	4	2	67
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4							
Eastern Bluebird	6			11	18			
Townsend's Solitaire		4	22		1			
American Robin	2633	7	1404	96	1558	30	150	32
European Starling	2085	1526	1161	794	434	170	210	1060
Cedar Waxwing	233		373	65	230	25		41
Orange-crowned Warbler	1							
Yellow-rumped Warbler	17							
Eastern Towhee				1				1
Spotted Towhee	13			1	1			9
American Tree Sparrow	593	11	246	384	371	53	115	656
Chipping Sparrow								10
Savannah Sparrow			1					
Fox Sparrow	6			2				6
Song Sparrow	47		6	16	1		1	9

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Lincoln's Sparrow	2			5				
Swamp Sparrow				1				
White-throated Sparrow				4			2	19
White-crowned Sparrow	38	3	1					12
Harris' s Sparrow	183			32			7	144
Golden-crowned Sparrow	1							
sparrow sp.		3						
Dark-eyed Junco	366	34	415	1986	267	26	23	1266
slate-colored	356	8	307	1983				372
oregon	7	20	108	3			1	13
pink-sided	3							
unspecified		6					22	881
Lapland Longspur			2129					
longspur sp.								50
Snow Bunting					1			
Northern Cardinal	50		11	194	9	1	6	169
Red-winged Blackbird	79	272	62	87		20	125	2087
Western Meadowlark		2				1		
Meadowlark sp.	52		26	67				56
Rusty Blackbird	68			50	9			
Common Grackle				5	13			
Great-Tailed Grackle						1		12

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Brown-headed Cowbird				50		25		
blackbird sp.								60
Purple Finch	1			5				
House Finch	89	10	51	55	37	18		66
Red Crossbill						12		
Pine Siskin	40	43	7	4	2			41
American Goldfinch	99	72	150	231	469	5	35	161
House Sparrow	106	28	135	533	87	25	55	437