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## The 1999-2000 Nebraska Christmas Bird Count

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### **The 1999-2000 Nebraska Christmas Bird Count**

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**The 1999-2000 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) period included ten counts in Nebraska (Table 2). These counts reported a total of 133 species, a**

great total for so few counts. Counts were scattered statewide, but most effort was in the eastern half of the state where most of the birders are. The top count this year was Lake McConaughy, where the combination of several lingering rarities, excellent participation, and great count weather led to a new record Nebraska count of 101 species, breaking the old record of 87 species. Other excellent totals were 85 at Harlan County, 84 at Branched Oak-Seward, and 74 at both Lincoln and Omaha. Not surprisingly, Omaha (32) and Lincoln (26) had the most field observers.

#### DISCUSSION OF SPECIES

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

The species totals for each count are listed in Table 1. The 1999-2000 Nebraska CBC period will probably be best remembered for the extremely mild pre-count weather, much like last year. As in 1998-99, many lakes and rivers were completely ice-free at the beginning of the count period. There was some colder weather around Christmas, but warmer weather returned in late December.

The semi-hardy waterbirds were well represented this year. The only loons were Common Loons: 2 at Lake McConaughy and 1 at Harlan County. Grebe totals were excellent, but most were at Lake McConaughy: 1 Horned, 2 Red-necked, 352 Western, and 11 Clark's. Noteworthy were the 5 Western Grebes at Harlan County. Four American White Pelicans were at Harlan County, a regular CBC locale for this species. Harlan County also hosted an excellent count of 41 Double-crested Cormorants; singles were at Branched Oak-Seward and Lake McConaughy (an injured bird). The total of 27 Great Blue Herons was respectable, although half of these were at Lake McConaughy.

Waterfowl were well represented again this year with an outstanding 29 species reported statewide. Among the geese, there were Greater White-fronted Geese on two counts, small numbers of Snow Geese on six counts (all in the east), and 2 Ross' Geese at Branched Oak-Seward. Canada Geese were recorded on all but one count and were most numerous along the Platte River Valley. The only swans this year were 11 well-documented Tundra Swans at Omaha. Duck numbers were generally excellent this year. Lake McConaughy hosted impressive numbers of several species, including 604 Gadwall, 165 American Wigeon, 210 Redhead, 63 Greater and 380 Lesser Scaup, 271 Bufflehead, and 19 Red-breasted Mergansers, many of which are record CBC totals for Nebraska. Other noteworthy totals included 104 Northern Shovelers at Branched Oak-Seward and 24,075 Common and 14 Red-breasted mergansers at Harlan County. A number of unusual waterfowl were found this year, highlighted by the male Tufted Duck at Lake McConaughy, which had been present since early December and is the first report of this species in Nebraska. Other good finds included an American Black Duck at Lincoln, single

Greater Scaup at Harlan County and Branched Oak-Seward, and single Surf and Black scoters, 6 Oldsquaw, and 3 Barrow's Goldeneye at Lake McConaughy.

The only Virginia Rails were 4 at Lake McConaughy, an expected winter location. Birders should check any open water with dense cattail beds for this species and Marsh Wren in winter. Both species are known to be widespread in winter in the Panhandle, and they could occur much farther east. There were small numbers of American Coots on several counts, plus an amazing 1,100 at Lake McConaughy. Killdeer were found on five counts and Common Snipe were on three counts. Gull numbers were good this year, but diversity on several counts was disappointing. An exception was Harlan County, which reported 7 species including a single alternate-plumaged Franklin's Gull, 16 Bonaparte's Gulls, a California Gull, and an adult Black-legged Kittiwake. Lake McConaughy hosted a large number of Ring-billed Gulls (7,000) plus 41 California Gulls, but no unusual gull species were found there.

Small numbers of Mourning Doves were found on five counts, perhaps indicative of the scarcity of this species in Nebraska this winter. Expected numbers of the three common owls (Eastern Screech-, Great Horned, and Barred) were found this year, plus single Long-eared Owls on three counts. Small numbers of Belted Kingfishers were found on all but two counts. Only 9 Red-headed Woodpeckers were found on three counts, all in the southeast. This total, plus the generally low numbers of Blue Jays, is probably indicative of a poor acorn crop. A single Red-bellied Woodpecker was noteworthy as far west as Scottsbluff, where the species has only recently appeared. Other interesting woodpecker reports included 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at Lincoln and a single Pileated Woodpecker at Omaha. The only Loggerhead Shrike was a single at Lincoln, but Northern Shrikes were more numerous with single count totals of 11 at both Lake McConaughy at Branched Oak-Seward. Observers should take care when identifying winter shrikes in Nebraska. A few Loggerhead Shrikes might be expected in southeastern Nebraska in winter, but Northern Shrike is far more numerous over the remainder of the state.

It was a good year for Red-breasted Nuthatches with small numbers reported on seven counts. The high count was 31 at Lincoln. Brown Creepers were also numerous this year with a high count of 46 at Lincoln. Wrens made a strong showing this year. An excellent total of 10 Carolina Wrens was reported at Omaha and small numbers were found west to Harlan County and Kearney. Winter Wrens were found on four counts with a high count of 3 at Lake McConaughy. Marsh Wrens were found at Lake McConaughy and Calamus-Loup. I also suspect this species winters regularly within the Scottsbluff count circle. It was a great year for Golden-crowned Kinglets with 167 found on six counts, including 56 at Lake McConaughy and 43 at Lincoln. Eastern Bluebirds were found on six counts with a high of 54 at Branched Oak-Seward. Small numbers of Mountain Bluebirds and Townsend's Solitaires and a single Hermit Thrush were at Lake McConaughy. American Robins were recorded on every count with a high of 2,502 at Lake McConaughy. The only

Northern Mockingbird was a single at Lake McConaughy, and single Brown Thrashers were found on three counts. Cedar Waxwings were a bit scarce this year with a high count of 178 at Norfolk. Noteworthy was an Orange-crowned Warbler documented at Lincoln. The only other warblers were 2 Yellow-rumped Warblers at Lake McConaughy.

Sparrow numbers were generally very good this year, especially the *zonotrichid* sparrows. Small numbers of Spotted Towhees were found on three counts, all in the east. A single Field Sparrow was a good find at Lincoln, while the only Lincoln's Sparrow was at Lake McConaughy. White-throated Sparrows were found in good numbers this year. The high count was 21 at Omaha and a single was unusual as far west as Lake McConaughy. It was a banner year for Harris' Sparrows with three counts each exceeding 100 individuals. White-crowned Sparrows were also numerous, especially in the west, with a high count of 73 at Harlan County. Lapland Longspurs were found on six counts with a high of 647 at Norfolk. The only Snow Buntings were 7 at Branched Oak-Seward.

Icterids were a mixed bag this year. Red-winged Blackbirds were found on every count; the peak was 1,094 at Scottsbluff. In winter, this species is typically most numerous in western Nebraska. It was a good year for meadowlarks, and quite a few Westerns (37) were singing at Lake McConaughy. Rusty Blackbirds were found in good numbers on several eastern counts and single Brewer's Blackbirds were described at Kearney, Norfolk, and Omaha.

In general, it was another poor year for winter finches. Purple Finches made a decent showing on eastern counts with a single bird as far west as Lake McConaughy. Two Red Crossbills at Lake McConaughy and 2 Common Redpolls at Omaha were the only reports for those species. Pine Siskins were present in small numbers statewide with a high count of 345 at Lake McConaughy. American Goldfinches were also widespread in small numbers.

#### NOTABLE MISSES

A number of species were not reported this year, including Trumpeter Swan, Glaucous Gull, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Short-eared Owl, and Great-tailed Grackle.

#### UNDOCUMENTED REPORTS

There were a number of reports this year that probably should have been accompanied by some supporting details or more thorough documentation. These included an Osprey and a Bohemian Waxwing at Norfolk, 2 Blue-winged Teal at Lincoln, and a Smith's Longspur at Omaha. For this reason, these reports were not included in my summary.

## OBSERVERS

**Scottsbluff** Dillon Beede, Bob DeLara, Phyllis Drawbaugh, Helen Hughsen, Walter Johns, Alice Kenitz (compiler), Kathy Larson, Brad McKinney, Connie McKinney

**Lake McConaughy** Laurel Badura, Charles Brown, Mary Brown, Bob Cecil, Stephen J. Dinsmore (compiler), Joe Fontaine, Robin Harding, Alice Heckman, Joel G. Jorgensen, Andie Lueders, Alicia Lupkes, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Lanny Randolph, James Sedgwick, Ross Silcock, Jerry Toll

**Harlan County** Stephen J. Dinsmore, Robin Harding, Glen Hoge, Wanda Hoge, Joel G. Jorgensen (compiler), Lanny Randolph

**Kearney** Laurel Badura, Joan Dummer, Bruce Eichhorst, Robin Harding, John Kozak, Gary Lingle, Richard Luehrs, Brian Moody, John Murphy, Lanny Randolph, Alice Rumery, Steve Schneider, Ward Schrack, Barb Tebbel, Paul Tebbel, Mark Urwiller

**Calamus-Loup** Joyce Borgelt, Norma J. Brockmoller (compiler), Robin Harding, Eldon Marsh, Neal Pohlman, Nancy Powers, Lanny Randolph, Jean Rumsey, Jan Uttecht, Duane Wolff

**Norfolk** Joyce Borgelt, Norma J. Brockmoller, Ed Brogie, Mark Brogie, Isolde Cutshall, Joyce Eucker, Darlene Finkhouse, Gene Kincanon, Eldon Marsh, Neal Pohlman, Nancy Powers, Jan Uttecht, Duane Wolff (compiler)

**Branched Oak-Seward** John Brenneman, Barbara DiBernard, Larry Einemann, Mike Ellis, Steve Finley, Joe Gubanyi (compiler), Karla Kaufman, Paul Kaufman, Tom Labedz, Marli Ockander, Mark Orsag, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Kevin Poague, Tony Splittgerber, John Sullivan, Jerry Toll

**Lincoln** Betty Adams, George Alexander, Irene Alexander, Colleen Babcock, Al Brown, Linda R. Brown (compiler), Terri Brown, Barbara DiBernard, Ann Donovan, Larry Einemann, Meghan Einemann, Nancy Hall, Susan Herrick, Paul Johnsgard, Tim Knott, Josef Kren, Thomas Labedz, Linda Maslowski, Pete Maslowski, Gina Matkin, Evan Meyer, Jeff Meyer, Chuck Norby, Mark Orsag, Kevin Poague, Randy Reinhart, Ken Reitan, Dick Rhodes, Ramona Rhodes, John Sullivan, Moni Usasz, Joyce Vannier, Lyle Vannier, Sarah Workman

**Omaha** Betty Allen, Roland Barth, Elliott Bedows, Daniel Christiansen, David Crawford, Sharon Draper, Nellie Falzgraf, Bob Fuchs, Dick Gilson, Ruth Green, Betty Grenon (compiler), Craig Hensley, Deb Hoffa, Karen Kahle, Jim Kovanda, Sandy Kovanda, Catherine Kuper, Steve Lamphere, Sue Mattix, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Don Paseka, Janis Paseka, Kathleen Pyper, Dick Rasmussen, Neal Ratzlaff, Kathleen Rose, Eric Scholar, Vicky Scoville, Mark Tarlton, Jerry Toll, Pam Whistler

**Dakota-Dix** Bill Huser (compiler)

Table 1: 1999 Christmas Bird Count

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Common Loon		2	1								3
Pie-billed Grebe		4							2		6
Horned Grebe		1									1
Red-necked Grebe		2									2
Western Grebe		352	5								357
Clark's Grebe		11									11
American White Pelican			4								4
Double-crested Cormorant		1	41				1				43
Great Blue Heron	1	13	4	1			1	6	1		27
Great White-fronted Goose				7			2				9
Snow Goose			203		5	35	1169	150	420		1982
Ross' Goose							2				2

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Canada Goose	12065	5741	2293	9205	2576	228	3096	1816	627		37647
Tundra Swan									11		11
Wood Duck								1			1
Gadwall		604	38	13		10	9	56	12		742
American Wigeon	17	165	1				1	7			191
American Black Duck								1			1
Mallard	6710	20868	31161	232	1886	139	6015	2611	730		70352
Northern Shoveler		16	61	2		1	104	1			185
Northern Pintail	9	6	4			4	4		1		28
Green-winged Teal		72	47				10		6		135
Canvasback		82	4		3	2	4		5		100
Redhead		210	14	13				19			256
Ring-necked Duck		84					2				86
Tufted Duck		1									1
Greater Scaup		63	1				1				65
Lesser Scaup		380	89				47	2	29		547



Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Surf Scoter		1									1
Black Scoter		1									1
Oldsquaw		6									6
Bufflehead		271	6				2				279
Common Goldeneye	10	896	148	17	6		69	72	83	4	1305
Barrow's Goldeneye		3									3
Hooded Merganser		6	7				5	11	7		36
Common Merganser		4392	24075	7	30		611	4	14	5	29138
Red-breasted Merganser		19	14				1	1			35
Ruddy Duck		12	1	1			3	4	5		26
Bald Eagle	11	39	109	7	34	11	2		6	4	223
Northern Harrier		16	18	10	5	6	9	5	2		71
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	4	1	3		2	3	1	7		22
Cooper's Hawk		1		2	1	1	2	3	2		12

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Caliums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Northern Goshawk						1	1				2
accipiter sp.		1									1
Red-Shouldered Hawk									1		1
Red-tailed Hawk		22	49	30	7	29	66	51	93	5	352
Ferruginous Hawk		1	1								2
Rough-legged Hawk	1	4	2	3	10	5	2				27
Golden Eagle	5	1	1			1					8
American Kestrel	13	36	13	18	17	12	15	19	18	4	165
Merlin		3	1	1		1	3				9
Prairie Falcon				1	1						2
Ring-necked Pheasant	2	47	1	15	3	109	8		5	1	191
Sharp-tailed Grouse		41			4						45
Greater Prairie-Chicken		48			23	1					72
Wild Turkey	91	5		53	100		1		101		351

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Northern Bobwhite	12		16	15	1	16	34		5		99
Virginia Rail		4									4
American Coot		1100	49			5	5	9	7		1175
Killdeer	2	17	3			3			1		26
Common Snipe	10	5				12					27
Franklin's Gull			1								1
Bonaparte's Gull			16								16
Ring-Billed Gull	43	7000	3150	14			54	52	58		10371
California Gull		41	1								42
Herring Gull		82	369				53	4	1		509
Thayer's Gull			2								2
Black-legged Kittiwake			1								1
Rock Dove	88	106	47	217	15	173	113	509	131		1399
Mourning Dove		11	13				8	23	26		81
Eastern Screech-Owl		2	7			6	11	6	5		37

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaupe-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Great Horned Owl	1	10	6	2	4	8	7	10	3	1	52
Barred Owl						1	3	3	2		9
Long-eared Owl						1	1			1	3
Belted Kingfisher	2	7	5		1	4	4	3	4		30
Red-headed Woodpecker							5	3	1		9
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	3	29	3	1	14	36	49	118	5	259
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker								2			2
Downy Woodpecker	5	22	43	4	11	44	72	161	156	5	523
Hairy Woodpecker	1	8	5	1	3	17	8	16	15		74
Northern Flicker	10	52	55	10	6	12	62	37	61	3	308
Pileated Woodpecker									1		1
Loggerhead Shrike								1			1
Northern Shrike	2	11	3		2	3	11	3			35

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Blue Jay	17	7	17	11		35	156	141	93	3	480
Black-billed Magpie	18	159	34	37	1	29	6			3	287
American Crow	49	85	121	66	1869	870	817	943	251	140	5211
Horned Lark	30	262	183	928	17	1138	47	18	2587		5210
Black-capped Chickadee	25	73	145	20	96	75	144	221	353	19	1171
Tufted Titmouse									63		
Red-breasted Nuthatch		2	3	8	3	14	28	31	10		99
White-breasted Nuthatch	3	23	30	8	1	31	70	61	204	7	438
Brown Creeper		9	22	6	2	5	16	46	17		123
Carolina Wren			3	2			1	2	10		18
Winter Wren		3	1				1	1			6
Marsh Wren		3			2						5
Golden-crowned Kinglet		56	8			3	38	43	19		167

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Eastern Bluebird		9	1		3		54	7	21		95
Mountain Bluebird		13									13
Townsend's Solitaire		14									14
Hermit Thrush		1									1
American Robin	71	2502	309	23	1	1	624	91	297	15	3934
Northern Mockingbird		1									1
Brown Thrasher		1	1					1			3
European Starling	3932	558	16746	1284	250	5554	1178	1670	1874	70	33116
Cedar Waxwing		40	21	7	21	178	103	16	68	113	567
Orange-crowned Warbler								1			1
Yellow-rumped Warbler		2									2
Spotted Towhee				2	2		4				8

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
American Tree Sparrow	10	575	807	388	62	1127	1367	1811	722	5	6874
Field Sparrow								1			1
Fox Sparrow			1				4		1		6
Song Sparrow	1	30	42	6	1		17	9	56		162
Lincoln's Sparrow		1									1
White-throated Sparrow		1	1	1			4	9	21		37
Harris' Sparrow		20	123	21	2	95	190	142	61		654
White-crowned Sparrow	11	28	73	1	10			6			129
Dark-eyed Junco	36	759	404	190	177	1184	1611	951	1738	24	7074
Lapland Longspur		55	73	3		647	8		81		867
Snow Bunting							7				7
Northern Cardinal		13	85	22	17	36	100	154	179	2	608
Red-winged Blackbird	1094	325	246	84	110	338	11	346	4	4	2562

Species	Scotts Bluff	Lake McConaughy	Harlan County	Kearney	Calaums-Loop	Norfolk	Branched Oak-Seward	Lincoln	Omaha	Dakota-Dix	Total
Western Meadowlark		37									37
meadowlark sp.	7	53	287	130		101	136	87	155		956
Rusty Blackbird						26	16	35		20	97
Brewer's Blackbird				1		1			1		3
Common Grackle		3	13			1	1	34	15		67
Brown-headed Cowbird			20			19					39
Purple Finch		1				1	34	10	5		51
House Finch	40	138	174	44	8	358	62	70	158	4	1056
Red Crossbill		2									2
Common Redpoll									2		2
Pine Siskin	81	345		6	4	5	33	43	10		527
American Goldfinch	87	250	44	73	154	79	157	60	195	1	1100
House Sparrow	346	181	202	292	74	1215	146	617	549	26	3648
TOTAL SPECIES	43	101	85	57	50	64	84	74	74	27	133
TOTAL BIRDS	24971	49675	82479	13571	7642	14083	18949	13410	12603	494	237877



Table 2. Site data for 1999-2000 Nebraska Christmas Bird Counts.

Count Name	Date	Species	Total birds	Obs.	Pt.	Hrs.	Temp		Snow	Wind
							L	H		
Scottsbluff	18 Dec	43	24,971	9	2	13	20	56	0	W 0-55
Lake McConaughy	2 Jan	101	49,675	17	9	66	28	45	0	NW 0-15
Harlan County	17 Dec	85	82,479	6	4	35	19	28	1	NE 5-20
Kearney	18 Dec	57	13,441	14	7	32	20	32	1	S 0-15
Calamus-Loup	28 Dec	50	7,368	10	5	28	40	55	0	NW 10-25
Norfolk	18 Dec	64	14,236	16	8	?	16	43	1	SW 0-12
Branched Oak -Seward	17 Dec	84	20,974	17	9	63	20	27	2	NNW 10-20
Lincoln	18 Dec	74	13,454	26	13	103	20	27	0	?
Omaha	18 Dec	74	12,603	32	13	72	15	34	0	NW 0-10
Dakota-Dix	2 Jan	27	494	1	1	8	27	33	0	light