

## Summary of Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1977-78

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Interest in Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) is increasing in Mississippi. Last winter, there were both a record number of counts (10) and number of observers (140). These compare with 5 counts and 31 observers as recently as 8 years ago. Three counts (Jackson County, Noxubee NWR, and Sardis Lake) posted record species totals this year, and Jackson County birders listed 152 species (plus 4 more in count week), a new state high.

Count totals are summarized in Table 1. The compiler's name, party-hours and party-miles, and highlights of unusual observations are given in the paragraphs below. Complete details will be published in the July 1978 issue of American Birds.

Thanks to all CBC compilers and observers, and especially to Tom Imhof, regional CBC editor for American Birds, who provided a tabulation of results to assist us in preparing this summary, and who reviewed the details submitted for unusual species.

Sardis Lake (W. Marvin Davis, compiler) -- Dec. 31; 60 party-hours (41 on foot, 19 by car); 209 party-miles (39 on foot, 170 by car).

This CBC, now 3 years old, tallied a record 88 species. Increased coverage (60 party-hours vs. 39 last year) produced higher counts for most species. Best bird was a Rough-legged Hawk (rare in Miss.). Numbers of Canada Geese (3800 vs. 468 last year) and Mallards (13,350 vs. 316) increased sharply; other high waterbird counts were 87 Horned Grebes (13 last year), 600 Pintail (38) and 705 Canvasbacks (71). The 509 Dark-eyed Juncos exceeded the combined total of the other 9 counts.

Moon Lake (Ben and Lula Coffey, compilers) -- Dec. 27; 13 party-hours (6 on foot, 7 by car); 56 party-miles (4 on foot, 52 by car).

The Moon Lake CBC, one of Mississippi's oldest, returned this year after a one-year hiatus. Unusual species were 8 Common Mergansers (rare in Miss.) and 17 Least Sandpipers (only ones seen on an inland CBC this year).

Grenada (W. Marvin Davis, compiler) -- Dec. 17; 35 party-hours (28 on foot, 7 by car); 181 party-miles (25 on foot, 156 by car).

Noteworthy records on this CBC included 37 Red-breasted Nuthatches (cf. 20 on the other 9 counts combined); the only Bewick's Wren in the state; a Solitary Vireo, first for Grenada since 1972; and 5 Le Conte's Sparrows.

Noxubee NWR (Jerome A. Jackson, compiler) -- Dec. 18; 46.7 party-hours (33 on foot, 12 by car, 0.9 by airplane, 0.8 by helicopter); 218 party-miles (52 on foot, 111 by car, 40 by airplane, 15 by helicopter).

Once again, the Noxubee count was perhaps the only one in the U.S. to feature coverage by both airplane and helicopter! Ideal weather, plus a high observer turnout, contributed to highest-ever counts for 23 species, and a record species total of 95 (not 94 as reported to American Birds - 150 Canada Geese were inadvertently omitted from the list!). Unusual species included 5 Cattle Egrets and a Vesper Sparrow, both new to the count, and a Golden Eagle (adult) and Solitary Vireo, both found for only the second time. Noxubee was the only count reporting Evening Grosbeaks (4), although they appeared throughout the state in January.

Washington County, south (Edward Alexander, Jr., compiler) -- Dec. 18; 47.5 party-hours (19.5 on foot, 28 by car); 283 party-miles (18 on foot, 265 by car).

This year's total of 88 species was the second highest ever for Washington County. As at Sardis Lake, counts were high for Canada Goose (456 vs. 56 last year) and Mallard (35,578 vs. an average of about 10,000). Counts of some raptors were also high (previous highs in parentheses); Red-tailed Hawk, 91 (26) and Am. Kestrel, 72 (31). The 20 Tree Swallows were the only ones seen on an inland CBC. Other unusual species were a Cattle Egret, 38 White-fronted Geese, a Blue-winged Teal (new to the count), 2 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and a Black-and-white Warbler (new to the count).

Jackson (William H. Turcotte, compiler) -- Dec. 31; 60 party-hours (43 on foot, 17 by car); 198 party-miles (23 on foot, 175 by car).

Jackson recorded 95 species this year, down from last year's record 101. Four of the 5 Bald Eagles seen in the state were at Jackson, as were the only inland Fish Crows (3). Counts of 8 Common Loons and 13 Double-crested Cormorants were local highs. An Oldsquaw reported on the count was deleted from the American Birds listing because no details were provided, but is included in the total here; as Oldsquaws are regular in winter at Jackson (seen on 4 of the last 5 CBC's), such details seem unnecessary. However, an Am. Redstart was also reported without field notes; for a species this unusual in winter, a full description of the bird is essential, and we hope details will be forthcoming.

Natchez (Ralph Shields III, compiler) -- Dec. 17; 57 party-hours (19 on foot, 34 by car, 4 by boat); 314 party-miles (12 on foot, 282 by car, 20 by boat).

Natchez' species total dropped from 92 last year to 76 this year. However, Natchez observers did record the only Northern Oriole in the state, and the only inland Great Egrets (3) and Common Goldeneye (1). Five Common Loons were seen, for a local high. Two species seen last year, and one this year, were deleted by American Birds for lack of adequate details; we encourage the compilers of this count to be careful to

submit field notes for unusual species.

Hattiesburg (Larry Gates, compiler) -- Dec. 29; 31 party-hours (21 on foot, 10 by car); 90 party-miles (15 on foot, 75 by car).

Hattiesburg slipped by only 3 species from its high of 100 species last year. Unusual species, all new for the count, included a Merlin, 2 White-breasted Nuthatches, 2 Short-billed Marsh Wrens, an Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warbler, 2 Indigo Buntings, and a Dickcissel. High counts included 800 Cedar Waxwings and 455 Chipping Sparrows; also noteworthy were 5 Eared Grebes and 4 Spotted Sandpipers (the latter species never missed on the count!). A Bald Eagle was seen in count week.

Southern Hancock Co. (Judith Toups, compiler) -- Dec. 19; 62.5 party-hours (47.5 on foot, 15 by car); 207 party-miles (41 on foot, 166 by car).

This count, after an impressive 140 species in its first year, dropped to 134 this year. The decrease was at least partly because of an unusually warm day with brisk winds starting in mid-morning, which made "dicky-birding" useless after 10 A.M. Best bird was an imm. Black-legged Kittiwake at Bay St. Louis (Steve Peterson, Larry Gates). Hancock Co. was the only CBC in the state to record Mottled Duck (2), Peregrine (1), Gull-billed Tern (1), or Bachman's Sparrow (14), and the only CBC except Hattiesburg to log a Merlin (1).

Jackson County (Larry Gates, compiler) -- Dec. 17; 81 party-hours (60 on foot, 21 by car); 348 party-miles (28 on foot, 320 by car).

Aided by increased coverage (23 observers vs. 17 last year), Jackson County logged 152 species, a new high for Mississippi. Among the long list of unusual species were 2 Eared Grebes, a Surf Scoter, 4 (!) Ospreys, an Am. Oystercatcher (rare in the state), a Black-necked Stilt (first Miss. winter record), a Sprague's Pipit, a Yellow-throated Vireo, 2 Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warblers, and a Lincoln's Sparrow. High counts included 1250 Black Skimmers (previous high 14) and 39 Sandhill Cranes (perhaps nearly the whole Miss. population?). The most unusual species reported on the count, a Baird's Sandpiper, was deleted by the regional CBC editor, evidently because details provided by the count compiler were quite brief. Details are on file at Mississippi State. The species normally winters in South America.

Despite the high species total, Jackson Co. missed 17 species recorded by Hancock Co. this year, including some "easy" species (e.g., Turkey Vulture, Spotted Sandpiper, Brewer's Blackbird, and even Chipping Sparrow!). Clearly, both our coastal counts could use even better coverage in the future.

Note to CBC compilers for 1978-79 -- Please send a copy of your complete CBC results (including details of weather, coverage, etc.) to Dr. Jackson as soon as possible after your count next winter. If possible, please send a complete photocopy of the form you send to American Birds; if you

do not have access to a copy machine, send a typed or written copy instead. In any case, please include copies of field notes (full description, including circumstances of observation) for any unusual species recorded. Otherwise, these details will remain buried in the National Audubon files in New York, where they are unavailable to us. Thanks for your cooperation.

Table 1. Data for Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1977-78

| Count          | Date    | Species | Indiv. | Observers | Parties |
|----------------|---------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Sardis Lake    | 31 Dec. | 88      | 52,609 | 8         | 6       |
| Moon Lake      | 27 Dec. | 63      | 7,489  | 2         | 1-2     |
| Grenada        | 17 Dec. | 81      | 4,483  | 5         | 3-4     |
| Noxubee NWR    | 18 Dec. | 95      | 35,457 | 21        | 7       |
| Washington Co. | 18 Dec. | 88      | 94,718 | 25        | 8       |
| Jackson        | 31 Dec. | 95      | 9,469  | 12        | 5       |
| Natchez        | 17 Dec. | 76      | 3,897  | 15        | 9       |
| Hattiesburg    | 29 Dec. | 97      | 10,645 | 14        | 7       |
| S. Hancock Co. | 19 Dec. | 134     | 8,446  | 15        | 8       |
| Jackson Co.    | 17 Dec. | 152     | 16,249 | 23        | 8       |