

Winter Surprise: A January Baltimore Oriole in Ohio

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My husband called me to the breakfast room window, "Karen, you should see this huge goldfinch." OK, OK, we have lots of goldfinches at our thistle feeder and it was probably just fluffed up keeping warm, I thought. But this bird was on our big feeder, the one with sunflower and safflower mix, and it didn't look quite right. The bill gave it away, certainly not a goldfinch's bill. But what was an oriole doing at our feeder in Dayton, Ohio, in the dead of winter—23 January, to be exact, even though it had been rather mild? And what was an oriole doing at a feeder, anyway? Aren't they insect and fruit eaters?

We have been observing the comings and goings of birds in our yard for many years, racking up an impressive 62 species either in or flying over our 3-4-acre wooded suburban yard. Among our more interesting visitors have been summer tanager, fox sparrow, yellow-billed cuckoo, pileated woodpecker, wood thrush, and a nice variety of migrant warblers. This winter we were very pleased to have the red-breasted nuthatch and brown creeper to chase away the season's doldrums, but we never expected an oriole. Nor had we ever seen one here even in summer.

We eventually called the Audubon rare bird alert number here in Dayton, left a message about our bird, and got out all our bird books to figure out what kind of oriole we had. My new Sibley guide, a Christmas gift, came in handy: either a female or first-year male Baltimore oriole. Jim Arnold from the hotline came out and decided it was a first-year male because of the deep yellow color and the dark back. And then more birders came. It was present for over a week, and he came every day, flying between our house and our neighbors' across the street who serve up safflower seed and peanuts. I tried stringing orange sections in strategic locations to enhance our offerings, but he seemed to prefer the seed. I know insects are his number one favorite, especially caterpillars, and I'm wondering if he heard me declare this past year as our "Year of the Butterfly," and somehow got wind of the black swallowtail chrysalis hanging on our porch, and is just biding his time. Or maybe he was after any of the other 13 varieties of butterflies we observed here last summer. Hopefully our wooly worms were well hidden under the leaf litter. But then again, maybe he just preferred seeds. At any rate, there was no need for us to go south this winter; we had a little bit of summer right here in our own backyard.

See page 71 in this issue for one of the author's photographs of this remarkable bird. —Ed. 

The 2001-02 Christmas Bird Counts

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This year we present the results from 60 Christmas Counts conducted entirely or partially in Ohio, down from last year's 62. Most of the results were obtained directly from the Audubon web site at <<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>>. Audubon cautions that the data have not been reviewed yet. Readers of this report should also be aware that there may be some errors. Three counts—Athens, Clark County, and Gypsum—did not report their results to Audubon, but are included here. Finally, we include the results from Hancock County, which counts the entire county, rather than the standard 15-mile circle.

An asterisk next to an entry in the charts indicates that we received documentation of the sighting. Other reports of unexpected species may also be accurate. I have omitted reports of exotics, and have corrected a few obvious data entry errors. At least I hope they were errors. If your count really did see multiple Tufted Ducks, and no Ring-necked Ducks, then I apologize for taking them away from you in this report.

Unusually warm weather lasted until well into the count period, allowing quite a few unexpected species to linger. We usually get a combined species list of somewhere in the high 140s; this year the tally was 152, plus 5 additional during count week. The most amazing statistic for this year's count is that we found six warbler species. Besides the obvious yellow-rumped warblers, we usually find a couple of common yellowthroats, and even a pine warbler isn't out of the question. But this year we also had Nashville warbler, yellow warbler, and American redstart.

Building on Tom Kemp's article in last winter's issue ("All Time High Ohio Christmas Bird Counts", *The Ohio Cardinal* Vol. 24(2):94-98), this year's count added three new species to our list: brown-headed nuthatch (Burton, 1), yellow warbler (Cuyahoga Falls, 1) and American redstart (Columbus, 1). New high counts were set for mute swan (Gypsum, 43), bald eagle (Gypsum, 63), sandhill crane (Preble County, 200), least sandpiper (Clark County, 3), purple sandpiper (Lake Erie Islands, 11), hairy woodpecker (Millersburg, 148), and white-breasted nuthatch (Millersburg, 639). High counts were tied for red-throated loon (Mentor, 1), green heron (Millersburg, 1), northern shoveler (Ottawa NWR, 23), peregrine falcon (Cleveland, 2), black-headed gull (Elyria-Lorain, 1), and Nashville warbler (Cleveland, 1).

For those who enjoy the competitive aspect of Christmas Counts, Cincinnati and Toledo each found 88 species, followed by Millersburg with 84, Gypsum with 83, Cuyahoga Falls and Wilmot with 77, and Elyria-Lorain and Ragersville with 76. Cuyahoga Falls put 88 counters into the field, plus an additional 56 at feeders, Preble County had 89 in the field, and Toledo had only 31 field counters, but added 236 feeder watchers.