A Forty-year Summary of the Wisconsin Christmas Bird Censuses

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The 1939 Christmas marked the completion of the first forty years of censuses taken by bird students and published in Bird-Lore (now Audubon Magazine.) Wisconsin has been active in contributing to these censuses, and censuses were reported from the state during each year of the period. The number totals 215 and varies from one to eighteen a year (Table 1) for from one to sixteen areas. The reports came from fifty-four different areas (Table 2.) One area, Elkhorn (mostly near Lauderdale Lake) has a continuous series of thirty-two censuses during the twenty-nine year interval 1906-1934. This series is one of the longest in the whole country, and it is to be hoped that some one will continue it. Other areas reporting a number of censuses are Madison, Hartland, and Milwaukee.

The Black-capped Chickadee was found on almost every Christmas Census. Photo by Eugene Sanborn, Vilas county. Courtesy Wisconsin Conservation Commission

The 215 censuses report 123 different species of birds. Of this number, six are "off-census species"—that is, were reported only as additional to those reported on the census trip itself, either because they were seen enroute to the census area, in a different area, or upon a different date. Studies for other states indicate that the number of off-census species diminishes as the number of on-census species increases and finally vanishes. It is to be expected that all off-census species will be found on-census eventually.

Table 3 is a tabulation of the 123 species, arranged in order of the percentage of years reported. The off-census species are listed at the
end. This tabulation is probably a usable but rough indicator of general relative occurrence of the species. Relative-abundance and frequency-of-occurrence tabulations are in preparation, but it seems likely that they will be delayed. It seems advisable to present this tabulation for such interest and use as the bird students of Wisconsin may have for it.

**Table 1**: Years of censuses, showing first the number of stations operated and second, censuses made in each year. Where only one figure appears, number of stations and censuses are identical. 1900: 1, 1901-06: 2; 1907-5; 1908-09: 8, 9; 1910: 13, 15; 1911: 15, 16; 1912-16: 18, 19; 1913: 7; 1914 5; 1915-6; 1916; 4; 1917: 2; 1918-3: 19; 1919: 4, 5; 1920: 3; 1921: 4; 1922-23: 8; 1924: 3; 1925: 4; 1926-27: 3; 1928: 2; 1929: 4; 1930-31: 6; 1932: 3; 1933: 4; 1934: 3; 1935: 4; 1936: 4, 5; 1937: 5; 1938: 9, 10 (4 unpublished); 1939: 8, 10 (3 unpublished.)

**Table 2**: Distribution of Christmas censuses. The city named frequently means “vicinity of”, and first figure indicates years, while the second shows number of censuses. Where identical, only one number appears. **Barron county**: Barron, 1; **Brown**: Green Bay, 2; **Dane**: Madison, 13, 18; Oregon, 1; Verona, 1; **Douglas**: Superior, 3; **Dunn**: Menomonie, 2; **Columbia**: Kilbourn (Wisconsin Dells) 1; Lodi, 1; **Green Lake**: Green Lake, 2; Berlin, 2; Princeton, 1; **Jefferson**: Watertown, 9; Fort Atkinson, 2; Johnson Creek, 1; **Kenosha**: Kenosha, 1; **LaCrosse**: La Crosse, 3; **Lafayette**: Darlington, 6; **Lincoln**: Tomahawk, 1; **Manitowoc**: Manitowoc, 1; Branch, 1; **Marathon**: Wausau, 1; Unity, 1; **Marquette**: Westfield, 6, 8; **Milwaukee**: Milwaukee, 13, 14; Wauwatosa, 3; **Monroe**: Sparta, 2; **Outagamie**: Appleton, 11; **Ozaukee**: Ozaukee, 2; **Pierce**: Ellsworth, 2; **Price**: Park Falls, 2; **Racine**: Racine, 3; Kansasville, 1; **Rock**: Beloit, 1; Evansville, 4; Janesville, 1; **Rusk**: Ladysmith, 4; **Sauk**: Prairie du Sac, 1; **Sawyer**: Freedom, 3; **Sauk**: Reedsburg, 3; **Baraboo**: 4, 5; **Shawano**: Shawano, 1; **Sheboygan**: Sheboygan, 3; **Walworth**: Walworth, 1; Elkhorn, 29, 32; Lake Geneva, 5; **Wisconsin**: Whitewater, 4; **Waukesha**: Waukesha, 7; **Dousman, 1;** **Hartland, 15;** **Waupaca**: Waupaca, 1; **Winnebago**: Winneconne, 6

**Table 3**: The species reported during the first 40 years of Christmas censuses in Wisconsin. The list includes 123 species (6 off-census) arranged by percentage of the total years reported as follows: **100%—Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Brown Creeper, Brown Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tree Sparrow, Brown Creeper, Slate-colored Junco, American Goldfinch, Marsh Hawk, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Snow Bunting, American Coot, Ring-necked Pheasant, Long-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, Red-winged Blackbird, English Sparrow, Scrub Owl, Starling, Red-headed Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Rusty Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Red-shouldered Hawk, Hungarian Partridge, Ring-billed Gull, Horned Owl, Short-eared Owl, Bronzed Gackle, Evening Grosbeak, Canada Goose, Hermit Thrush, Lapland Longspur, Old Squaw, Red-breasted Merganser, Bufflehead, Sparrow Hawk, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, Prairie Chicken, Tufted Tittmouse, Eastern Meadowlark, Black Duck, Canvas-back, Hooded merganser, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bonaparte’s Gull, Pileated Woodpecker, Bohemian Waxwing, Migrant Shrike, Pine Grosbeak, Swamp Sparrow, Green-winged Teal, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, American Rough-legged Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brewer’s Blackbird, Cowbird, White-winged Crossbill, White-throated Sparrow, Horned Grebe, Gadwall, Baldpate, Wood Duck, Barrow’s Golden-eye, American Scoter, Goshawk, Cooper’s Hawk, American

(EDITOR’S NOTE: The American Oyster-catcher here listed evidently was recorded by a beginning bird student, as it is not represented on Wisconsin’s check-list. Barrow’s Golden-eye is on the hypothetical list.)

THE DRAWINGS OF A. L. KULMLEN

The Wisconsin Historical Society has two volumes of water color drawings by A. L. Kulmlen. They are dated 1875 and were exhibited apparently at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in that year.

The first volume is devoted entirely to plants. The second contains two plates of butterflies, two of fish, one of the Thirteen-line Spermophile, and one of its Skeleton. The bird plates consist of drawings of the Cerulean Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo, Baird’s Sandpiper, Blue Jay and the skeleton of the Stilt Sandpiper. The coloring of the Philadelphia Vireo is especially soft and pleasing. The plate of the Blue Jay is unique as the side of the bird shows the muscular system. The drawing is worth reproducing for its historical interest.

Insofar as known, these are the first colored drawing of birds to be produced by a Wisconsin artist. After the volumes had been donated to the University of Wisconsin, a member of the Kulmlen family attempted recovery. Prof. E. A. Birge decided rightly that the University should retain possession. — A. W. Schorger.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS NEAR MADISON

By Samuel D. Robbins, Jr.
Madison Bird Club

Between eleven and twelve o’clock on the morning of December 22, 1907, R. H. Denniston, now a professor of botany at the University of Wisconsin, counted sixteen individual birds of five different species. This was the first Christmas bird count on record for the Madison region. Although systematic yearly Christmas bird counts were not inaugurated until recently, different observers have made counts from time to time during the past thirty-five years. Chief among the early counters was Warner Taylor, who worked during the period from 1915 to 1922. Among others were Norman Betts (1913 and 1915) and S. Paul Jones (1919-1920). There was a gap in the bird counting for thirteen years after 1922, interrupted only in 1929 and 1930 by a group composed of Kempston, Ogden, and John and Jackson Main.

Not until 1936, however, was any concerted attempt made to cover the territory around Madison thoroughly. Two separate censuses were run that year: one by the Madison Bird Club under the leadership of N. R. Barger, which produced over 900 individuals, more than twice the highest number recorded previously; the other a group led by John Main which recorded a new high in total species, 24. These counts, together with one the following year by the Madison Bird Club, were apparently only forersumers, because in 1938, after a unusually mild autumn, John Main’s group found 42 species and 3950 individuals. This was the first successful attempt to record a true picture of the bird life in this locality. Since then, the sport of counting birds has become more popular, and results have improved correspondingly. In 1939, three different counts were made. Main’s party found 46 species, but the three parties found a collective total of 57.

The year 1940 is perhaps one of the greatest landmarks in the history of Christmas bird counts in Madison, both in a negative and positive sense. The death of John Main brought to an end Madison’s heretofore best counting system. On the other hand, the Madison Bird Club started a series of bird counts which was the most thorough and inclusive yet made.