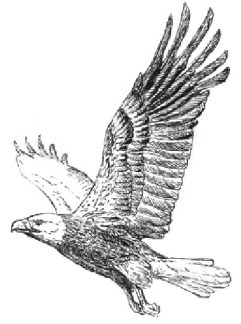




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 36, No 2

Summer 2025

Saturday June 7, 2025 Field Trip Mississippi Palisades State Park 6:00am. Lost Mound Wildlife Refuge, Thomson Fulton Sand Prairie and Lock and Dam 13. Meet at Schuler's Shady Grove Park, Rapids City 6:00am for carpooling. This is an all day field trip with a return possibly as late as 4:00pm. Participants are advised to bring a lunch. This field trip features late waterfowl, breeding warblers, forest and grassland birds. We will walk on some trails in the Palisades. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Wednesday June 18th, 2025 Friends of Milan Bottoms Roost-In/City of Rock Island TIF Public Hearing. Join the Friends of Milan Bottoms Coalition at a Roost-In demonstration at the Rock Island City Hall (1528 3rd Avenue) from 3:30-530 p.m. Stay for the public hearing immediately afterwards. The city of Rock Island is entertaining development in Milan Bottoms, the largest Bald Eagle winter night roost in the lower 48 states. See more about this event on page 4.

Friday- Saturday June 27th-28th - 2025 Backyard BioBlitz Hauberg Estate 1300 24th St. Rock Island. Explore local wildlife and plants while helping document species with expert naturalists. Public hours: Friday 3pm-6pm. Saturday 10am-2pm. Live raptors with RARE. Guided Hikes. Interactive Nature Stations. Presentations. Arts and Crafts.

Visit us on the web at
www.quadcityaudubon.org.

We're also on Facebook!



Audubon

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Summary of the 2024-2025 Local Christmas Bird Counts

Jason L. Monson – Kelly J. McKay – Mark A. Roberts – Cathleen D. Monson

The local Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season began on opening day of the count period, December 14th, 2024, with the Bald Bluff Count. Six participants among 3 field parties recorded 65 species and 2,703 individual birds. With this, it's twelfth year, Bald Bluff still managed to add some new species to the cumulative list, including: Red-breasted Merganser and Great Black-backed Gull.

The Davenport CBC was held on December 15th. Twenty-three participants in 9 field parties tallied over 132,000 birds and 94 species. Observers were treated to some very good birds this year: Surf Scoter (1), Horned Grebes (2), Iceland Gulls (2), Lesser Black-backed Gulls (2), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1), and Peregrine Falcons (2).

On December 17th, fourteen participants in 5 field parties documented 78 species and over 21,000 birds on the Princeton-Camanche CBC. Notable species seen included 1 Marsh Wren, 1 Fox Sparrow, 3 Northern Saw-whet Owls, 1,450 Tundra Swans, and 1,007 Trumpeter Swans.

Fifteen observers in 6 field parties participated in the Clinton-Savanna CBC on December 18th. Participants observed some excellent birds that day, including: 5 Wood Ducks, 269 Hooded Mergansers, 138 Sandhill Cranes, 6 Killdeer, 1 Fox Sparrow, 4 Savannah Sparrows, and 125 Cackling Geese. 15,341 total birds and 84 species were reported.

Fifteen participants in 7 field parties teamed up to count nearly 5,000 birds the next day (December 19th) during the Louisa Y CBC. Seventy-three species were observed. Despite windy conditions that day, several notable species were seen, including 2 Tundra Swans, 1 Canvasback, 1 Bufflehead, 1 Red-breasted Merganser, 2 Belted Kingfishers, 1 Merlin, and 1 Northern Shrike.

On December 21st, 10,711 individual birds and 92 species were recorded by 17 observers in 5 field parties, and 7 feeder watchers on the Muscatine CBC. Participants were treated to some real finds that day with 3 Wood Ducks, 3 Northern Saw-whet Owls, 1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 1 Field Sparrow, 2 Fox Sparrows, 1 Lincoln's Sparrow, 1 Eastern Towhee, and an impressive 43 Savannah Sparrows.

The Eastern Mercer County CBC was held on December 22nd. Nine participants in 6 field parties counted 11,455 birds and 75 species. A few noteworthy species were documented, including: 7 Trumpeter Swans, 1 Northern Pintail, 1 Brown Thrasher, 1 Gray Catbird, 2 Field Sparrows, and 1 Lincoln's Sparrow.

On December 23rd, eleven observers in 5 field parties tallied 80 species and 5,793 individual birds on the Western Mercer County CBC. Participants were treated to some remarkable birds that day, such as 2 Tundra Swans, 25 Trumpeter Swans, 1 Wood Duck, 1 Field Sparrow, 10 Fox Sparrows, 1 Savannah Sparrow, and 2 Lincoln's Sparrows.

Twelve participants in 4 field parties counted over 20,000 birds amongst 84 species during the Andalusia-Buffalo CBC on December 24th. Some noteworthy species were seen, including 22 Trumpeter Swans, 3 Tundra Swans, 8 Sandhill Cranes, 1 Short-eared Owl, 3 Fox Sparrows, and 6 Northern Bobwhite.

The Buchanan County CBC was conducted on January 2nd. Eight participants in 4 field parties were able to see some impressive species: 1 Gray Partridge, 77 Eurasian Collared Doves, 2 Killdeer, and 1 Short-eared Owl were among the noteworthy species encountered on count day. A total of 5,095 birds and 58 species were documented.

Eight field observers in 4 parties tallied 5,165 birds during the Northwest Clayton County CBC on January 3rd. Sixty-two species were observed. Participants were treated to some excellent finds that day, including: 1 Golden Eagle, 1 Merlin, 2 Northern Shrikes, and 2 Fox Sparrows.

The following day (January 4th), eight participants in 4 field parties documented 4,867 birds and 67 species on the Southeast Clayton County CBC. Some noteworthy birds observed that day included: 2 Wood Ducks, 1 Ruffed Grouse, 2 Golden Eagles, 5 Long-eared Owls, 3 Northern Saw-whet Owls, 9 Belted Kingfishers, 1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and 8 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

The final day of the count period, January 5th, four field parties consisting of 7 observers counted over 11,000 birds and a total of 75 species on the Van Petten CBC. Early morning owling yielded some impressive numbers with 33 Eastern Screech-Owls, 10 Northern Saw-whet Owls, and 6 Long-Eared Owls. Persistent birding the rest of the day brought out some remarkable species, treating participants to 1 Thayer's Gull, 1 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 1 Great Black-backed Gull, 4 Savannah Sparrows, and 1 Common Redpoll.

The compilers would like to extend their gratitude to all of you who participated in the 2024-2025 local Christmas Bird Counts. Collectively, we observed 252,083 individual birds and 122 cumulative species this season. Thank you all, so much, for your support. We look forward to seeing you next year!

Mission Statement

The Quad City Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds; a better understanding of the natural world; stewardship of natural areas and habitats; fellowship; improvement of community awareness of environmental issues; and education of youth for the benefit of future generations.

Thank you to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*.

The next deadline is August 25th, 2025. Submissions are gladly accepted.

Send to: Jason Monson,
(309) 221-1177, jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at: www.quadcityaudubon.org.

A Summary of One Christmas Bird Counter's 2024-2025 Season

Kelly J. McKay

For those of you new to Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) or those not familiar with the idea of marathoning, a CBC Marathon consists of conducting a full-day count every day during the 23-day CBC season. I am one of only two people who have ever successfully completed a CBC Marathon, and the only person to have completed more than 1 with 14 marathons under my belt. So, yes, you can say I am rather fanatical about CBCs! However, for the second year in a row I did not attempt a marathon during the 2024-2025 CBC season. Nevertheless, I still participated on 19 CBCs in Illinois, Iowa, and Kentucky.

My CBC season this year was roughly divided into three parts. The first leg included 11 consecutive counts which were all fairly local. These included: Bald Bluff (12-14), Davenport (12-15), Lost Nation (12-16), Princeton-Camanche (12-17), Clinton-Savanna (12-18), Louisa Y (12-19), Green Island (12-20), Muscatine (12-21), Eastern Mercer County (12-22), Western Mercer County (12-23), and Andalusia-Buffalo (12-24). After a two-day break, the second leg of the CBC season included what I call the "southern swing." This involved 4 counts in southern Illinois and Kentucky including: Arklands (12-27), Horseshoe Lake (12-28), Union County (12-29), and Mermet Lake (12-30). Following another two-day break, the CBC season concluded with what I call the "northern swing." This involved 4 counts in northeast Iowa and northern Illinois including: Buchanan County (1-2), Northwest Clayton County (1-3), Southeast Clayton County (1-4), and Van Petten (1-5).

Overall, my field parties during these 19 CBCs identified a tremendous diversity of species (141) and recorded almost a quarter million individual birds (249,732)! The lowest diversity counts included Bald Bluff (which took place during an all-day ice storm) and Buchanan County (each with 53 species), while the highest diversity was encountered at Arklands in southern Illinois (96 species). In terms of total birds, the fewest were reported at Bald Bluff (1,199), while the greatest number (i.e., nearly half of the birds recorded by my field parties during the season) occurred at Davenport (102,959). Of these, 4 species accounted for 93,983 birds including: Common Grackle (37,901), Red-winged Blackbird (37,291), European Starling (11,590), and Brown-headed Cowbird (7,201). What, you were expecting more sexy species!

During my 19 CBCs this season, my field parties observed some unusual species such as: Surf Scoter (Davenport); Long-tailed Duck (Davenport); Ruffed Grouse (SE Clayton Co.); Gray Partridge (Buchanan Co.); Horned Grebe (Davenport and Arklands); Iceland Gull (Davenport and Van Petten); Lesser Black-backed Gull (Davenport and Van Petten); Great Black-backed Gull (Van Petten); Black-crowned Night Heron (Arklands); Great Egret (Arklands and Union Co.); Golden Eagle (NW Clayton Co.); American Barn Owl (Mermet Lake); Merlin (Louisa Y, Arklands, and NW Clayton Co.); Marsh Wren (Princeton-Camanche and Mermet Lake); Gray Catbird (Lost Nation, E. Mercer Co., and Arklands); Brown Thrasher (Lost Nation, E. Mercer Co., and SE Clayton Co.); Redpoll (Green Island and Van Petten); Red Crossbill (Bald Bluff, Lost Nation, Green Island, and E. Mercer Co.); White-winged Crossbill (Bald Bluff); Field Sparrow (E. Mercer Co. and W. Mercer Co.); Savannah Sparrow (Clinton-Savanna, Green Island, Muscatine, E. Mercer Co., and Van Petten); Lincoln's Sparrow (Lost Nation, Muscatine, and E. Mercer Co.); Eastern Towhee (Lost Nation and Green Island); Pine Warbler (Union Co.); and possibly the best bird of the year, although the pair of American Barn Owls is right there also, Yellow-throated Warbler (Horseshoe Lake). The 4 CBCs in southern Illinois and Kentucky produced several of the more southern specialties including: Ross's Goose, Eastern Phoebe, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Mockingbird, and American Pipit which were recorded on all 4 of the southern counts. The Black Vulture and Turkey Vulture were each encountered on the same 3 counts (Horseshoe Lake, Union Co., and Mermet Lake), while the Loggerhead Shrike and Brewer's Blackbird were each observed on the same 2 counts (Arklands and Mermet Lake). Several American Woodcock were already engaged in courtship displays at Mermet Lake. The Fish Crow was present at Horseshoe Lake, while the LeConte's Sparrow occurred at Mermet Lake.

During the 2024-2025 CBC season, a number of species appeared to be more numerous and/or widespread than normal. This group included: Wood Duck, Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, and Fox Sparrow. In contrast, several species seemed to be considerably less abundant this season. For example: most waterfowl species, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Cedar Waxwing, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Snow Bunting, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

The CBC Program remains the longest continuous-running and most widespread wildlife survey on Earth! It is one of the few wildlife surveys in the world that generates long-term, large-scale data that allows scientists to fairly accurately monitor long-term avian population trends. The CBC relies almost entirely on citizen scientists, and is the cornerstone of community science efforts in the Western Hemisphere and a flagship program of the National Audubon Society. I strongly encourage everyone to get involved with the CBC Program. In today's world where wildlife populations are under constant threat and declining across the globe, programs like the Christmas Bird Count are more important than ever!

The 2024-2025 Christmas Bird Count – A Great Year for Owl Aficionados

Kelly J. McKay

One of my favorite aspects of the Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) each year is nocturnal birding, otherwise known as “owling.” I will admit to being an owling fanatic. Each CBC season I spend an enormous amount of effort, often in the dark freezing cold pre-dawn hours, trying to entice these usually invisible apparitions of the night to respond to my recorded calls. I am still trying to figure out why some nights are great for owl response when other nights, with seemingly similar conditions, are relatively poor? Regardless of whether it is a good or not so good night for owl activity, you greatly increase your chances of encounters with these remarkable predators by putting in the effort and being patient.

Throughout the 2024-2025 CBC season, I experienced my overall best year ever in terms of owls. During the 19 CBCs that I participated on, my field parties recorded an amazing total of 588 owls among 7 different species! This produced a remarkable average of nearly 31 owls/CBC. The only normally occurring species in the Midwest which I was not able to identify was the Snowy Owl. Not surprising, since this appeared to be a very poor eruption year for this ghost-like visitor from the far north. Among our common owl species (e.g., Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, and Barred Owl), all three species were encountered on each of the 19 CBCs. Overall, my field parties recorded 194 Barred Owls, 172 Great Horned Owls, and 161 Eastern Screech-Owls. The Long-eared Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl each occurred on 9 CBCs, and each had 26 individuals reported this season. Four CBCs yielded a total of 7 Short-eared Owls, while a territorial pair of American Barn Owls were observed during the Mermet Lake CBC in Kentucky.

My field parties produced 30+ owls on 6 different CBCs this year. Chris Swanson and myself tallied 31 owls from 5 species during the Muscatine CBC (12-21-24). This included 13 Great Horned, 9 Barred, 7 Eastern Screech, 1 Long-eared, and 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl. I was joined by Chris Swanson and Jeanne Hedges on the Andalusia-Buffalo CBC (12-24-24). During this Christmas Eve CBC, we reported 33 individuals from 4 species, including 23 Barred, 8 Great Horned, 1 Eastern Screech, and 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl. I was able to detect 56 owls from 3 different species on the Horseshoe Lake CBC (12-28-24). This less diverse community consisted of 21 Eastern Screech, 20 Great Horned, and 15 Barred Owls. The day before (12-27-24), Isaac Grosner and myself identified 62 individual owls during the Arklands CBC. The 6 species encountered represented the most diverse owl community in 2024-2025. This parliament (the term for a group of owls) was composed of 26 Eastern Screech, 22 Great Horned, 7 Barred, 4 Long-eared, 2 Short-eared, and 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl. Chris Swanson again joined me on the last day of the season (1-5-25) as we conducted the Van Petten CBC. During this count, our team recorded 66 total owls including: 23 Great Horned, 19 Eastern Screech, 10 Northern Saw-whet, 8 Barred, and 6 Long-eared Owls. However, the title this season rests with the opening day count at Bald Bluff (12-14-24). I and Chuck Leib encountered 87 total owls during this count – the largest number of owls I have ever recorded throughout my 629 CBC career. What makes this result truly amazing is that this CBC experienced on-and-off freezing rain and icing periods from 4:00 AM through the end of the day! In order to try and beat the ice storm, I began owling at midnight. For those first four hours, calm winds and mild temperatures yielded abundant numbers of owls. In fact when Chuck met me at 4:00 AM, just as the freezing rain was starting, I had already amassed 49 owls. Over the next three hours, with light rain and freezing rain falling, Chuck and myself recorded an additional 38 birds! This record-setting count included: 35 Eastern Screech, 25 Great Horned, 18 Barred, 5 Long-eared, and 4 Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Again, the key to successful CBC owling is effort and patience. For example, during the 19 counts I participated on in 2024-2025, I spent a total of 53.75 hours owling and covered 317 miles! I believe there are two main reasons why folks are often unsuccessful when it comes to owling. First, people will often use small recorders or their phones when calling owls. These devices simply do not have enough volume to project the call over a greater area and thereby potentially interact with a greater number of birds. Second, people tend to be impatient. I have noticed many times birders will play two or three calls of each species and if nothing responds, they move on. Sometimes it will take several minutes for the owls to start responding. Therefore, when it comes to owling, patience is truly a virtue. I encourage all CBCers to engage in nocturnal owling. I think you will find, that it is often one of the highlights of your CBC experience.

Milan Bottoms is in Grave Danger!

Bring Your Voice to the Roost-In and Rock Island TIF Public Hearing June 18th, 2025

The Friends of Milan Bottoms Coalition is organizing a “Roost-In” demonstration from 3:30-5:30 p.m. prior to the Rock Island TIF public hearing on June 18th, 2025. The purpose of the Roost-In is to raise awareness about the value of Milan Bottoms as wildlife habitat, and the importance of maintaining it as an untouched area. The city of Rock Island is holding a public hearing regarding proposed development in Milan Bottoms starting at 5:30. As many of you know, the city of Rock Island is considering allowing development in Milan Bottoms, the largest Bald Eagle winter night roost in the lower 48 states. Any development in the area will have a catastrophically negative impact on that habitat. Despite continued resistance from many groups, the city of Rock Island is still considering this development project.

If you value Milan Bottoms, and the habitat it provides for Bald Eagles, and so many other animals, please come to the Roost-In, and stay for the public hearing. Bring your signs, bring your voices, and let Rock Island know that you oppose any development in this important habitat. Please sign up for public comment before the hearing. Anyone that signs up is given 5 minutes to voice their concerns.

To learn more about Milan Bottoms, the animals that call it home, and how important this area is, visit the Friends of Milan Bottoms Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61574916103063>. Other important dates coming up regarding the proposed development include the Rock Island city council meetings on July 14th and July 28th. For more information about the Roost-In, public hearing, and Friends of Milan Bottoms, contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661.

Please join us for the Roost-In from 3:30-5:30 p.m., and stay for public comment at the public hearing starting at 5:30 on June 18th, 2025 at Rock Island City Hall, 1528 3rd Avenue.

BACKYARD BIOBLITZ

Join us for a BioBlitz at Hauberg Estate in Rock Island, IL! Explore local wildlife and plants while helping document species with expert naturalists.

START
JUNE 27, 2025
2:00PM

END
JUNE 28, 2025
2:00PM

FREE
Event

Activities
Friday from 3:00PM - 6:00PM
Saturday from 10:00AM - 2:00PM

- ✓ LIVE Raptors with RARE
- ✓ Guided Hikes
- ✓ Interactive Nature Stations
- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Arts & Crafts
- ✓ & MORE!

Hauberg Estate
1300 24th St.
Rock Island, IL 61201
 director@haubergestate.org
 309-373-5080

JOIN US FOR A RELAXING DAY BIRDING.

****BRING A LUNCH OR MEAL FOR YOURSELF.****

ENJOY LATE WATERFOWL, BREEDING WARBLERS, FOREST, AND GRASSLAND BIRDS.

PLEASE NOTE:
WE WILL BE WALKING A FEW STEEP TRAILS IN THE PALISADES.*

AUDUBON FIELD TRIP!

SATURDAY JUNE 7, 2025

Field Trip to Mississippi Palisades State Park, Lost Mound Wildlife Refuge, Thomson Fulton Sand Prairie and Lock and Dam 13.

Meet @ 1st Ave in Rapids City, IL in Schuler's Shady Grove Park @ **6:00am** for carpooling.

This is an all day field trip with a return possibly as late as **4:00pm**.



Quad city Audubon has gifted five birding backpacks to the Davenport Public Library. The backpacks are available for checkout at both the Eastern and the Fairmount branches of the Davenport public library. The backpacks include high-quality binoculars, a guidebook for identifying birds and suggested places to go in the Quad City area to look for birds. These backpacks provide an excellent resource for those wishing to start learning about birds in their area.

Quad City Audubon suggests checking a birding backpack out of the library and joining us on one of our many field trips. Please check our website for the latest updates on events and trips at Quadcityaudubon.org and this Newsletter.