

# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

February 2025



## ENSBC 2024 Christmas Bird Count

by John Leonard

Evanston North Shore Bird Club sponsored its 64th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Sat., Dec. 28, 2024. The CBC is the premier community science project, running now for 125 years. This census is one of the few that accounts for the mileage and hours of observers' efforts and is thus useful for a variety of scientific studies. We send our data to a central repository at the National Audubon Society; historical trends are at their website: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone>.



Sixty-eight dedicated field birders in 10 sub-areas of our 15-mile diameter count circle centered at Dundee Rd and Skokie Blvd, enjoyed decreasing moderate winds of 10-15 mph, and eventually sunny conditions with temperatures from 40 to 52 degrees. The total number of species (76) was above our average of 71 since 2000. We collectively walked a total of 148 miles, 25 miles more than last year as we had 7 more counters. David Wachtel added another 8.5 miles by bicycle at Skokie Lagoons. Commuting between birding locations involved another 172 car miles to observe birds in daylight hours.

In addition, several participants set out before dawn, and Owen Woodhouse went out after the countdown dinner to pick up an Eastern Screech Owl on the way home! The Ryerson crew was particularly successful in finding owls, spotting Eastern Screech, Great Horned and our only Barred Owls. Five areas found Screech and Great-horned Owls.

For the first time since the pandemic, John Leonard presented in person at Libby Hill's home the excitement-building countdown, starting with, of course, European Starling, and ending with a mega rarity. Putting observations of each species in historical context, along with trend graphs of prior data, always interests participants; especially intriguing is the finding of abundant or missing species, and the later stage of the countdown when less common and even surprising finds are revealed. One of the biggest surprises was the high number of Hooded Mergansers (61 quadrupling the previous record) at a few sites but mostly in the North Shore Channel (John Bates). There was a record-setting number of Red-breasted Mergansers in Lake Michigan and elsewhere, triple the average over the past 15 years. Extremely warm weather and extensive open water were likely major factors.



We saw a record number of Pileated Woodpeckers (5) versus previous high of 4 in 2022, with an average of 1 over the past 15 years. They were never seen before 1992. Red-headed Woodpeckers continue to do well, although not as many were seen as last year. Luckily, a single white morph Snow Goose has continued on for several weeks now at Lake Glenview. A single Canvasback was found at the now famous Lincolnshire Commons shopping mall. A Common Loon was seen by Owen Woodhouse's team on the lake, rare this time of year; none of the slightly more common Red-throated Loons were seen.

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Ethan Ellis and Vlad Nevirkovets found our lone Double-crested Cormorant along the Des Plaines River. Although widely expanding their range in Lake County, this year marked our first sighting of European Goldfinch on this CBC (Eric Lundquist). As for low numbers or missed species, Cedar Waxwings come to mind. They are an irruptive species whose numbers wildly fluctuate from year to year. Misses included Fox and White-crowned Sparrow, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, and Purple Finch.



CBC countdown at Libby's house

Nancy Pinchar in Evanston observed the only Carolina Wren on our count. A total of 26 species were tallied at 17 backyard stations, and their numbers significantly boosted our count of Mourning Doves, House Sparrows, juncos, woodpeckers and cardinals. Thanks to Ron Zick of Wild Birds Unlimited, Glenview for spreading the word about our feeder effort and especially to Joel Greenberg for collecting the data. Combining both the field and feeders, we counted 16,904 birds!

The most exciting find by far was the **first ever RED PHALAROPE on an ILLINOIS CBC**. See the article by Joel Greenberg below!

## A Holiday Tradition and Surprise! by Joel Greenberg

I went on my first Evanston North Shore CBC in 1967 and have missed only one or two since. I have had lots of partners but have covered roughly the same area since the early 1970s: Lake-Cook on the south, 41 on the east, Half-Day on the north, and just west of Milwaukee on the west. This year my partners were regulars Stefanie Altneu, Andy Kimmel and first timer Bill Weidner.



One of our best walks is usually the challenging trek along the narrow bank between the fences of backyards and the west fork of the North Branch of the Chicago River. In 2001, at the end of our walk, Carolyn Fields and I were greeted by two police officers probably alerted by one of the neighbors nervous in the wake of 9/11. Once they learned our purpose, the officers wished us well.

Stefanie joined us where the walk comes near her home. When we finished, she asked if she should go home and pick up her scope. Based on previous years, I said that my scope would be sufficient. Would I ever regret that response later!

Something truly extraordinary was to follow. One of our later stops is a lake behind Lincolnshire Commons, just north of Aptakisic Road and west of Milwaukee Ave. The south-east edge is fringed with phragmites, but there is a cleared section so that's where we began scanning. A week before there had been a male Canvasback, and he was still there along with seven more species of waterfowl. At one point Stefanie saw what looked like a dark female mallard and thought it might be a Black Duck. I turned my scope in that direction and was totally amazed to see a **Red Phalarope** swimming in front of the mallards. (Did I ever kick myself for turning down Stef's scope offer!)

I had good looks at the dark stout bill, black mark behind the eye on an otherwise white head, pale gray upperparts devoid of any white markings and contrasting with the white underparts. But the bird was moving about making it difficult for my compadres to see it. Andy saw the bird fairly well, and it was a lifer for Stefanie! Bill never really got much of a view. Stefanie tried to take a photo using her phone through the scope, but all she got was a tiny white dot. We decided to head to the other side of the lake to get a closer view.

I alerted birders via telephone and Discord, and folks began to show up. Stefanie's wonderful spouse Dan brought her scope over. Eric Lundquist and his team joined us, and although we failed to relocate the phalarope, Eric found seven European Goldfinches, the first ever recorded for the CBC.

The Red Phalarope was not only the first ever seen on this count but also the first record of the species for any Illinois CBC in the 125 years since the effort began. This is my second best find on all counts over the years. In 1972, I discovered the state's second Tufted Duck while birding with Richard Horwitz on the Chicago Lake Front CBC. The Red Phalarope photo shown here is not our bird but one seen as recently as late December near Indianapolis. Unlike our bird - which was never seen again - the Hoosier phalarope lingered a while. This lovely picture was taken by Ryan Sanderson. The bird is identical in appearance to the one we saw.

I'm reminded that you never know what you might find out there. Surprises in the field never cease!

**From:** Annette Prince  
**Date:** Oct 28, 2024  
**To:** Libby Hill  
**Subject:** Gift to Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CBCM)

Hi Libby-

How very kind of the ENSBC board to again contribute to the volunteer-led mission of CBCM. We deeply appreciate your support!

Your contribution will be very needed to continue our hotline work that now receives more than 10,000 calls a year, assisting people with their questions about helping birds and preventing their harm. We also use contributions to pay for our rescue, education and advocacy materials. We need equipment for our volunteers and have informational materials for the public and buildings we work with. All of this assists us in spreading the word about the importance of protecting the birds we want to preserve and continue to enjoy.

Thank you for helping us help more birds and for being such a devoted champion for the environment, Libby. Please let me know if you need any other information.

Gratefully,

Annette Prince  
Director, Chicago Bird Collision Monitors  
[aprincecbcm2@msn.com](mailto:aprincecbcm2@msn.com)  
630 841 7110  
[www.birdmonitors.net](http://www.birdmonitors.net)  
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**CBCM is holding a fundraiser on Saturday, February 22, 2025, 6-9pm.  
1328 W. Randolph, Chicago, IL 60607**

**[Click here to See the event invitation!](#)**

**As ENSBC looks ahead to the new year,** we are looking for people to serve on the Club's board. This is a great way to get to know people in the birding community and use your time and talent to help the birds we all love. We are looking for a Vice-President and Membership Chair. Our **nominating committee** would welcome your candidacy or suggestion of someone you'd recommend. Contact [sarahjm38@icloud.com](mailto:sarahjm38@icloud.com) to let us know of your interest .

## ENSBC Field Trips

**Sunday, March 30: Looney Trip --** Join David Johnson looking for loons, pelicans, ducks, and more around northern Lake County. Register at either [djohnsoda@comcast.net](mailto:djohnsoda@comcast.net) or [libbyhill@comcast.net](mailto:libbyhill@comcast.net).



**Saturday, April 5: Woodcocks at Air Station Prairie.** To register go to [libbyhill@comcast.net](mailto:libbyhill@comcast.net)

### Programs You Won't Want to Miss

**Tuesday, Feb. 25 (on zoom):** *"Adapting to Change: Bird Photography as Recovery"*. **Jobi Cates**, a local birder, photographer and policy advocate, will share photos, stories, and lessons learned from birds as part of her journey with chronic illness. A birder for many years, Jobi got Covid in March 2023 and became a "long-hauler", suffering serious debilitation. Going back to work was not an option, but using methods learned in speech and physical therapy, Jodi made bird photography an integral part of her recovery.

**Tuesday, March 25 (in person):** *"Dragonflies: A Natural History"*. Journey into the mesmerizing world of dragonflies—ancient aerial predators whose distant ancestors soared with two-and-a-half-foot wingspans over 300 million years ago! Join **Marla Garrison** of the Liebman Institute for Science Innovation at McHenry College and author of *Damselflies of Chicagoland* for an image-intensive presentation showcasing the aquatic insect order Odonata, which has been studied by aeronautical engineers for decades. Through macro photography we will take an up-close look at their development, life cycle, and behaviors.

**Tuesday, April 22 (in person):** *"Cicadas, Birds and Ants: Research from the Cicada 'Pulse'"*. **Sean Menke**, Professor & Chair of Biology at Lake Forest College, along with his colleagues, took advantage of the cicada event in 2024 to learn more about ecosystems. In nature, populations of plants and animals occasionally explode in numbers, providing a temporary surplus of nutritious food for consumers. These 'pulses' can initiate chain reactions in food webs. We studied the synchronized emergence of billions of Brood XIII periodical cicadas in Chicagoland this past summer, an enormous 'pulse' of insect food for birds and ants. Come find out what we learned and still hope to find out!



White Wagtail in Door County, WI  
by Dave Johnson

## In Wisconsin...a Rarity!

by Dave Johnson

Jeri and I had a chance to chase a lifer mega rarity **White Wagtail** in Sturgeon Bay Wisconsin, discovered on 28 Dec 2024 by local birders Candy and Rush Evans at Portage Park, the first time the species has ever been seen in Wisconsin. There are many forms of White Wagtails, and this bird is believed to be of Siberian origin and is a vagrant anywhere in North America. We traveled 218 miles from home in NE Illinois to see this rarity in Door County WI on the 2nd of January 2025, spending about one hour watching it feed on the rocky shore and algae mats of Portage Park, largely at the rocky point. I was able to get several digiscoped photos with other birders while we savored seeing this vagrant wagtail, often pumping its tail up and down, thus the name wagtail. I remembered first hearing about this bird when one showed up in Michigan in 1985 at a sewage treatment plant in Muskegon; I never got to chase that one. Since then, Michigan has tallied two more wagtail records. Elsewhere, this bird is largely seen as a vagrant along the west coast in winter.

## And another Rarity here at home!!

by Tarik Shahzad

Demond McDonald, Phil Stosberg and Tarik Shahzad saw a Short-tailed Shearwater fly by Montrose beach pier. It flew straight out into the lake after flying parallel along the pier. This is the first state record of either a Sooty or Short-tailed Shearwater. Hopefully this bird will remain on Lake Michigan. If you have a scope and the time, lake watching might help you land this mega rarity too!

## Species Profile



I love watching the American Goldfinches as they 'change their outfits' with the seasons. They're here all year, of course. Frankly I almost prefer their deep winter plumage, especially in the tail. So spectacular!

Lorra Rudman



Short-tailed Shearwater  
by Demond McDonald

## Breaking News: 2026 ENSBC trips with Red Hill Birding!

**Jan. 29 - Feb. 5, 2026. Jamaica:** Island Endemics & Caribbean Specialties  
Guide: Josh Engel & local guides. To register, click  
<https://www.redhillbirding.com/jamaica-ensbc>

**July 5 - 13, 2026. Newfoundland:** Puffins, Northern Gannets, breeding birds  
and more! (Trip planning in process.)  
Email [libbyhill@comcast.net](mailto:libbyhill@comcast.net) for information.



Bird Calls is a publication of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club  
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