The 126th Christmas Bird Count in Missouri

By Kendell Loyd, CBC Regional Editor – Missouri

This season, Missouri hosted 34 active count circles. While no new circles were established, all previously active circles continued operation, maintaining the record-high number of counts achieved last year. A total of 652 participants recorded 155 species across the state, consisting of 823,789 individual birds. Weather conditions across the count period were variable but generally mild. The coldest temperature recorded occurred on the Maramec Spring count (4°F), while the warmest occurred on the Taney County count (82°F). Most counts experienced favorable conditions, though several were impacted by precipitation or wind. The Grand Pass count experienced heavy rain during the morning hours, the Kansas City count had light rain followed by snow, and the Laclede County count recorded light rain during the morning. Snow cover was minimal, with only the Weldon Spring count reporting any accumulation.

Several notable species were seen throughout the state. Black Scoter was recorded for the first time on the Kansas City count, becoming the first circle in Missouri to document all three expected scoter species; this also represents only the second Missouri CBC record for Black Scoter, following birds at Confluence last year.

An Inca Dove was documented at a private feeder within the Cole Camp circle, although only recorded this time during count week. This was the first detection for that count. There have been only two definitive CBC records previously, and this represents Missouri's 12th record of the species overall. A Red-necked Grebe on the Dade County count represents both a first Missouri CBC record. Dade County also documented its first Red-throated Loon and its fourth Pacific Loon, representing the second and fifth state CBC records, respectively. Four Rivers recorded its second dark ibis (Plegadis sp.), most likely White-faced Ibis, though winter identification to species is often not possible. Perhaps the most notable bird of the season, an immature Gyrfalcon* was photographed within the Confluence count circle during count week, representing the first record for that count and only the second Missouri CBC record, the first occurring at Loess Bluffs in 1977. Eurasian Tree Sparrow, introduced to the St. Louis area in 1870, remains largely restricted to that region and adjacent areas; however, the Four Rivers count in southwestern Missouri recorded its first occurrence, representing one of the southwestern-most records of the species in North America.

Black Vulture continues to expand its winter range northward and eastward through the state. Big Spring recorded its third occurrence (all since 2022), Jefferson City its fifth (all since 2019), Big Oak Tree and Columbia each their eighth (all since 2015 and 2018, respectively), and Weldon Spring its ninth (all since 2015). Maramec Spring recorded a count week individual but has four confirmed records, all since 2020. Even in southern portions of the state, the species is increasing, as evidenced by Springfield's high count (235). Red-shouldered Hawk, likewise, continues to expand its winter range, with additional records at Loess Bluffs (fifth), Maryville (third), and St. Joseph (eighth). High counts were established at Big Oak Tree (16), Clarence Cannon (19), Confluence (17), Grand River (5, tied with 2023), Johnson's Shut-Ins (11), and Trimble (9).

Other noteworthy birds in the state included Blue-winged Teal, Long-tailed Duck, Greater Roadrunner, Sora, Greater Yellowlegs, American Woodcock, Iceland Gull, Golden Eagle, Long-eared Owl, Prairie Falcon, Fish Crow, Northern House Wren, Gray Catbird, Redpoll, Smith's Longspur, Vesper Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Indigo Bunting.

As for total species counted, the Four Rivers count recorded 115 species, setting a new state record and surpassing the previous high of 114 species set at Four Rivers in 2016 and tied by Dade County in 2023. Other counts established new high species totals: Jefferson City (84 species), Kirksville (69 species), and Laclede County (60). Additionally, Mark Twain Lake recorded their highest number of individual birds (3536). One new species was added to the Missouri CBC list this year: a Red-necked Grebe at Dade County, which is considered casual in winter in the state.