

## XII. SOME NOTES ON OKLAHOMA COUNTY'S CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUSES FOR 1925 AND 1926

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In 1919 the magazine "Bird-Lore" started its first Christmas bird census; this has now grown into an important institution for bird students all over North America.

On Dec. 23, 1925, from 9 A. M. to 12:30 P. M. and from 1:30 to 6 P. M. the writer took a Christmas bird census in the vicinity of Oklahoma City going 12 miles on foot and 17 miles in a car. The day was clear with a strong south wind, the temperature, 26° to 40°. Woods, brushy hills, prairie, swamp, and lake habitats were visited. The following birds were seen: Gull (sp?) 40; Mallard, 200; Marsh Hawk, 5; Florida Red-shouldered Hawk, 1; Red-tailed Hawk, 2; Cooper's Hawk, 1; Sparrow Hawk, 1; Short-eared Owl, 1; Screech Owl, 1 (heard at night); Quail, 10 (1 covey); Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Southern Downy Woodpecker, 11; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 2; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2; Flicker, 19; Red-shafted Flicker, 1; Blue Jay, 3; American Crow, 50,000; Western Meadowlark, 126; Red-winged Blackbird, 46; Brewer's Blackbird, 12; American Goldfinch, 347; Pine Siskin, 73 (40 in a flock); Harris's Sparrow, 131; Western Tree Sparrow, 291, Western Field Sparrow, 5; Slate-colored Junco, 21; Dakota Song Sparrow, 32; Fox Sparrow, 3; Arctic Towhee, 2; Cardinal, 76; Cedar Waxwing, 6; Migrant Shrike, 5; Myrtle Warbler, 11; Western Mockingbird, 2; Carolina Wren, 5; Texas Wren, 2; Brown Creeper, 6; Plumbeous Chickadee, 87; Tufted Titmouse, 3; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 1; Robin, 289; Bluebird, 4. Total, 43 species, 51,887 individuals. Three other species—Canvasbacks, Redheads, and American Mergansers were reported on the 23rd by Forest Taylor, an official of the Izaak Walton League here. (During the two previous days 2 Western Mourning Doves, 1 Belted Kingfisher, 3 White-crowned Sparrows and 12 Savannah Sparrows were seen.)

An interesting feature of this census is the comparative abundance of winter bird life in central Oklahoma. Of 187 censuses from thirty two states and five provinces of Canada, only six states and one province had a larger bird guest list than those of central Oklahoma. It is interesting to note that five of these six front on the ocean where water and shore birds are common. These states were New York, New Jersey, Florida, Washington, and California, and all their lists contained approximately

one-third to one-half water and shore birds. Of all the lists from the inland states represented in the census only a single one outnumbered those of central Oklahoma, and that was taken at Columbus, Ohio, by seven members of the Wheaton Bird Club who recorded forty nine species. This number, however, is only five more than Professor and Mrs. L. B. Nice reported from Norman and three species more than the writer listed for Oklahoma City.

The large number of species which winter in central Oklahoma is best shown by a key list made by merging Professor and Mrs. Nice's Norman census with the writer's Oklahoma City census. As these two regions are only twenty two miles apart any species occurring in one district should be found in the other as they differ so little in topography. Uniting the two lists, fifty nine species are recorded.

A novel comparison between the winter land birds of Oklahoma City and those regions submitting larger lists of species is shown by the table. As mentioned before practically all of these latter censuses included many water birds. In order to have a more accurate basis for the comparison of these different regions the water and shore birds were excluded and the table was made by beginning with the Raptores and counting only the species following. It is seen that Oklahoma City is tied with Daytona Beach, Florida, for tenth place as each recorded forty species.

When the master list for Oklahoma City and Norman was treated in the same way the number of species became fifty two which would have put it in fifth place, after San Diego, California.

The point which the writer wishes to convey is that central Oklahoma has an abundance of bird life in the winter as well as in the summer. And yet, while the number of species known to occur in the state is large, in comparison to the other states its bird realm is practically unexplored. Ornithology, therefore, has a particularly fertile field in Oklahoma where conservation has begun while the state is yet young and abundantly endowed with most of its natural bird life.

Town	Total no. of birds	Land birds	Place
1. Santa Barbara, California	106	55	Third
2. San Diego, California	106	53	Fourth
3. Lee County, Florida	81	49	Fifth
4. Palma Sola, Florida	80	42	Eighth
5. Los Angeles, California	79	56	Second

6. Daytona Beach, Florida	77	40	Tied for Tenth
7. Seattle, Washington	73	34	Fourteenth
8. Leon County, Florida	73	57	First
9. New York, New York	67	44	Sixth
10. Comax, Voncouver Island	60½	26	Sixteenth
11. Carmel, California	60	41	Ninth
12. Pensacola, Florida	56	38	Twelfth
13. Los Angeles, California	52	33	Fifteenth
14. Barnegat Bay, New Jersey	50	36	Thirteenth
15. Columbus, Ohio	49	39	Eleventh
16. Oklahoma City, Okla	46	40	Tied for Tenth
17. Norman, Oklahoma	44	43	Seventh

Perhaps the most unusual record included in this census is that of the crow which was seen in such enormous flocks that the most conservative estimate was 50,000 individuals. This total was swelled to its great size by three huge flocks together with many smaller groups. These large flocks seem fairly regular in occurrence collecting each winter in the same localities. One flock roosts near Millwood School northeast of Oklahoma City, another ranges the North Canadian bottomland and the adjoining territory five miles west of the city, and the third flock centers its base of operations near the Oklahoma City reservoir. Of the three, the flock at the reservoir seems to be the largest while the one northeast of the city seems the most regular in occurrence. On December 23, when the census was taken, most of the reservoir was frozen over and the crows were huddled on the ice in several black lines hundreds of yards long.

Pine Siskins were seen several times on the census day and were unusually common during the whole winter of 1925-1926. This was no doubt due to the severe weather in Colorado and other states to the north which drove a larger number of them to the south. The writer is of the opinion that many of our siskins breed in the mountains of Colorado. In the Sangre de Cristo range and in other mountains of south central Colorado siskins were abundant this summer (1926), scores being seen daily by the writer in the montane zone. This seems to offer an excellent project for bird banding work for it would, in time, furnish valuable information on their migratory routes, manner of flocking, and other peculiarities of the bird.

All of the Oklahoma censuses published in Bird-Lore were from the central and east central portions of the state and these lists all included the Harris Sparrow. The Nice's count of 363 and the writer's of 131 show their abundance in this region. However, their winter range seems very limited as only three

lists outside of this state contained the Harris Sparrow, namely those from Springfield, Illinois, Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Fort Worth, Texas. While an accurate idea of this sparrow's distribution is impossible since there are so few reports from Missouri Valley States, an idea of its limited range is given. Only one record in ten lists in Illinois, none in three from Missouri, one record in the single list from Arkansas, none from Nebraska although they were seen frequently at other times, and one record in two lists from Texas. Kansas, where it is abundant, was not represented in the census.

The Harris Sparrow is a close rival of the Tree Sparrow for the title of the most abundant winter sparrow in central Oklahoma. His voice is a common sound for his peculiarly individual song comes from the thickets on every side.

The Golden-crowned Kinglet is rare in Oklahoma County. One recorded on December 23 was the first the writer has ever seen in that locality. Like the siskins this bird had probably wandered farther south because of the unusual cold. The beautiful woods near Lessenger's Lake, west of the city attracted the tiny sprite, and it was there that I saw hopping around over a hackberry tree for all the world like his larger cousin the chickadee. The only manifestations of his good cheer was his repeated "tzee. . . .," given in a thin, high pitch.

Another interesting fact about winter bird life that is emphasized by this Christmas census is the abundance of robins. A majority of the people have the idea that the robins leave central Oklahoma on the approach of winter and that their return to the cities is a sign of the coming spring. However, while it is true that they are uncommon in the cities proper during the winter, in the outlying woods and wooded swamps they are even more abundant in the winter than in the summer. There are several places near Oklahoma City which the robins use as their winter quarters, and it is here that the writer was able to see them in large numbers at almost any time. Of these winter quarters, the one near Lessenger's Lake, four miles west of the city, seems to be the largest. Abundant water surrounded by windbreaks of heavy timber, and an abundance of food are the chief reasons for the large number of robins at this place. Hawthorn, persimmon, turkey berry, hackberry, sumac, and bittersweet are some of the fruits in this locality. A goodly proportion of the 289 robins listed in the writer's census were seen there.

The 1926 Christmas census taken by the writer in the Oklahoma City region resulted in the same number of species as

the previous year. Thirty-three species were seen both years.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 26, 1926, 9:00 A. M. to 1:00 P. M.; 2:00 P. M. to 5:30 P. M. Clear, bright most of the time; ground bare; south wind, growing gradually stronger; temperature twenty-six to forty-four degrees. Single observer using 12x binoculars. Eight miles on foot, twenty-nine by automobile.

American Merganser, several\*; Mallard, 80, Oklahoma City reservoir; Gadwall, several\*; Pintail, many\*; Redhead, few\*; Canvasback, many, Oklahoma City reservoir\*; Lesser Scaup, 12, Oklahoma City reservoir; Quail, 2; Marsh Hawk, 2; Red-tailed Hawk, 2; Florida Red-shouldered Hawk, 1; American Rough-legged Hawk, 1; Road-runner, 1; Belted Kingfisher, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Southern Downy Woodpecker, 2; Red-headed Woodpecker, 1; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 6; Flicker, 22; Red-shafted Flicker, 5; Blue Jay, 25; American Crow, 20,800 (estimated from three great flocks); Western Meadowlark, 7; American Goldfinch, 67; Savannah Sparrow (Nevada?), 1; Harris Sparrow, 79; White-throated Sparrow, 1; Western Tree Sparrow, 3; Western Field Sparrow, 30; Slate-colored Junco, 125; Song Sparrow (Dakota?), 8; Towhee, Arctic, 15; Cardinal, 37; Cedar Waxwing, 2; Migrant Shrike, 1; Myrtle Warbler, 14; Mockingbird, Western, 2; Brown Thrasher, 1; Carolina Wren, 13; Texas Wren, 1; Brown Creeper, 2; Tufted Titmouse, 16; Plumbeous Chickadee, 67; Hermit Thrush, 1; American Robin, 15; Bluebird, 34.

Total—Species 46, Individuals 21,492 (est.).