



Glenolden CBC: An 'Elite Count'

OF ALL THE NATIONAL AUDUBON Society Christmas Bird Counts in Pennsylvania, none has a higher species total than the Glenolden Count. Centering its 15-mile diameter in Wallingford and encompassing Tinicum National Environmental Center, Ridley Creek State Park, Springton Reservoir and parts of the Delaware River, the Glenolden CBC has tallied 100 or more species each December since 1973.

This particular count is named for the town in the southeastern corner of Pennsylvania in which its originator, John A. Gillespie, resided. In 1922, he identified 18 species around Glenolden as he took part in Audubon's 23rd annual winter bird census. As history would have it, Gillespie also chose that year to join the DVOIC as an associate member.

Last year, on its 60th anniversary, the Glenolden Count was one of only six CBCs out of 1,453 in the United States, Canada, Central America and the West Indies (and one in South America) to be designated an Ideal Model Count. The only other East Coast "Elite Count" to be accepted in the I.M. Count's experimental year was in Greenwich-Stamford, Conn.

The distinction was granted to the Glenolden Count upon application by compiler Franklin C. Haas. The count repeated its special status in 1983.

Attempting to make the data gathered in CBCs more reliable and accurate, Audubon asked Ideal Model Count compilers to provide more than just the traditional species seen this year and totals for individual birds.

Robert S. Arbib Jr., editor of Audubon's *American Birds*, which publishes CBC results, explains in the July-August 1983 edition some of the tasks assigned to I.M. Count compilers.

Ideal Model Counts, Arbib writes, list the most recent 10-year averages for this year's species and individual bird totals, "as well as the cumulative all-years species total for the count and the percent of that total observed this year. Further," he adds, "they add statistics on species and individuals per party-hour both for this year and for the recent 10-year averages."

Compilers "had new forms to complete, maps to mark showing actual coverage within the count circles"; they had to "derive the Reliability Indices of the party leaders, provide a more detailed weather analysis . . . and more detailed documentation of rarities and on feeder birds. They had to supervise more careful counts of party-miles and party-hours by all observers."

They also must give elevation figures and break down habitat coverage by percentage — deciduous forest, fields, residential, etc.

Haas, superintendent of Ridley Creek State Park, took over as compiler from Keith Richards in 1980, before becoming a DVOIC member. He and his wife, Barbara, joined in early 1983. When Haas saw the articles in *American Birds* proposing the elite count, he knew Glenolden could meet the minimum requirements of 50 participants. Last year's count had 121 observers, 65 in the field and 56 at feeders.

"You had to have a compiler who was willing to do the extra work and who could get his field observers to go along and obey the rules," said Haas, 38. He claimed some observers strayed from the count circle and others didn't keep a running tally of birds they saw during the day.

"They would not follow the rules, so the count was very hit or miss. You couldn't look at it and compare one year's count to the next in any scientific manner." The whole idea of the Ideal Model Count, he said, is "to get consistency so the data can be compared, if not with other counts, at least from one year to the next within its own count, to be able to spot trends in population fluctuations and species distribution."

As more studies use CBC data to plot trends in distribution or population of species in their winter habitats, Haas explained, the Ideal Model Count attempts to "make all the data a little more meaningful. Right now it's such a hit-or-miss operation that any study using this material is suspect."

Haas thinks the ground rules for the I.M. Count are fine. His

main complaint lies with the question of the Reliability Index, which tries to measure a participant's devotion to birding and knowledge of whatever birds might show up in a count area.

Participants must provide an average number of hours birding each year over the last five years, their life lists and their state lists. Haas has altered the Audubon request by asking his participants to estimate how many birds ever recorded in Pennsylvania the participants have seen *anywhere*.

He would choose to ignore the R.I. "I don't think it's measurable. It's simply not a factor you can quantify. I don't feel the reliability factor is significant enough in the overall scheme of things to worry about. The biggest factor in finding birds in an area is the number of observers you have. If you have enough people out there, they're going to find 90, 95 percent of the species that are occurring."

In fact, the R.I. has become a controversial factor in the Ideal Model Count, with some participants nationwide objecting to having their reliabilities rated. "As it turned out," Arbib acknowledges in his article, "the R.I. is not a very good measure."

I.M. Count compilers must rate the weather on a scale of 1 to 10 three weeks prior to count day; one week prior and on count day. The scale is based on how good a day it is for finding birds.

"A pouring rain day would be poor, three feet of snow would be poor because you can't get around," Haas said. "If it was too windy, it'd be poor, too balmy would be poor. You want to find a medium ground where it's cool enough that the birds are active and feeding a lot but not too warm that they've settled down for the day and shut up. I'd say this year was an 8. For field birding it was just about right."

TEMPERATURES FOR THE 1983 count day, Dec. 17, were about 26° to the mid-40s; skies were partly cloudy and the winds were still until early afternoon, which made for good owling before sunrise. The stronger winds prevented Haas from calling it a 10.

Haas is finding this year's paperwork is little easier, since he's being assisted by his personal computer. He used it to type up the instruction forms and mailing labels. "Before, I would take each person's report and transfer all that information to another form and laboriously add up all those columns and numbers. Now, I take the information from this form and put it on the computer and it'll do all the adding for me. It will give me averages and all kinds of good stuff if I want it."

Just because Haas has questions about the Reliability Index doesn't mean he doesn't occasionally have to question the reliability of participants.

"As a compiler you have to be a little hard-nosed sometimes and say, 'No, I won't believe you.'"

"The first year I got all the feeder watchers in, I got a report of a golden-fronted woodpecker with a note, 'It's always nice to see a new bird at your feeder,'" Haas recalled. He checked out the report, and the bird turned out to be a female red-bellied woodpecker.

Feeder watching hasn't been honed down to a science yet, either. "When someone has 100 red-breasted nuthatches, you know they've been counting the same ones coming back all day," Haas said.

"When I sent my report in last year, I sent a letter of comments and suggestions. One of the questions I asked is, 'How do you count birds at a feeder? Has anybody done studies on it?'"

With all this talk about birds and Christmas Counts, it seems appropriate to give some of the highlights of the '83 Glenolden CBC. Haas reported an unofficial total of 109 species — not all forms had been returned to him as of a week after the count day. Three species were new to the count: a great cormorant seen on the Delaware River, a Wilson's warbler at Tinicum and an Empidonax flycatcher, species unknown, in Newtown Square. Empidonax finders Bill and Mark Stocku and Paul Guris were spotted at the post-count meeting painstakingly filing a rare-bird documentation form.

PROGRAMS

All meetings begin at 8 p.m. at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

JAN. 8 — ANNUAL MEETING. Election of officers, results of the Christmas Birds Counts. Refreshments will be served.

JAN. 19 — ARMAS HILL. Our own voice of the hotline will discuss his trip to Costa Rica.

FEB. 2 — RICK MELLON. Tentative program.

FEB. 16 — ANNUAL SLIDE CONTEST. Participants may enter three slides in each category: birds, natural history and scenery.

MARCH 1 — PETER DUNNE. Cape May Bird Observatory's director hasn't said what his topic will be, but he'll be freshly returned from his first trip east of the Hudson Canyon — to Kenya.

RANDOM PUBLICATIONS

A random and incomplete compendium of various recent releases to augment your already bulging library shelves.

The National Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. Three volumes. Edited by John Farrard. Knopf, 1983. List at \$13.95 per volume. Photographic guide book by the publishers of the previous Audubon guide, but much improved. List of authors of species accounts reads like a "Who's Who in North American Birding." At over 4 pounds, however, hardly a pocket guide.

A Field Guide to the Birds of North America. The National Geographic Society. 1983. Published through the *National Geographic* as part of a package including a fancy coffee-table book, a four-record set of bird songs and a wall map of migratory routes in the Americas. Offers more plumages of certain species than most field guides carry. With 13 different artists, there is understandably some variation in the quality of the drawings.

Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification, by Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Bruun and Herbert S. Zim, with illustrations by Arthur Singer. Golden Press, New York, 1983. First revision of this excellent guide in 17 years. The maps have been improved, new plates have been added; still one of the best overall field guides on the market.

Western Bird Guide, by Richard Pough. \$10.95 Long-awaited reprint of 1957 edition long out of print. Excellent color plates by one of America's foremost bird painters, Don Eckelberry. This traditionally has been the book to take to Attu.

Also to be mentioned are two books that are not of recent issue, but have local interest:

The Birdwatcher's Activity Book, by Donald S. Heintzelman. Stackpole Books, Cameron and Kelker Sts., P.O. Box 1831, Harrisburg, Pa. 17105. 1983. \$11.95. The DVOC member's 12th book includes more than 70 photos, project diagrams and maps.

All-Season Birding in Southern New Jersey, by James F. Akers, \$4. This guide to South Jersey birding was written by a former club member who died in a boating accident in 1978. To purchase the book, see Jim Meritt before meetings. Proceeds from its sale will benefit the James F. Akers Memorial Scholarship Fund at Stockton State College, Pomona, N.J.

WHY DO YOU THINK THEY'RE CALLED 'DUES'?

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Jim Meritt, DVOC Treasurer

809 Saratoga Terrace

Turnersville, N.J. 08012

Moving? Send Jim address corrections, too.

FIELD TRIPS

Jan. 14 and 15: Pocono winter birds. Leader: Phil Street. Meet at the Holiday Inn, Allentown, Routes 309 and 22, at 9 a.m. on Saturday. Weekend cost of \$26 includes cabin accommodations at the Pocono Environmental Education Center, Dingman's Ferry, Pa., and dinner, breakfast and Sunday lunch. Bring sleeping bags, lunch for Saturday. For information, call Phil, 215-687-6542 (work) or 215-363-7776 (home).

Jan. 29: Shark River-Manasquan Inlet area. Half-day trip to be back in time for the Super Bowl, if you're so inclined. Leader: Jim Meritt. Meet at Pat's Diner, Route 38, at 7:30 a.m. For information, call Jim, 215-726-3240 (work) or 609-227-5948 (home).

Feb. 18 to 20: Annual DVOC New England Weekend. Leader: Alan Brady. Meet at boat ramp at Salisbury Beach State Park, Mass., Feb. 18 at noon. Alan has arranged a pelagic trip Feb. 19. The group will depart at 8 a.m. from the Ceres Street dock in Portsmouth, N.H., Capt. Walter Dunphy will steer his sturdy 65-foot craft *Heritage* to Jeffries Ledge in search of alcids, et. al. Betty Phinney will be pelagic trip leader. Cost of boat trip: \$25 per person. Reservations necessary. Mail check to Alan, Box 103, Wycombe, Pa. 18980, or call him at 215-598-7856 (home) or 215-968-2833 (work). He advises you to wear very warm clothes, bring food and hot beverage; there is no rain date.

March 3: South Jersey Owls and Waterfowl. Leader: Brian Moscatello. Meet at 12 South, formerly the Montana Mining Co., at 8 a.m. For information, call Brian, 609-235-1739 or 609-261-2495.

April 1: Pedricktown, N.J. Be an April Fool and come welcome back the ruffs. Low tide at 7:30 a.m.; high tide at 1 p.m. Meet on the causeway at about 10 a.m.

LOCAL NOTES

Dr. Stanley Temple was guest speaker Dec. 15 at the annual Alexander Wilson lecture, co-sponsored by the DVOC and the Academy of Natural Sciences. Temple, who is Beers Bascomb Professor of Conservation at the University of Wisconsin, discussed the decline in songbirds of the deciduous forests of the Eastern United States. . . . **Vince Abraitys**, 68, a DVOC member since 1965, died Nov. 3 after a lengthy illness. Vince, who resided in Sergeantsville, N.J., will be remembered by club members as an avid birder, as well as an excellent botanist. He authored the book *The Backyard Wilderness*.

Club member **Donald S. Heintzelman** reports that copies of the 1982 and 1983 autumn hawk counts at Bake Oven Knob are available. Send a self-addressed business-size envelope with 37 cents postage to him at 629 Green St., Allentown, Pa. 18102. . . . The DVOC extends a cordial welcome to the following members elected this fall: **Edward Crawford**, of Bryn Mawr; **David Lauer**, of Philadelphia; **Stanley Senner**, of Kempton, Pa.; **Bradley and Gina Shaw**, of Medford Lakes, N.J.; **David Spawn**, of Philadelphia; **Patricia Sutton**, of Cape May Court House, N.J.; and **Russell Swett**, of Berwyn.

Philadelphia larus

DVOC's newsletter is named for DVOC's official bird, the Bonaparte's gull (*Larus philadelphia*).

Have you been on a birding vacation recently? Reached a milestone in your lifelist? Spotted a passenger pigeon in your backyard? Written a verse about a vireo?

Send any information you would like considered for publication to the *Larus* editor, Sandra Sherman, 316-Rear S. Olive St., Media, Pa. 19063. Deadline for the next issue is Feb. 15.

Larus would like to thank cartoonist Stu Goldman for his rendition of Bonaparte's gull. Mox on the history of the bird in the next issue!