

Winter 1988-89

Winter 1988-89 Christmas Bird Count Calendar

Following are dates for most Mississippi CBCs (plus one), and who to contact if you plan to attend. In addition to your favorite counts, try to bird one of the smaller CBCs; they can use your help! I plan to participate in 7 MS counts this year, and I challenge other state birders to increase their participation.

- Vicksburg: 17 Dec. Contact Hal Moore
phone (601) 638-2680.
- Memphis: 18 Dec. Contact Ben & Lula Coffey
672 N. Belvedere
Memphis, TN 38107
- Grenada: 20 Dec. Contact Marvin Davis
phone (601) 234-1773
(In case of rain may postpone to 21 Dec.)
- Sardis Lake: 22 Dec. Contact Marvin Davis as above.
(In case of rain may postpone to 23 Dec.)
- Sumner: 23 Dec. Contact Genevieve Tharp Little
Rt. 6, Box 250 - Kaiser Lake Rd.
Natchez, MS 39120-8936
phone (601) 442-4622
- Hattiesburg: 28 Dec. Contact Terrie & Larry Gates
phone (601) 268-6411
- S. Hancock Co.: 28 Dec. Contact Judy Toups
phone (601) 896-3153
- Church Hill: 29 Dec. Contact Genevieve Tharp Little as
above.
- Jackson: 31 Dec. Contact Bill Turcotte
240 Lowe Circle
Richland, MS 39218
- Jackson Co.: 31 Dec. Contact Terrie & Larry Gates as
above.
- Washington Co.: 1 Jan. Contact Ed Alexander
phone (601) 332-1655 (work)
332-7895 (home)

(CBC calendar continued)

Noxubee: 2 January. Contact: Ray Weeks
phone (601) 327-1658

Moon Lake: will take place after Memphis, Reelfoot Lk., Sardis,
and Grenada, subject to weather. Contact Lula & Ben Coffey
as above.

I presume that Arkabutla Lake and Natchez CBCs will take
place this year, although their compilers did not respond to my
inquiry.

Christmas Bird Counting: 1948-1988
by Marvin Davis

In January 1988 I completed 40 seasons of annual Christmas
Bird Counts (CBCs). I hope that I might be excused for
reminiscing a bit over that period and its events, as well as
over the changes during that interval.

Mississippi CBCs in 1948

There were only five CBC's taken throughout Mississippi in
1948: Indianola, Eudora, Hickory Flat, Tupelo and Moon Lake. Of
these only the last has continued to the present, still led by
Ben and Lula Coffey as at the beginning. All but the first of
that 1948 list were run by the Coffeys, the mid-South's all-time
champion CBC compilers/participants. By contrast, 40 years
later saw 14 CBCs taken in the state. The five counts for
Mississippi in 1948 surpassed three surrounding states---Alabama,
Arkansas and Louisiana, with one each---but trailed Tennessee's
seven. However, in 1986-87 (the most recent season available)
the order was: Louisiana, 21; Tennessee, 20; Arkansas, 19;
Mississippi, 13; and Alabama, 11. Thus, Mississippi's relative
position has fallen since 1948. Parenthetically, by 1964 Moon
Lake was the sole CBC published, so only 24 years ago the state
started upward from a very low level of CBCs.

In 1948 the 81 species reported at Moon Lake were the peak
count. By contrast, for 1987-88 the highest count was 161 at S.
Hancock County, which set a new all-time high for Mississippi.
The average for five counts in 1948 was 56 species, a level that
13 counts easily surpassed in 1987-88 and one equalled. The
all-state average should, if complete data were available, fall
very close to 100 species. The difference 40 years makes in
these statistics may be explained by the increased number of
participants all across Mississippi, in spite of the fact that
most of our CBCs are still quite undermanned by comparison to
those in many other states, including some of our neighbors. The

(Davis: CBC'ing continued)

immediate answer to improvement would be to increase the multi-count participation of our yet limited cadre of counters.

On the national scene there are interesting contrasts: 357 counts with 3,670 observers in 1948 versus 1,544 and 35,420 in 1986 (latest available). This is especially remarkable because in 1948 the Editor expressed concern that "some measures will need to be taken to keep the number of reports within bounds!". In 1948 Harlingen, TX had the U.S. highest count of 146, while in 1986-87 Freeport, TX was champion at 212. Christmas Bird Counting gets bigger and better!

Personal highlights, 1948-1988

As a Purdue freshman, I and my first two birding companions---Purdue classmates---shared our first two CBCs in the 1948-49 season in nw. Indiana, with results of 26 and 24 species. Thus began what became a sequence of 14 counts taken in Indiana or Illinois, one in California and, surprisingly, 38 each in Oklahoma and Mississippi for a total of 91 at 16 different sites. Oklahoma CBCs equalled those in Mississippi despite a three times longer residence here because I continued to return to Oklahoma CBC's for seven seasons after moving, and didn't immediately begin CBC participation here, plus averaging fewer per year until recently.

Focusing on a few "most memorable" sightings out of 91 CBCs and an aggregate total of 219 species is quite difficult. Being in an offshore boat party at Tomales Bay, CA on 1 January 1966 surely provided the most species outside of my usual experience---3 loon species, 4 grebes, a fulmar, 4 alcids and 9 gulls! A special memory from nw. Indiana in 1949 was seeing three Snowy Owls in one binocular field-of-view. Among Oklahoma counts, a single-observer one at Ft. Supply in 1962 accomplished its objective of adding a new species to the all-time U.S. list---the Lesser Prairie Chicken (48 of 'em!). That has to be a unique experience. Another outstanding one, out of several enriched by being shared with George M. Sutton, was at Kenton-Black Mesa, OK in 1960 which yielded a U.S. highest count of 570 Mountain Bluebirds, plus two species new to Oklahoma that invasion season, the Steller's Jay (14) and Cassin's Finch (221) from the Rockies.

In Mississippi I cannot choose between two Black-headed Gulls in 1972 and one Mountain Bluebird in 1978 at Grenada; 1969 was memorable at Grenada for a personal "clean sweep" of all six wrens, plus an American Bittern. However, that paled in the light of tallying 79 species in 1979 to initiate the Sardis Lake CBC in what was intended as a solo trial run, not intended for

(Davis: CBC'ing continued)

publication. When the Sardis Dam/Lower Lake area gave a rich harvest of rarities, i.e. Eared and Western grebes, Greater Scaup, Oldsquaw, Black-legged Kittiwake and Little Gull, it soon became very serious!

In 1986 a Tundra Swan at Sardis Lake was greatly pleasing. Not of the same class was the highly unexpected pleasure at Grenada in 1987 of collectively breaking the mystical "100" barrier with an astounding 107 species---ten better than the previous best. And that didn't include my all-time, definitely most exotic CBC species in 91 counts---from Africa (via some unknown aviary) came a single Sacred Ibis! I don't expect to top that one.

Highlighting CBCs can't really stop at "big" species or big days. It would be incomplete, for me at least, not to mention "big" weather experiences. My hands-down winner for temperature was 1950 at se. Cook County, IL, where three of us suffered through 9 hours of -12 to +8 degrees F; 1951 was a strong second at -3 to +13 degrees. The species total in 1950 was only 23, with essentially all water frozen and snow nearly three feet deep hampering travel. However, for southern CBCs 1983 deserves respect for starting temps at Grenada and Sardis Lake of 5 and 6 degrees F, respectively. Highs were only 37 and 23 degrees, so it was comforting to reach 88 and 86 species, respectively.

Nine CBCs at Wichita Mts. Wildlife Refuge, OK, convinced me of its windiness. For 1961 the record says there was a north wind, 50 mph, of which I had solid evidence. I incautiously opened my car door while headed downwind; the gale tore the handle from my grasp and slammed the door past fully open into "hyperextension," wrenching the hinges so badly that the door couldn't be fully closed again that day. Several Oklahoma CBC days turned into snowy blizzards; on one the day began clear at 50 degrees.

Naturally, my wettest, most rainy CBC was in Mississippi---at Grenada in 1986. Then there was the strange day there in 1977 when a.m. visibility was impaired by dust from the plains 600-700 miles westward; the afternoon brought scattered muddy showers, and at one point hail fell while the sun shone on me simultaneously!

I hope never to improve on these examples of bad weather, but space will not permit my accounting all the beautiful-weather days. There are too many great, wonderful days to remember for one to dwell on the bad ones, except for a bit of perverse bragging, "I survived...!".

(Davis: CBC'ing continued)

If the CBC "bug" hasn't bitten you before, plan now to begin your own list of CBC memories by participating in the 1988-89 season, coming soon to a site near you. And better yet, try participating in several. Join the ranks, and have fun!

Dunne to address MCAS

Renowned author and birding personality Pete Dunne will speak to the MS Coast Audubon Society at their regular meeting, 16 January 1988, at 7:30 p.m. Pete wrote Tales of a Low-rent Birder, and writes regularly for Birding and Bird Watcher's Digest magazines. He is also largely responsible for the annual New Jersey World Series of Birding. All are invited to attend what will certainly be an entertaining program.

Minutes of the 1988 Fall MOS Meeting

President Judith Toups called the meeting to order and thanked Marvin Davis for organizing and hosting the meeting. Marvin Davis also thanked those people at Delta State University who helped him with arrangements.

New members and guests were introduced and included Randy Stringer and Marion Hietto, both from Jackson, Judy Rays from Magnolia, and Leia Porter from McComb.

MOS historian Nona Herbert gave an informative synopsis of the life of M.G. Vaiden, who made many contributions to MS ornithology in the Cleveland and Rosedale area.

The Treasurer's report was read by Janet Dubuisson and accepted.

Jerome Jackson reported on the progress of the MS Kite. Three issues were ready and were distributed at the meeting. This brings the MS Kite up-to-date except for the July 1988 issue, which he reported was in progress.

Steve Peterson presented estimated costs for making MOS patches: \$3.59/50 patches or \$2.91/100 patches. It was decided to have 100 patches made using Steve's design for the emblem.

Judith Toups announced that a Regional Audubon Conference concerning wetlands would be held in Florida Nov. 4-6. Gerry Morgan and JoRee Pennell were going and were looking for additional participants.

(Minutes of the fall 1988 meeting continued)

She also announced that the MS Coast Audubon would be raffling a pair of 9x35 Bushnell Discoverer Elite binoculars. Gerry Morgan could be contacted for \$1.00 tickets.

The governor of MS and the Army Corps of Engineers has asked the MOS to get involved with the Yazoo Project. Margaret Copeland was appointed as liaison for MOS. A motion was made for Margaret to write a resolution opposing the Yazoo Project. The motion was unanimously accepted by the membership. Jerome Jackson commented that the resolution should be published in the MOS Newsletter and should mention the possibility of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers existing in the area affected by the project.

Malcolm Hodges and Mike McGraw announced that the spring 1989 meeting will be held in Natchez. Carolyn Jarnagin volunteered to arrange for the fall 1989 meeting to be held at J.P. Coleman State Park.

Gene Knight presented nominations for MOS officers for 1989 as follows: President, Marvin Davis; Vice President, Mike McGraw; Treasurer, Janet Dubuisson; Secretary, Terence Schiefer. A motion to accept the slate of officers was made by Jerome Jackson, seconded by Hal Moore, and accepted unanimously by the membership. The Tucker Award committee (Hal Moore, Bill Turcotte, and Marvin Davis) presented the Tucker Award for outstanding contributions to MS ornithology to Judith Toups and Jerome Jackson for their book, Birds and Birding on the MS Coast.

Malcolm Hodges announced that back issues of the MS Kite and MOS t-shirts were available for purchase at the meeting. Janet Dubuisson announced 1989 dues are now payable to the treasurer. Malcolm Hodges presented the 1st Annual Honey Bun Awards (real honey buns from an anonymous awarder) to Judith Toups, Gerry Morgan, and Chita Cassibry for their participation in New Jersey Audubon's World Series of Birding.

Terence Schiefer conducted a countdown of species seen during the day's field trips; 97 species of birds were reported.

Steve Peterson announced that a tape of frog calls recorded by Bill Turcotte will be on sale at the State Museum of Natural History in Jackson. Carolyn Jarnagin suggested that MOS have membership cards made and she offered to check on printing costs.

Judith Toups introduced the speaker for the evening, Malcolm Hodges, who spoke on birding catfish ponds in the MS Delta. After the program, Jerome Jackson showed a slide/tape

(Minutes of the fall 1988 meeting continued)

presentation available from the North American Loon Fund entitled "Hi! I'm a Loon." The meeting was adjourned and MS Kites were distributed to those members present.

Respectfully submitted, Terence Schliefer, MOS Secretary

1989 MOS Spring Meeting

The 1989 spring meeting of the MOS will be held in Natchez on 5-7 May. Mark your calendars for this event; details will appear in the spring newsletter.

MOS Financial Report: April-September 1988

Income and expense statement

Income:			
Dues		310.50	
Interest		161.79	
Sales: T-shirts		84.00	
Checklists		25.75	
Donations		6.00	
			<u>588.04</u>
Expenses:			
Printing: Newsletter		134.98	
Miscellaneous		11.70	
Postage: Newsletter		154.52	
Miscellaneous		14.10	
Spring meeting		30.40	
			<u>345.70</u>
			Net profit: <u>242.34</u>

Balance sheet

Assets:			
Balance in checking:	Gulfport	836.43	
	Starkville	<u>1683.91</u>	
			2520.34
Balance in savings			3142.02
Certificate of deposit			<u>2000.00</u>
			Total assets: <u>7662.36</u>

Janet Dubuisson, Treasurer

MOS Resolution: Yazoo Basin Projects

Whereas, the MOS is an organization committed to the study and preservation of birds in Mississippi; and

Whereas, the MOS recognizes the national and international responsibility the State of MS has to protect habitat for migratory waterfowl; and

Whereas, the Yazoo Basin Projects will have proven adverse environmental impacts of destruction of wetlands and bottomland hardwood forests which are vital for migratory waterfowl; and

Whereas, the reports to the MOS concerning Ivory-billed Woodpeckers possibly still existing in the Yazoo River drainage warrant further investigation and research;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the MOS unanimously:

1. Opposes channelization of streams and further construction in the Yazoo Basin Projects in the MS delta; and
2. Urges that mitigation for the Yazoo NWR be implemented immediately to offset the effects of work already completed or in progress on the refuge; and
3. Urges that Leroy Percy State Park be spared the devastation proposed in the project plan; and
4. Recommends the development and deployment of a plan to manage and preserve habitat necessary for migratory waterfowl in the MS delta through the purchase and lease of land and transfer of lands already owned by the Farmers Home Admin. to form a network of protected habitat managed by the U.S. Dept. of Interior or by the MS Dept. of Wildlife Conservation.

Furthermore, whereas, the present environmental impact statement prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is totally inadequate in its coverage and assessment of plant and animal communities with virtually no evaluation of the status of endangered species in the area,

The MOS resolved to strongly urge that a thorough and complete study of the ecological communities be conducted to prepare a proper environmental assessment in order to facilitate recognition of those areas in greatest need of protection.

Unanimously adopted October 8, 1988, at the 1988 Fall Meeting of the MOS, Cleveland, MS.
(Please forgive abbreviations used here to conserve space. ---Ed.)

Individual, \$10; Family, \$15; Junior/Golden Age, Individual \$4, family \$8; Subscribing (institutions) \$10. Send dues to the Treasurer.