AUDUBON PARK BIRD COUNTS – FEBRUARY, 2015

Another cold and miserable month when will the "winter" end? Eight of the 17 mornings were cold with a low temperature of 29 degrees at first light on the 20th. At least the first week of March appears to be warmer. It has rained regularly which means that the marsh has stayed full.

The surprise of the month was a River Otter which visited the impoundments from the 10th to at least the 20th; that is a first record for the survey. Up to five White-tailed Deer have been seen during the month.

Now to the birds there were 19 American White Pelicans on the 1st with 12 on the 14th; these were flying over. The Green Heron was last seen on the 4th. The only sighting of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks involves two on the 16th. A Northern Harrier flew to the north on the 6th. A light morph Short-tailed Hawk was present on the 12th and 14th but the weather since then has not been suitable for these raptors.

To my surprise an adult Common Gallinule (Moorhen) took up residence from the 12th to at least the 26th. I managed to disturb an American Woodcock from the south-western end of the marsh on the 16th. A Forster's Tern visited from time to time from the 3rd to the 20th. An Eastern Whip-poor-will was seen or heard on six dates during the month. The only new bird for the month (number 201) a Vesper Sparrow was seen on the 12th. Finally there was a male Painted Bunting on the 23rd.

There were a number of "highest counts" this month: there were 283 Black Vultures on the 17th and 1037 Turkey Vultures on the 23rd. A total of 127 Sandhill Cranes seen on the 16th only a few were in the area. Tree Swallows peaked at 6860 on the 1st with 6000 again on the 16th. Finally there were ten Savannah Sparrows on the 28th. On the 1st I saw 9740 birds that is also a high count.

I decided to end on an up note despite the weather (it is raining as I write this). At the end of the month on the 28th a Northern Parula was singing and a pair of Sandhill Cranes had two tiny chicks by the marsh.

Harry Robinson