

Audubon Park Bird Counts December, 2013

This is a report on the birds that I saw at the park during December; I visited the park twice a week but there was no fixed schedule. The temperature varied considerably but the lowest temperatures were only in the mid-forties. With all the trees along the northern border there was little or no wind chill.

This is a tale of two places the marsh and the impoundments. I started each day at the latter and it was a question of which species would call first a Killdeer or a Barred Owl. Perhaps a Wilson's Snipe would lift off and it would be the first species. With the first light the Hooded Mergansers started to arrive in flocks of two to three. On the warmer days the males would start displaying flashing their white crest calling all the time. Next to arrive was the Great Egret followed quickly by the ibis (both species) and a Little Blue Heron. A Belted Kingfisher would arrive giving its rattling call and all would appear set for the day. Then the Sandhill Cranes would start calling and that woke everybody up! Early in the morning birds are flying in all directions from their respective roosts so this is the time when an unexpected species is most likely to be seen. A Muscovy Duck was perhaps an unwelcome sight one day as it flew to the east. I knew it was bad news now there two.

Later I would go to the marsh and spend some time on the boardwalk; in December this place was alive with birds. The noisiest were the American Robins that seemed to be everywhere with small flocks of Cedar Waxwings seemingly in attendance. American Goldfinches with their soft calls flitted about. There were numerous Yellow-rumped Warblers hunting for insects in the trees and on the ground. The woodpeckers seemed to love this area the Pileated and Red-bellied coming exceptionally close. During the month a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was here; that is an uncommon winter visitor. With care you might locate a Common Yellowthroat, a Sedge Wren or a Swamp Sparrow down by the water.

On the 26th and the 31st I saw 61 species and this is more species than one team saw on the DeLand Christmas Bird Count and they had a large area to cover. On the 29th I saw 2585 birds and that too is a large total. Some of the highlights for the month were a Common Loon on the 31st, 30 White Ibis on the 17th, 29 Hooded Mergansers on the 23rd, four Bald Eagles on that date, 24 Wilson's Snipe on the 10th, an Eastern Whip-poor-will on the 26th, 69 American Crows on the 7th, 2050 Fish Crows on the 29th, 575 American Robins on the 31st, 395 Cedar Waxwings on the 14th, 130 Yellow-rumped Warblers on the 23rd, 16 Pine Warblers on the 23rd and 46 American Goldfinches on the 14th. Finally on a misty morning (the 23rd) a flock of 14 Wild Turkeys fed along the western border.

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