

*The 109th Christmas Bird Count of 2008–2009 is now history, consisting of 2124 counts with about 59,800 observers recording about 65,573,000 individuals of 2126 species. In sharp contrast, the original 25 CBCs were taken on 25 December 1900 by 27 observers recording about 18,500 individuals of 90 species. The longest-running unbroken survey of avifauna in the world, the CBC is by far the largest survey of its kind on such a spatial scale.*

# 4000

## Four Hundred and Counting: *Reflections on a Long Association with the Christmas Bird Count*

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Paul Sykes on the Back Bay NWR CBC on the occasion of his 400th Christmas Bird Count, 29 December 2008, his 71st birthday. Photo/Robert L. Anderson



*I have been  
involved with  
the Christmas  
Bird Counts  
for 56 years...*

as a participant, organizer, compiler, and regional editor. It has been a most pleasant journey with many wonderful experiences: enjoying the pure joy of bird-

ing, contributing to our knowledge of early winter bird populations, experiencing the thrill of observing many different species at many localities and in different habitats, marveling at large numbers of birds (sometimes in the millions), and meeting and associating with great people over the years. It is only during the count periods that I see my many birding friends and enjoy the camaraderie of kindred spirits.

### *The Early Years*

My interest in birds began at the age of 10. At that time my parents, sister, and I lived in the suburbs of Norfolk, Virginia, in Lafayette Residence Park. This section of the city had many large old trees, well-landscaped yards, and extended for about a mile along the Lafayette River, a tidal estuary bordered by small patches of salt marsh. It was a heavily developed area but a good place to find a variety of birds. This neighborhood was home for my first 27 years. A small strip of salt marsh extended halfway through the center of our large city block. Neighbors Eloise and Joseph Shank (editor of the evening newspaper, the *Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch*, and later the *Ledger-Star*), lived on our block with their backyard on this marsh. Mrs. Shank had nest boxes and various types of bird feeders provisioned during the colder months. She also fed hummingbirds during spring, summer, and early fall using homemade feeders (no hummingbird feeders were commercially available at that time). All the bird activity in this landscaped yard attracted my attention; you could see birds close-up

without optics. At 10, I was awestruck by the different species, their behaviors, and their intricate plumages. From this time on I was hooked.

I purchased my first binoculars in 1950 for \$130, a pair of 7x35 Bausch & Lomb Zephyrs. I earned the money cutting grass and raking leaves, and collecting and selling scrap iron and paper; Christmas and birthday money also helped! I still have these bins, which are in good working order.

At 12 or 13 I met other birders in the Norfolk–Virginia Beach area and began birding regularly on weekends, holidays, and sometimes after school. Floy C. Burford, Frank (Pop) C. Richardson, and W. (Froggy) F. Rountrey became my mentors in the 1950s, taking me birding all over Tidewater Virginia, and occasionally elsewhere in the state, as well as to North Carolina's Outer Banks.

My parents, and three aunts who also lived in the neighborhood, were very supportive of my birding hobby from the beginning, and that support extended over many years. Mom would get up early and fix me a hot breakfast, then Dad would drive me to meet other birders until the time I obtained my driver's license. Dad would also pick me up if I had no means of getting home. When I finally had a license I used the family car, or if that was not available, I was usually able to borrow my aunts' car. In later years my parents let me use our house as lodging for visiting birders that had come from out of town for the CBCs. We often had as many as 15 birders "camping out" on all available floor space in the living and dining rooms and foyer.

In 1952 at age 15, I joined the Virginia Society of Ornithology, where I soon met and birded with birders and professional ornithologists (Ruskin S. Freer, John H. Grey, J.J. Murray, Jack E. Perkins, Robert O. Paxton, Fred R. Scott, C.C. Steirly, Charles "Mo" E. Stevens, and Alexander Wetmore, to

mention a few). In February 1953 I was a junior founding member of the Cape Henry Bird Club at Norfolk (now the Cape Henry Audubon Society). I am still a member of both organizations.

My first spotting scope, a Bausch & Lomb Balscope Sr., with 30x and 60x interchangeable eyepieces and a tripod, was a gift in 1954 from birding friend Connie Darden of Norfolk. Connie was buying a new scope, and our mutual friend Floy Burford suggested she give the scope and tripod to me rather than to the Cape Henry Bird Club. This reliable old scope, now mounted on a different tripod, sits in front of a picture window in my study, overlooking our wooded backyard in Watkinsville, Georgia.

### *The Journey*

My first CBC was at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in what was then Princess Anne County, Virginia (now the city of Virginia Beach) on 26 December 1953; I was 15. Floy Burford was compiler. At that time there were no participation fees (some individuals and counts voluntarily sent contributions to defray publication costs). This 54th (1953–1954) Christmas Bird Count was published in the April 1954 issue of *Audubon Field Notes* (AFN). That issue cost \$2; subscription to all six issues of AFN was \$3. Gasoline was 33 cents or less per gallon; the service station attendant pumped the gas, cleaned the windshield, checked oil level and air pressure in the tires at no extra charge, and road maps were free. Candy bars and soft drinks were 5 cents, hot dogs went for 15 cents, and hamburgers 20 cents. The first official fee for the counts (50 cents per observer) came with the 56th CBC (1955–1956) to help defray costs of printing the CBC issue. The fee to cover publication costs was gradually increased over the years to the current \$5, which, like 50 cents long ago, might buy two hamburgers. Cape

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*Paul W. Sykes Jr. has been birding for 61 years and involved with Christmas Bird Counts for the past 56 years. He is the first person to have participated on 400 or more CBCs. Paul is a retired U.S. Department of the Interior wildlife research biologist and is now scientist emeritus with his former home office, the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. In retirement, he continues with his research, initiated in 1999, on the survival, longevity, and site fidelity of the eastern population of the Painted Bunting from North Carolina to Florida.*

Henry Audubon Society, as the longtime sponsor of three counts—the Back Bay NWR, Bodie-Pea Island (North Carolina), and Little Creek (Virginia) CBCs—agreed in the 1990s and continues to the present to pay the \$5 fee for all participants on these counts.

I took over as compiler for the Back Bay NWR count the next year, at the age of 16 (two days shy of my 17th birthday). Since 1954 I have compiled 174 Christmas Bird Counts at six localities in three states (Table 1). Over the years I started five new CBCs, four of which are still ongoing. I started the Little Creek and Norfolk County counts in southeastern Virginia in 1954. I changed the name of the Norfolk County CBC to Chesapeake two years after the city of Chesapeake, including all of Norfolk County, was incorporated in 1963. This count was discontinued after 1967. In 1957, while a sophomore at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, I started the Nansemond River CBC, but it ran only intermittently through 1967. Edward (Ned) S. Brinkley restarted this count in 1995, but shifted the center of the count circle slightly. I started the Bodie-Pea Island CBC in 1965 while in graduate school at North Carolina State and have continued as compiler to the present. In 2005, Steve Holzman (a biologist and information technology specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Ecological Services Office in Athens,



The original Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge as it appeared in December 1959. At the time, the refuge administrative complex could only be reached by driving or walking the sand beach 5 miles from the nearest paved road, by shallow draft boat, or by float plane. Photo by Paul Sykes.

Table 1. Christmas Bird Counts Compiled by Paul W. Sykes Jr., 1954 through 2008.

State	Number of Different Counts	Count Name (Code)	Inclusive Years	Number of Counts
Georgia	1	Lake Oconee (GALO) <sup>1</sup>	2005–2008	4
North Carolina	1	Bodie-Pea Island (NCBP)	1965–2008	44
Virginia	4	Back Bay NWR (VABB)	1954–1961, 1963–2006, <sup>2</sup> 2007–2008 <sup>3</sup>	54
		Little Creek (VALC)	1954–1961, 1963–2008 <sup>3</sup>	54
		Nansemond River (VANR)	1957–1960, 1963, 1966, 1967	7
		Norfolk County/Chesapeake (VANC/VACH)	1954–1961, 1965–1967	11
<b>Totals 3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>GA = 1; NC = 1; VA = 4</b>		<b>174</b>

<sup>1</sup> Co-compiler with Steve Holzman 2005–2008.

<sup>2</sup> I was in the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean area during the Christmas Count period in 1962–1963 and did not participate on any CBCs.

<sup>3</sup> Co-compiler with Dorie Stolley in 2007–2008.

Georgia) and I started the Lake Oconee CBC in Greene County, Georgia, about 20 miles south of Athens. In 2007, Dorie S. Stolley (a biologist with the USFWS at Back Bay NWR, now visitors' services manager at Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR at Cape Charles) joined me as co-compiler of the Back Bay NWR count. All CBCs that I have compiled have been published in *Audubon Field Notes*, *American Birds*, or more recently, on National Audubon's website, with Virginia CBCs also published in *The Raven*, and, since 1965, the one North Carolina count in *The Chat*.

Over the past 56 years I have participated on CBCs in seven states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (Table 2). The only year I missed was in 1962 while on active duty in the U.S. Navy. The ship on which I was stationed, the destroyer tender, *USS Shenandoah* (AD-26), home ported at Norfolk, was deployed to the Mediterranean during the 63rd CBC. I tried but was unable to return home for the counts. The Back Bay NWR and Little Creek CBCs that year were compiled by Henry A. Hesperheide and W. (Froggy) F. Rountrey, respectively. Hence I have participated on counts for 55 of the past 56 years.

I participated on counts in four states from Florida to Virginia for several years. All travel to and from the counts

has been by car—an estimated 200,000 miles. The greatest straight-line distance between counts was 815 miles, about 1075 road miles, from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, to Cape Charles, Virginia. Only one count is done per calendar day, and time on individual CBCs has ranged from 7 to 13 hours afield (this does not include time driving to and from the count circles), with a mean somewhere between 11 to 12 hours per count, including nocturnal efforts but not time at compilations. I have nearly always attended compilations for counts that have them, as I find it most interesting to learn what the other parties have seen during the day. I try to get five to seven hours sleep per day during the counts and regularly go on five CBCs consecutively in North Carolina and Virginia. The most miles walked on the counts in a year were 33 on nine CBCs in 1988 (3.7 miles per count).

During my early CBC years I had no idea that they would become a lifelong pursuit, but my interest has never diminished. In the last few years I realized I would soon reach a significant milestone in the number of counts in which I have taken part. I was elated to reach that plateau of 400 counts on my 71st birthday on 29 December 2008 on the 109th CBC at the Back Bay NWR, Virginia. This was also the first CBC on which I participated in 1953, and the

**Table 2. Annual Christmas Bird Count Participation by Paul W. Sykes Jr., 1953 through 5 January 2009.**

State	Number of Different Counts	Count Name	Participation <sup>1</sup>	
			Inclusive Years	Number of Years
Alabama/Georgia	1	Eufaula NWR	1997–2001	5
<b>Total</b>				<b>5</b>
Florida	6	Biscayne Natl. Park	1981, 1983, 1988	3
		Ft. Lauderdale	1974, 1983, 1984, 1987–1993	10
		Gainesville	1991	1
		Merritt Island NWR	1988, 1991	2
		Stuart	1971	1
		West Palm Beach	1972–1993	22
<b>Total</b>				<b>39</b>
Georgia	11	Albany	1995	1
		Athens	1994–2001, 2008	9
		Atlanta	1994–2007	14
		Augusta	2002–2003	2
		Dublin	1990, 1991, 1993–1995	5
		Glynn County	1992	1
		Harris Neck	2002–2005	4
		Lake Oconee	2005–2008	4
		Piedmont NWR-Rum Creek WMA	1989–2008	20
		St. Catherines Island	2002–2008	7
<b>Total</b>				<b>67</b>
Maryland	1	Ocean City Pelagic	1979	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>1</b>
North Carolina	5	Bodie-Pea Island	1965–2008	44
		Cape Hatteras	1981–2008	28
		Ocracoke	1997	1
		Raleigh/Wake County	1964	1
		Roanoke Rapids	1991	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>75</b>
South Carolina	7	ACE Basin	1992	1
		Aiken	1997, 1998, 2005–2007	5
		Clemson	1993	1
		Rocky River	1997	1
		Savannah River Plant	1990, 1995	2
		Lake Wateree	2006	1
		Winwah Bay	2005	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>12</b>
Virginia	8	Back Bay NWR	1953–1961, 1963–2008 <sup>2</sup>	55
		Cape Charles	1965–1978, 1980–2008	43
		Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel	2003	1
		Chincoteague NWR	1965, 1970–1978, 1980	11
		Dismal Swamp	1993, 1994, 1996–2000, 2002	8
		Little Creek	1954–1961, 1963–2008 <sup>2</sup>	54
		Nansemond River	1957–1960, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1995–2009	22
		Norfolk County/Chesapeake	1954–1961, 1965–1967	11
<b>Total</b>				<b>205</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>38</b>	--	--	<b>403<sup>3,4</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Participated on only one count per calendar day; minimum of 7.5 hours in field per count, but averaged between 11–12 hours per count. Participated on my first CBC in 1953 (Back Bay NWR, VA) at age 15.

<sup>2</sup> I was in the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean area during the Christmas Count period in 1962–1963 and did not participate on any CBCs.

<sup>3</sup> My 300th CBC was Little Creek, VA, on 31 December 1999; 350th CBC was Atlanta, GA, on 19 December 2004; and 400th CBC was Back Bay NWR, VA, on 29 December 2008.

<sup>4</sup> From 1954 (at age 16) through 2009 I have compiled 174 CBCs. Highest number of CBCs participated on in one year was 14 in 1997, 13 in 2005, and 12 in 1995, 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2006.

first I compiled, in 1954. Eighteen people attended the compilation that evening at Seacrest Restaurant, in the count circle in the community of Pungo in Virginia Beach. Back Bay NWR manager, Jared Brandwein, presented me with a certificate of appreciation, and my co-compiler, Dorie Stolley, most thoughtfully baked and decorated a chocolate birthday cake that was enjoyed by all. The wording on top of the cake read “Happy 400th, 71st Paul.” I had carefully scheduled my 400th count to be at Back Bay NWR (Table 4). I ended the 109th CBC with my 403rd count at Nansemond River CBC on 3 January 2009. Are 500 counts possible in a lifetime? Just maybe, if health and will continue unabated.

From that first count in 1953, I kept a file of each CBC in which I took part. These files now fill several file cabinet drawers plus four boxes, and continue to increase annually. To date I have been on 38 different counts in seven states (Table 2), having participated five times on counts in Alabama, 39 in Florida, 67 in Georgia, once in Maryland, 75 in North Carolina, 12 in South Carolina, and 205 in Virginia.

I’ve been very fortunate to have had a flexible work schedule my entire 42-year career as a wildlife research biologist (now emeritus) with the U.S. Department of the Interior. I’ve been located at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center’s (Laurel, Maryland) field stations in Florida, Hawaii, and Georgia. Joan, my bride of 47 years (several married birding friends refer to her as a saint for her indulgence of my birding hobby), has been most tolerant of my involvement with the CBCs these many years. The combination of a flexible work schedule, an understanding spouse and family, a willingness to survive on less than seven or eight hours sleep per night while driving long distances and eating convenience foods, combined with the sheer joy of birding at different places not subject to much snowfall has enabled me to maximize my count participation over the long haul.

I have remained dedicated to a select group of CBCs over the years, mainly in coastal Virginia and northeastern North Carolina (Table 2), despite the fact that Joan and I have not lived in the Norfolk area since 1964. After moving from Tidewater Virginia, we lived in Raleigh, North Carolina, for three years, at Delray Beach, Florida, for almost 20 years, and for the past 23 years at Watkinsville, Georgia. While living in Florida, we would load up our Chevy station wagon and, with our three children, drive straight through to one of our parents' homes in Norfolk or Currituck County, North Carolina—a 17-hour drive prior to completion of I-95, and a 15-hour drive after completion. During the Florida years we spent only one Christmas day at our home in Delray Beach, but that one year I left the next day for the counts in Virginia and North Carolina.

Up until the 101st CBC (2000–2001), the inclusive dates for the counts and the length of the count periods varied widely in the early years of CBC history (examples: December 24 to January 2, December 14 to January 2, December 19 to January 4). Starting with the 101st, dates were permanently fixed from December 14 through January 5. This made the length of the period 23 days—a greater number than any prior count period. Making the inclusive dates permanent allowed for long-range planning and provided greater flexibility in selecting count dates.

The highest numbers of CBCs I participated in in one CBC season were 14 in 1997, 13 in 2005, and 12 in 1995, 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2006. Most years I have done 11 CBCs or fewer. Chandler S. Robbins, another veteran CBCer, informs me that the most counts he went on in one year was 12 in 1977. I am sure there are a number of other avid CBC participants who have done 12 or more counts in one year. For instance, the “grand champion” in doing Christmas Bird Count marathons is Kelly McKay of Quad Cities, Illinois, who in the 103rd CBC (2002–2003) participated in an amazing 20 counts in

**Table 3. Regional Christmas Count Editing for *American Birds* by Paul W. Sykes Jr., 1974–2001.**

CBC Number	Years	Region	Number of CBCs Edited and Summarized
75th	1974–1975	NC, SC, GA, FL	74
76th	1975–1976	"	75
77th	1976–1977	"	76
78th	1977–1978	"	80
79th	1978–1979	"	80
80th	1979–1980	"	89
81st	1980–1981	"	87
82nd	1981–1982	"	91
83rd	1982–1983	"	100
84th	1983–1984	"	103
85th	1984–1985	"	106
86th	1985–1986	"	104
87th	1986–1987	GA, FL <sup>1</sup>	66
88th	1987–1988	"	70
89th	1988–1989	"	70
90th	1989–1990	"	73
91st	1990–1991	"	73 <sup>2</sup>
92nd	1991–1992	"	75
93rd	1992–1993	"	74
94th	1993–1994	"	74
95th	1994–1995	"	74
96th	1995–1996	"	73
97th	1996–1997	"	74
98th	1997–1998	"	75
99th	1998–1999	"	78
100th	1999–2000	"	77
101st	2000–2001	"	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4 States for 12 Years</b>	<b>2172</b>
		<b>2 States for 15 Years</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Region was split in 1987 with North Carolina and South Carolina paired and Georgia and Florida paired.

<sup>2</sup> No regional summaries were published for the 91st CBC in 1991, Vol. 45, but some regional editor's brief comments were included in the overall count summary.

Iowa and Illinois between 14 December and 5 January (McKay 2003). He did even more on the 104th CBC (2003–2004), participating on 23 different CBCs—one count for each day during the count period. No one else to date has accomplished this feat or even come close. He drove 7100 miles, slept only 32 hours (if correct, this is an average of 1.4 hours per count), and saw 132 species over the course of 267 hours on the counts (McKay 2004).

Harry Armistead and Will Russell started the Cape Charles count in 1965. I have participated on every Cape Charles count except one, in 1979 (Table 2). I was on Richard Rowlett's Ocean City Pelagic CBC the day before the Cape Charles count, but the trip was weathered out, and instead ran the next day at the same time as Cape Charles. As a consolation, I saw my life Great Skua

off the Maryland coast and was still able to make the compilation of the Cape Charles count. Another count I have participated on since its inception (by Harry LeGrand and Carl Perry in 1981) is the Cape Hatteras count, now compiled by Pat Moore. Other counts I have been on for a number of years include West Palm Beach from 1972 to 1993, then run by Howard P. Langridge and now by Charles Weber; the Piedmont NWR–Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area, Georgia, 1989 to present, compiled by Terry Johnson; and Nansemond River, 1954 to 1961, 1965 to 1967, and 1995 to present, now under the helm of Robert (Bob) L. Ake.

Harry Armistead for many years has graciously taken on the task of scheduling the dates in cooperation with the compilers of many, but not all, of the CBCs on the coasts of Maryland,

Virginia, and northeastern North Carolina in an effort to minimize competition for participants. This enabled a number of us to go on more counts in a row and not have to do much “back-tracking,” either starting north and going south, or the reverse. For the past 11 years, Harry and son George, Jared Sparks, myself, and several others started with Cape Hatteras, then moved north to Bodie-Pea Island, Back Bay NWR, Cape Charles, and, for me, Little Creek and Nansmond River. The difficulty of getting all compilers to agree on the dates of their counts to accommodate these arrangements has not been easy. Consequently, Will Russell, with his well-known dry humor, composed a short poem (below) nearly 40 years ago. At that time Chan Robbins was compiler of the Ocean City CBC (Jay Sheppard took over from Chan in 2000).

## A Compiler's Lament

*What a pity Ocean City  
Can't be disregarded.  
No one in Virginia cares  
When Marylanders are getting started.*

*Poison Robbins on Thanksgiving.  
That would solve our problems.  
Blackwater would evaporate  
Scheduling would be sedate.*

*If Sykes would stay in Florida  
Things would be a cinch.  
Virginia would be devastated  
Maryland quite elevated.*

*Paul says this and Harry that  
Why is Chandler so contrary.  
Ah—I know what can be done  
Hold Chincoteague in February!*

*It is no use  
I've racked my brain  
It simply can't be done  
I thus suggest  
We drop all counts  
'til 1981.*

—Will Russell

Some years ago (I forget the year) a strong northeast storm forced me to postpone the Back Bay NWR count for several days. This is the only CBC I have postponed. For the past 30-plus years the counts have been scheduled well in advance, so we must take a chance with the weather, and with many more counts in the general region, postponement would not be possible now.

Several long associations with Christmas Bird Counts are truly remarkable. Charlie Rogers of Princeton, New Jersey, went on his first CBC at Princeton in 1900 and had missed only one count until his death at 89—a run of 78 years. Harry B. McConnell of Cadiz, Ohio, at age 89 completed his 55th year on the Cadiz CBC, unbroken since he started in 1901 (Robbins 2006). Chan Robbins, now 91, has been on counts for 74 consecutive years through the 109th CBC (Robbins pers. comm.). Charlie (Mo) Stevens of Charlottesville, Virginia, over a period of 63 years through 2007, has participated on 220 CBCs in Virginia. He has been on 17 different counts and compiled 166, all in Virginia. The dedication of these four gentlemen to the counts over the years is truly inspiring.

Birding with his longtime friend, W. (Froggy) F. Rountrey, Frank (Pop) C. Richardson, at age 100, participated on the Little Creek, Virginia, count on 31 December 1986, the 87th CBC (Leukering 1987, photo p. 544). He is probably the oldest person to ever go on a Christmas Bird Count. He went on his first CBC at age 65 in 1951 at Back Bay NWR, and managed to go on a total of 47 counts over the years (Sykes 1991). Pop lived to be 104.

It is interesting to note that Chandler Robbins became the compiler on his very first CBC at Belmont and Fresh Pond (Cambridge), Massachusetts, on 26 December 1934 (three years before I was born) at the age of 16. Chan continued to compile the Belmont CBC through 1947 (Robbins 2006). He has participated on 397 published CBCs from 1935 through 2008 (109th CBC).

Chan is a lifelong birder with “fantastic ears” and exceptional bird-identification skills. He was associate editor and technical editor of *Audubon Field Notes* from 1947 to 1990, and he established eight CBCs in Maryland from 1946 through 1949. He is a world-renowned wildlife research biologist at the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, where he is scientist emeritus and still maintains an office. Among his many accomplishments, he is co-author with Robert Stewart of the *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia*, and co-author with Bertel Bruun and Herbert S. Zim of *A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America* in 1966 and subsequent editions (Boone and Dowell 1987, Dowell and Sheppard 2005, Robbins 2006).

One of the youngest persons to go on a Christmas Bird Count is undoubtedly the well-known biologist and birder extraordinaire, Peter Pyle (with the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes Station, California). His father, Robert (Bob) L. Pyle, I vividly recall, told me that his wife, Leilani (Billie to many of her friends) went on counts in Maryland when she was pregnant with Peter. Now 51, Peter has been on one or more counts every year since he was born (Peter Pyle pers. comm.). I am sure that there are a number of other staunch birders who have gone on counts for 50-plus years that should also be recognized.

Through the 74th (1973–1974) CBC, Allan D. Cruickshank had been editing and summarizing all the counts. Beginning with the 75th (1974–1975) CBC, Canada, the United States, Middle America, and the West Indies were divided into 25 CBC regions; some regions have since been further subdivided. I became the regional editor for North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida at that time, and remained in that position through the 86th (1985–1986) CBC (Table 3). Starting with the 87th (1986–1987) CBC, this region was split, and Harry LeGrand became the regional editor for North and South Carolina. I continued

as the regional editor for Georgia and Florida for the 87th through the 101st CBC, thus serving as a regional editor for 27 years. After I relinquished the duty of regional editor in 2001, I recommended to CBC Director Geoff LeBaron that Florida and Georgia be made independent CBC regions and suggested for my replacements Giff Beaton for Georgia and Bill Pranty for Florida. Both of these well-known birders accepted the duties and continue as regional editors to the present. During this time I edited 2172 counts and wrote summaries for 26 years (no regional summaries were published for the 91st [1990–1991] CBC).

### Events of Interest

Everyone has had interesting or humorous situations arise while on CBCs, and I am no exception.

On the Cape Charles count one year, Townley Wolfe and I went to the door of a farmhouse to request permission to bird the property and were met at the door by the owner with shotgun in hand. We made a hasty retreat. Dan Connelly, George Reeves, and I, a couple of years ago at Aiken, South Carolina, were stopped by the local sheriff's deputy for trespassing, having been reported by the local caretaker of a large property with an absentee owner. The "no trespassing" sign on the old logging road where we entered the property was hidden from view by vegetation, and we did not see the sign until we were leaving. Dan, being local, talked to the deputy and the matter was dropped, but as a result we lost an hour or so of good birding.

Once on the Norfolk County CBC I forgot my binoculars, but did not discover this until first light. I was working with Dick Peake, who, of course, had his bins, and we had a spotting scope. I birded without my binoculars, mostly by ear. It was an interesting but often frustrating day of birding. This was the count that for many years had millions of blackbirds (Red-winged, Rusty, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed

**Table 4. The Final Countdown to Paul Sykes's 400th Christmas Bird Count, on the 109th Anniversary of the World's Longest-Running Bird Survey.**

Date	Count Name (Code)	Count Compiler(s)	Sykes Count Number
14 December	St. Catherines Island, GA (GASC)	Emil K. Urban (Augusta, GA)	394
15 December	Piedmont NWR-Rum Creek WMA, GA (GAPR)	Terry W. Johnson (Forsyth, GA)	395
20 December	Athens, GA (GAAH)	Eugenia Thompson and Mary Case (Athens, GA)	396
21 December	Lake Oconee, GA (GALO)	Paul Sykes (Watkinsville, GA) and Steve Holzman (Bishop, GA)	397
26 December	Drive from Watkinsville, GA, to Nags Head, NC	--	--
27 December	Cape Hatteras, NC (NCCH)	Pat Moore (Buxton, NC)	398
28 December	Bodie-Pea Island, NC (NCBP)	Paul Sykes (Watkinsville, GA)	399
<b>29 DECEMBER</b>	<b>BACK BAY NWR, VA (VABB)</b>	<b>Paul Sykes (Watkinsville, GA) and Dorie Stolley (Virginia Beach, VA)</b>	<b>400</b>
30 December	Cape Charles, VA (VACC)	Harry Armistead (Philadelphia, PA)	401
31 December 2008	Little Creek, VA (VALC)	Paul Sykes (Watkinsville, GA)	402
3 Jan. 2009	Nansemond River, VA (VANR)	Bob Ake (Norfolk, VA)	403

Cowbirds) and European Starlings that roosted in the eastern part of the Great Dismal Swamp.

During a Bodie-Pea Island count in the early 1970s, John Williamson, manager of the Pea Island NWR, and I lit a "small" fire in the marsh on the Pamlico Sound side of the refuge to try to flush rails into view. The prescribed fire burned out of control; we spent a couple of hours putting it out and never did observe any rails.

When I was in my teens, I found several Common Mergansers, always a good bird in the area, on a large lake near the Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base on the Little Creek CBC. When I left the area, I had a minor fender bender with another vehicle. Fortunately, this is the only auto accident I've had on a count in 56 years.

Several years ago I scheduled our Back Bay NWR countdown at the restaurant where we have customarily held the compilation. We arrived to find it closed! I was so embarrassed—I didn't know the restaurant closed on Sundays. It was too late to go elsewhere, and I had

to cancel the countdown—this is the only time in the history of that count there was no compilation.

I had another restaurant situation in January 2007. Robin Carter and I worked a sector of South Carolina's Lake Wateree CBC. This was my 12th and final count for the 107th CBC. Robin and I, together with the count compiler Donna Slyce and her husband, went to a local restaurant for a delightful meal, with lots of interesting conversation. I left the restaurant ahead of the others, and on the drive home I realized that I had skipped town without paying my tab. When I got home I called Robin; he had paid for my meal. I humbly apologized and mailed him a check posthaste. It must be the white hair or lack thereof.

A lot of birding friends and traveling companions used to kid that I couldn't pass a McDonald's or Burger King without a "Big Mac or Whopper attack." My love of fast foods, as well as fried chicken and other fried fare, finally caught up with me. I underwent quintuple bypass surgery on 6 November 1996, at the relatively young age of 58.

Fortunately, I did not have a heart attack, “only” heavily occluded “plumbing.” Recovery was rapid, and I fully participated in 10 CBCs in three states (Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia) that year, feeling fine on all counts. Since this wake-up call, my eating habits have changed dramatically—now salads and grilled skinless chicken beckon me rather than hamburgers and french fries.

After my dad passed away from a heart attack at 64, my mother kept the house in Norfolk for many years. She did not live in the house or rent it, but lived a block and a half away with her three sisters in a large house my maternal grandparents built in 1909, visiting her house almost daily. Each year during the count period, Mom let out-of-town birders stay at the empty house. During one count in the early 1970s, everyone except one couple had left early that morning to go birding. My mother went there early that morning and found the couple engaged in intimate behavior (as Shakespeare would say, “making the beast with two backs”). When she learned they were not married, being very straight-laced about such matters, she was furious. That evening she really laid into me! Fortunately, the tempest passed, and she continued to let birders stay at the house during subsequent counts.

One year it suddenly turned cold, and the edges of the bay and refuge impoundments at Back Bay NWR froze over quickly. Harry Armistead, others, and I were amazed to find several eastern cottonmouths coiled on top of the ice, too cold to move. It was a bizarre sight. Also, it was highly entertaining to see King Rails slipping and sliding across the ice.

Several years ago during a Bodie-Pea Island count, a dry cold front with very strong northwest winds (some gusts to 55 miles per hour) moved through coastal North Carolina late in the afternoon. I was at the Pea Island NWR visitor center when the winds swept in, and met up with Bob Pilch and Dean Bohon, who had finished their section of the count. The detached restroom

building was closed for renovation. Fortunately, two portable toilets had been set up at the edge of the parking lot. Bob availed himself of one of the portable units. Just as he exited, a strong gust of wind blew it over, spilling the contents into the parking lot. Bob was lucky. The three of us had a good laugh before we went to report the situation to the refuge staff.

### *Parting Thoughts*

The 101st counts (2000–2001) were the last to be printed in their entirety. Since then, the details of all individual counts are available only in electronic form; regional summaries and high species counts are printed together with various interesting papers pertaining to the counts in the now single volume *American Birds*. I was deeply saddened and disappointed with this change. I strongly feel this was a huge mistake and that the majority of the CBC participants have been “short changed” in the process. I fully realize that costs were rising, and this was a quick practical solution. Although electronic format is great for data analysis, and anyone can now access the data (see Butcher 2003), I dare say most participants no longer read as many of the individual count results as they did when they were printed. Who would prefer to read a 300-page publication online rather than in book form? I, and many others I have spoken with, when on business or birding trips, would take along a copy of *American Birds* to read when not otherwise engaged. I urge Audubon to reinstate the printed form of the count results as had been done for 101 years, and to continue the electronic medium as well. To cover the publication costs the price for the “book” could be increased, more ads for birding products included, donations requested from birders/count participants, corporate sponsors sought, and other fund-raising plans developed. The birding community would benefit greatly if sincere effort were made to resurrect the ever-popular printed publication.

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*continued on page 119*

## Four Hundred and Counting *continued from page 23*

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## One Hundred Years and Going Strong *continued from page 39*

be nearly as successful, especially with rarities that linger. The first mention of feeding stations was very early, but not recorded officially until the 1940s. Since the '50s, perhaps due to an upswing in disposable income, there has been a general increase in feeder folk. This is not to take away from the contributions of the bush thrashers, who risk life and limb to find stashes of wintering avifauna. These numbers too have generally increased over the years. The biggest jumps came in the mid-1970s and the numbers remain about the same each year now.

### Looking Forward to the Next 100 Years

I envy the pluck and dedication of the earlier participants and to the conservation value of the first Christmas Bird Counts. The development of the CBC for avian protection purposes was initiated by intuitive nature lovers when it was noted there were vast populations of birds as well as other species being destroyed.

Unfortunately, the job of conservation is not yet done. The best way we can relate to our fore-birders is through an ardor for the CBC. Let's enjoy that it remains a great way to get together with other like-minded individuals to pursue an event that is truly fun, to garner knowledge, and to accomplish something worthwhile.

And so the London 100th CBC is in the books—quite an accomplishment for London and the McIlwraith Field Naturalist Club of London. That's 100 years of promoting bird conservation through the study of wintering birds. We can be proud. 🐦