

Erik I. Johnson

Louisiana 117th CBC Summary

National Audubon Society
5615 Corporate Blvd., suite 600B
Baton Rouge, LA 70808
ejohnson@audubon.org

During the 2016-2017 (117th) Audubon Christmas Bird Count, 222 parties (16 more than last year) dedicated 1,722 party-hours (95 more than last year) across 29 counts (2 more than last year). Great to see the Louisiana CBC efforts continue to increase! One new CBC was added to the docket, Palmetto Island CBC, and one count was resurrected, Tensas NWR CBC, not having been run since the 112th CBC. Thank you to those and compilers that coordinated the count effort this year, as well as all the volunteer counters!

The species total across all Louisiana CBCs was 259 species, one shy of last year. Additional “non-countable” species that are locally established included Canada Goose, Muscovy Duck, Whooping Crane (an experimentally reintroduced population), and Monk Parakeet. A total of 7,271,184 birds were counted with Red-winged Blackbird (4,216,692), Brown-headed Cowbird (2,044,020), and Snow Goose (281,773) being the most numerous.

Among the 29 Louisiana CBCs, 24 of them topped 100 species, and four topped 150 species: Palmetto Island (156), New Orleans (154), Sabine (151), and Creole (150). Although the top counts this year were short of last year’s two top counts, which reached 161 and 160 species, it is exciting to see a new CBC (Palmetto Island) and a southeastern Louisiana count (New Orleans) with such high counts. In north Louisiana, the counts with the most species were Pine Prairie (113) and Natchitoches (112).

It was a good year for winter hold-over warblers, with 16 species represented. The most remarkable perhaps were **Magnolia Warbler** (2; Grand Isle, Venice) and **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (1; Thibodaux). Other species outside of the six common species included **Black-and-white Warbler** (9 among 7 counts), **Prairie Warbler** (6 among 5 counts), **Nashville Warbler** (3; Creole, Grand Isle, Sabine NWR), **American Redstart** (3; Grand Isle, New Orleans, Venice), **Northern Waterthrush** (2; White Lake, Venice), **Yellow Warbler** (2; Venice), **Yellow-throated Warbler** (2; Venice), and **Black-throated Green Warbler** (1; New Orleans).

Other rarities of note included **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** (17; Creole), a stake-out **Tundra Swan** (1; Sweet-Lake-Cameron Prairie NWR), good counts of both **Surf Scoter** (10) and **Black Scoter** (65) from the Sabine NWR CBC, **Long-tailed Duck** (1; Sabine NWR), **Magnificent Frigatebird** (2; Grand Isle, Venice), a stake-out **Brown Booby** (St. Tammany), **Broad-winged Hawk** (1; Grand Isle), **Swainson’s Hawk** (1; Creole), **Purple Gallinule** (2; Sweet-Lake-Cameron Prairie NWR, St. Tammany), **Groove-billed Ani** (1; Grand Isle), **Lesser Nighthawk** (1; Venice), **Allen’s Hummingbird** (1; Reserve-Bonnet Carre Spillway), **Broad-billed Hummingbird** (3; Reserve-Bonnet Carre Spillway, St. Tammany), **Brown-crested Flycatcher** (2; New Orleans), **Couch’s Kingbird** (1; St. Tammany), **Bell’s Vireo** (2; Johnson’s Bayou, Sabine NWR), **Barn Swallow** (2; Palmetto Island), **Cave Swallow** (18; Lacassine NWR-Thornwell, Sweet Lake-Cameron Prairie NWR), **Clay-colored Sparrow** (1; Creole), **Harris’s Sparrow** (1; New Orleans), **Western Tanager** (1; Northshore-Slidell), and **Orchard Oriole** (1; New Orleans).

It is always interesting to see how each winter plays out in terms of representation by our more regularly occurring species. This was a disappointingly poor year especially for sparrows, as well as several other short-distance migrants. Corrected for party-hours, White-throated Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow numbers hit a new record low, both breaking last-year's record lows, and continuing -3.6%/year and -2.7%/year declines, respectively, since 1970. Figure 1 shows these declines as calculated using a hierarchical Bayesian approach, borrowed from Soykan et al. (2016, *Ecosphere* 7: e01351).

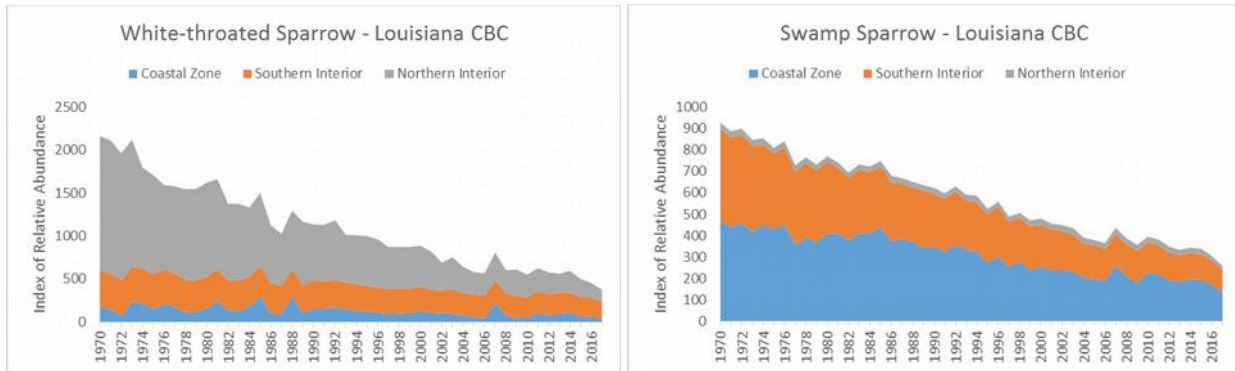


Figure 1. Trends of the White-throated Sparrow (left) and Swamp Sparrow (right) in Louisiana's Coastal Zone, Southern Interior, and Northern Interior between 1970 and 2017.

Even some common species, like Carolina Chickadee and Northern Cardinal, appear to be experiencing long-term declines, at -0.4%/year and -1.2%/year, respectively (Figure 2).

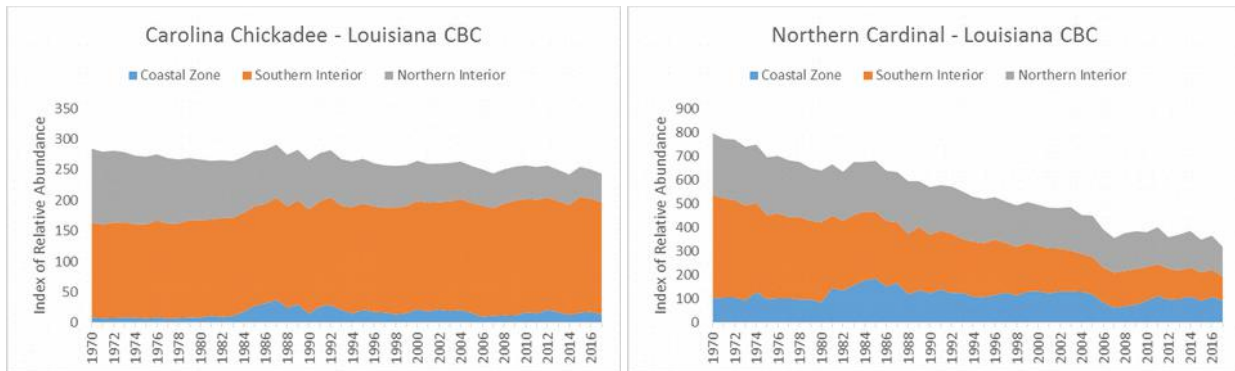


Figure 2. Trend analysis for Carolina Chickadee (left) and Northern Cardinal (right) in Louisiana's Coastal Zone, Southern Interior, and Northern Interior between 1970 and 2017.

This was a relatively decent invasion year for Purple Finch, at least in modern history, but nothing like the invasion years of the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 3).

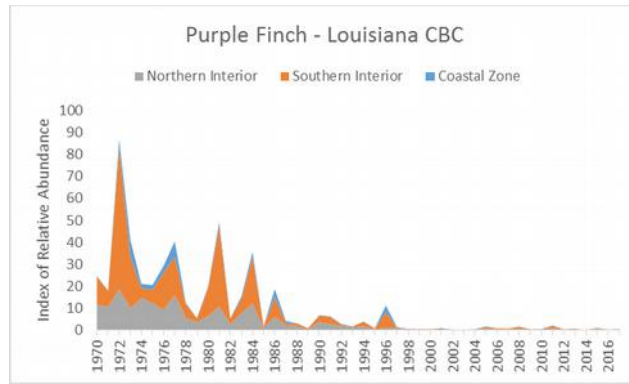


Figure 3. Purple Finch trend analysis in Louisiana’s Coastal Zone, Southern Interior, and Northern Interior between 1970 and 2017.

On the other hand, some species are showing long-term increases, like Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Bluebird, which are increasing at +1.9%/year and +3.6%/year, respectively (Figure 4). In addition, the continuing increase and establishment of once south-Texas species, like Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (5,140 from 8 CBCs) and Crested Caracara (100 from 10 CBCs) are evident.

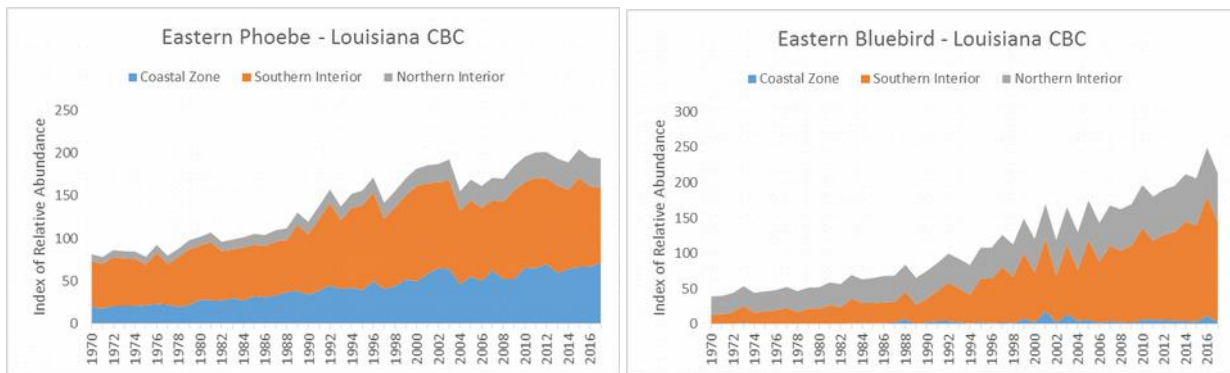


Figure 4. Eastern Phoebe (left) and Eastern Bluebird (right) trend analysis in Louisiana’s Coastal Zone, Southern Interior, and Northern Interior between 1970 and 2017.

Participation in the Christmas Bird Count provides long-term perspectives on how North American bird communities continue to shift and change. Thanks to all the compilers who ensure this legacy continues and to all the volunteers that spend their holiday season with the birds. Here’s looking forward to next year!