

IOS Listers Corner 2010

Year Lists: 2010 & Alltime Big Years

Pete Moxon's top year tally slots in as the fourth best Big Year on record, while Craig Taylor's 2010 total comes in among the top 20 alltime tallies.

While not matching the overall 300+ tallies of the last two years, this year's total of six who exceeded that threshold falls in line with last year's prediction that, on average, six birders a year will annually exceed 300+ species for their year list.

The growth of the Big Year in the last quarter century can be easily seen when looking at Kevin Richmond's total of 305 in 1985. Back then, it was the third highest all-time Illinois Big Year total. Today, it no longer is among the top 40 tallies!

Key: • = list submitted

(updated 3/15/11; compiled by Eric Walters & Joe Lill)

2010 Illinois Year List

323	Pete Moxon
312	Craig Taylor
306	David B. Johnson
306	Keith McMullen
303	Bob Fisher
301	<u>Tim Kuesel</u>
298	Robert Erickson
293	Greg Neise
293	Jeff Smith
289	Alan Stokie
288	Jeffrey Sanders
283	Eric Walters
281	Donnie Dann
281	Dan Williams
279	Beau Schaefer
277	<u>Douglas Stotz</u>
273	Joe Lill
273	Mike Madsen
272	Karen Fisher
270	Thad Edmonds
264	Urs Geiser
264	Fran Morel
259	Sam Burckhardt
257	Ted Hartzler
255	Geoffrey A. Williamson
250	<u>Matthew Cvetas</u>
249	Bob Carper
248	John McKee
248	Jim Mountjoy
245	John Longhenry
245	Darrell Shambaugh
243	David K. Antieau
238	Vernon Kleen
232	<u>Joan Norek</u>
223	Christine Williamson
222	Anthony Friend
221	John P. Leonard
219	Jeff Sundberg
217	Brian C. Smith
214	Travis Mahan

Alltime Big Year Lists (over 300)

330	Keith McMullen	2009•
330	Pete Moxon	2009•
325	Bob Fisher	2009•
323	Pete Moxon	2010•
322	Bob Fisher	2004•
322	Jeff Skrentny	2009•
320	Andy Sigler	2008•
318	Keith McMullen	2007•
318	Dan Kassebaum	2008•
318	Mark Seiffert	2008•
317	Bruce Heimer	2008•
317	Michael Baum	2009•
316	Robert Chapel	1996•
316	Karen Fisher	2004•
315	Robert Chapel	2000•
314	Kevin Richmond	1986•
314	Alan Stokie	2003•
314	Keith McMullen	2004•
312	Jeff Smith	2009•
312	Craig Taylor	2010•
311	Keith McMullen	2008•
311	Mike Madsen	2009•
310	Louise Augustine	1986•
310	Alan Stokie	2004•
309	Eric Walters	1990•
309	Dan Kassebaum	1996•
309	Robert Chapel	1998
309	Michael Retter	1999•
309	Travis Mahan	2003•
309	Alan Stokie	2005•
309	Jeffrey Sanders	2009•
308	Richard Biss	1978
308	Dan Kassebaum	2007•
307	Tom Pucelik	1983
306	Robert Chapel	1999
306	Adam Reyburn	1999
306	Keith McMullen	2000
306	Robert Chapel	2001
306	Jeffrey Sanders	2008•
306	Karen Fisher	2009•
306	David B. Johnson	2010
306	Keith McMullen	2010•

305	Kevin Richmond	1985
305	Robert Chapel	1995•
305	Dan Kassebaum	2003•
305	Craig Taylor	2008
305	Rob Erickson	2009
305	Greg Neise	2009•
305	Eric Walters	2009
304	Dan Kassebaum	2000•
303	Robert Chapel	1997
303	Keith McMullen	2001
303	Keith McMullen	2006
303	Bob Fisher	2010•
302	Louise Augustine	1988•
302	Eric Walters	1989
302	Eric Secker	2004
302	Keith McMullen	2005
302	Jeffrey Sanders	2005•
301	Myrna Deaton	1988
301	Todd Fink	1994
301	Keith McMullen	2003
301	Mike Madsen	2005•
301	Tim Kuesel	2010•
300	Myrna Deaton	1994
300	Keith McMullen	1999•
300	Alan Stokie	1999
300	Keith McMullen	2002
300	Bob Fisher	2008

Most 300+ Illinois Big Years

This list documents the total historical 300+ tallies made by each birder. (3 minimum)

13	Keith McMullen
7	Robert Chapel
5	Dan Kassebaum
4	Alan Stokie
4	Bob Fisher
3	Jeffrey Sanders
3	Eric Walters

Progression of the IL Big Year Record

75+	Robert Kennicott	c.1855
100+	F. Dayton	c.1895
117	Herbert & Alice Walter	1897
162+	Benjamin T. Gault	c.1925
170	William Dreuth	1932
182	William Dreuth	1933
187	William Dreuth	1937
203	William Dreuth	1938
225+	Charles C. Clark	c.1960
241	Betty & Harry Shaw	1970
290	Larry Balch	1971
308	Richard Biss	1978
314	Kevin Richmond	1986
316	Robert Chapel	1996
322	Bob Fisher	2004
330	Keith McMullen	2009
330	Pete Moxon	2009

2010: Hitting 300 for the first time!

For the past few years we've included some of the stories from those birders who've been near or at the top of the lists for a given year. This year we decided to feature two long-time birders who each reached 300+ species for the first time, Tim Kuesel and Dave Johnson.

Tim Kuesel 301 Species in 2010

The 300 barrier wasn't an insurmountable issue this year because I arrived into December with still-gettable winter birds, unlike the previous couple of years when I stalled in the 290's with only rarities and already-missed birds left on the 'Not Seen in Illinois' list for the year. As usual, being able to ride the coattails of the birder buddy with the comfy Explorer mobile office was the key, as Craig Taylor often made mid-week chases and then went back on weekends so I could add them too.

But a good many of this year's better birds did cooperate by being weekend birds. And as I recapitulate the list, I see that 38 of these were "one-sies," or single bird/single incident sightings. One that stands out amongst those would be the Mountain Plover that Greg Lambeth found and then, amazingly, re-found for us on a late April morning in a Douglas County field that was just overwhelmed by Golden Plovers (when the chances of all the afternoon visitors were killed by blinding sunlight). Also, the Barn Owl in a silo in Pope County was special because it had been an Illinois bugaboo bird for many years, just like the Kittiwake that finally fell at Montrose in January of 2011. The King Eider, the Ruff, and the two late downstate rare hummers also made this year one to remember. As far as chases go, I recall spending 3 summer weekends out of 4 at the same Collinsville Drury Inn with a separate target each trip, (Glossy Ibis, Western Kingbird, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher), and having the good luck to find the target bird very early on each weekend and then spend the rest of the time county ticking. With a 300 year finally in the rear-view mirror, county ticking holds the most enchantment ahead. Not to say that I would ignore a report of a Green-Tailed Towhee somewhere in Illinois in the year ahead! (or a Clark's Grebe or a Mew Gull or a Boreal Owl or a Chestnut-Collared Longspur or a Lewis' Woodpecker or a Rock Wren or a Mountain Bluebird or a Corvid other than the Illinois trio or a Lazuli Bunting or a Pine Grosbeak, etc., etc.)

David B. Johnson
306 in 2010: A Big Year Saga in Illinois!

I dedicate this narrative to the memory of my early birding mentors in Illinois: Tom and Penny Pucelik, Louise Augustine, and Dick Sandburg (see their Big Year Account 303 in '83 An Illinois Birding Marathon, IAB:208:46-50, Spring 1984). They are all pictured in that journal on page 49.

Once committed to doing a Big Year again (after 32 years!) I began the year observing an Eastern Screech-Owl wailing its tremolo call back in the wee hours of the morning with Gary Hantsbarger along Mill Creek in northern Illinois while participating in the Waukegan CBC and--I ended the year with eight Greater Prairie-Chickens (306) near Newton, Illinois, seven of which blasted from a roadside roost right outside my car window! NICE! In between there were many birds, new birding locations, new birding counties, travels with birding friends, family, my dogs (Bailey and Troy); it was all to be a wonderful birding time!

The last time I tried this Illinois Big Year birding was in 1978 with Richard Biss (308 that year) and Homer Eshbaugh (294) and me landing a 292! I'll always remember relocating the 1st Illinois Ross's Gull that Andy Sigler discovered several days earlier at North Ave. Beach, Chicago, with Richard Biss and H. David Bohlen towards the end of the year in December (I remember my car, an orange VW Dasher literally dying the next day!). It was tough doing a Big Year back then with only a minimal telephone tree and a Rare Bird Alert (two of them, one in Chicago and one in Springfield) that often posted sightings several days after the fact. Now we have IBET, IBF, cell phones, texting, GPS coordination, iPods, the whole nine yards of technical savvy at our fingertips. And of course, we have Keith McMullen's example and tutelage who's done this 300+ stuff for 10 years-and others who have made it too!

So, how do you do this? First, get a good checklist like the one on the IOS web page, print it off, then make every day of the birding year count even if you only bird primarily on weekends like I did. Then, plan, plan, plan on being at critical locations through out the year like southern Illinois in early to mid-June, where there are about 15 species you cannot easily see in central or northern Illinois. Detectability of birds for the correct season and location is a key element to success. For example, knowing that Red Knot and Buff-breasted Sandpiper can best be seen from mid-August to mid-September. Pay attention to your finch and shorebird lists--they will make or break your attempt at 300 plus! Third, chase, chase, chase immediately when you see birds posted on IBET or IBF, particularly if they are not a regularly-occurring species in Illinois. Finally during migration: bird-bird--bird particularly at land bird traps along Lake Michigan and elsewhere. You will miss some regularly occurring species; I missed Long-tailed Duck

and Whimbrel (not for lack of trying!), but you, then, have to make them up with uncommon or rare species like I did with observations of Sandwich Tern (14 Sept.), Anna's Hummingbird (5 Dec.), Black-throated Gray Warbler (19 Sept., Pete Moxon-thanks!), Brant (26 Nov., Lake Renwick), Parasitic Jaeger (25 Sept., Carlyle Lake) and Rufous Hummingbird (7 Nov., Coles Co.). While I was only a "weekend warrior" I did bird nearly every day both before and after work if only for an hour! (I did have a week out of the state in Iowa and a few weeks jury duty late in the year...)

Highlights:

January: Varied Thrush at Anne Straight's home in Forreton, IL (thank you, Anne!); all three swans at the widewaters of the Des Plaines River.

February: seven species of gulls at the IOS Gull Frolic.

March/April: Red-throated Loons on Lake Michigan (3 Apr.), 52 pelicans on Lake Marie the same day! Pine Warbler at McHenry Dam (13 Apr.), Eared Grebe (23 Apr., Pella Ponds, DuPage Co.), Lark Sparrow at Montrose, Chicago (30 Apr.).

May: height of migration: White-faced Ibis at Middlefork Savannah (4 May) with two Willets, Harris's Sparrow at Northerly Island (5 May); 3 Prairie and two Kentucky Warblers and a chat near Hennepin/Hopper, Putnam Co. (18 May), "tons" of warblers along Chicago's lakefront including Connecticut Warbler at Montrose., the IOS Spring Birding Weekend netted Bell's Vireo and Olive-sided Flycatcher, a trip to Siloam Springs S. P. (23 May) netted the rare Bewick's Wren singing away on a farm vehicle (where it's always been except not in a barbeque grill!) and a wonderful singing Worm-eating Warbler.

June: trip to southern Illinois and East St. Louis (combined) with Bob Erickson netted: Mississippi Kites and Red-shouldered Hawks, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Least Bittern, Black Vulture, King Rail, Black-necked Stilt, 2 Least Terns, Barn Owl, Chuck-wills-widow, Whip-poor-will, Western Kingbird, Fish Crow, and Blue Grosbeak. A chase back to East St. Louis (24 June) with Andy Sigler and Bruce Heimer provided stellar looks a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher attempting to nest; returning by way of Ray Norbut State Park (a new IL State Park for me!) near I-72 and the Illinois River provided excellent looks at a Worm-eating Warbler!

End of July and August: concentrated on shorebirds with a stellar day on 30 Aug. when Andy Sigler and I observed 25 species of shorebirds in a single day in central Illinois along and near the Illinois River valley. Highlights included American Avocet, Black-necked Stilts, an early Dunlin, 15 Red-necked Phalaropes, a Marbled Godwit, a Red Knot, and 4 Western Sandpipers to name a few.

September: a surprise came on 14 Sept. when on my way to work a short trip to Montrose in the early a.m. scored me a new state bird: Sandwich Tern on Montrose's Beach that Robert Hughes rediscovered. The IOS "boat trip" on Carlyle Lake (25 Sept.) netted a Parasitic Jaeger

and Sabine's Gull, both very "pelagic" and difficult to get on a Big Year. Bob Erickson and I ogled these sightings, as did all three pontoon boat observers, as we had excellent looks! On the way down to "Das Boat Trip" we found our own White-faced Ibis at Meredosia (a non stake-out!).

October: heralded the great North American exit migration and the arrival of some new species: California Gull (thanks Greg Neise!) at North Point Marina (28 Oct.), Le Conte's Sparrows uncharacteristically staying put at Illinois Beach State Park (north unit) for weeks (I saw three in one day there: 2 adults and 1 immature, all together and was able to show many their lifer birds there), Short-eared Owls were arriving (9 Oct.) and Pine Siskins (16 Oct.) the first of many arrived. I ended the month (30 Oct.) by discovering a Purple Sandpiper, my last shorebird species for the year, at Waukegan with Al Stokie, Beau Schaefer and Bob Erickson. Luckily it stuck around a second day for many Illinois birders to see!

November: I was hovering at 299 "ticking off" a beautiful male Rufous Hummingbird in Coles Co with my wife Jeri--one bird to go to hit the 300th mark! Finally--a Ross's Goose in Kane Co. was my 300th bird (14 Nov.), just off I-88 in with a flock of Cackling Geese. I ended the month by tallying a Brant at Lake Renwick and an immature Red-necked Grebe (26 Nov.) at a quarry lake in Bloomington, IL with Bob Erickson.

December: Many who do Big Years say it's tough to add any species in December--I added four: a state-first Anna's Hummingbird (5 Dec.), a Common Redpoll and N. Saw-whet Owl (23 Dec.) and finally eight Greater Prairie-Chickens at the Prairie Ridge Natural Area near Newton (28 Dec.). Whew!

Lowlights: Not many! But I did strike out three times on the Spotted Towhee in Winnebago Co. However, through the graciousness of Martin and Vonnie Kehoe--I finally saw this bird with Andy Sigler in early January 2011, by the way the Sibly squash that the Kehoes gave was divine!). Then there was that elusive Whimbrel which I should have seen, just missing it several times at State Line beach and Montrose by hours! I never was able to chase an "attainable" White Ibis though several were seen.

Having to race to work after re-discovering the Slaty-backed Gull in Indiana waters only to learn it had been chummed into Illinois several minutes later! Oh well! Finally, after searching a whole month for a regularly occurring but uncommon Long-tailed Duck it too was a strike out in December though Leroy Harrison and I got to bird "Bird Haven" in Olney and I did see a lifer white squirrel there! Soon the year had ended!

While others have been more successful at this Big Year effort and probably have more stories to tell--I thoroughly enjoyed my year birding in Illinois! I must acknowledge there were a lot of helpful birders along the way. Their knowledge and guidance along the way was

most appreciated: Amar Ayyash, Steve Bailey, Mike Baum, Vic Berardi, Alex Bloss, Vicki Buchwald, Matthew Cvetas, Bob Erickson, Donnie Dann, Sheryl DeVore, Danny Diaz, Bob Fisher, Matt Fraker, Sue Friscia, Urs Geiser, Sulli Gibson, Joel Greenberg, Eric, Aaron and Ethan Gyllenhaal, Leroy Harrison, Bruce Heimer, Kanae Hirabayashi, Micheal Hogg, Robert Hughes, R. David Johnson, Dan Kassebaum, Martin and Vonnie Kehoe, Tom Kelly, Vernon Kleen, Tim Kuesel, Joe Lill, Karen Lund, Cyndi Lubecke, Mike Madsen, Walter Marcisz, Keith McMullen, Alex Meloy, Fran Morel, Jim Mountjoy, Pete Moxon, Greg Neise, Jill Niland, Dick Paulson, John Purcell, Ari Rice, Kevin Richmond, Rhonda Rothrock, Jeff Sanders, Beau Schaefer, Greg Seegert, Mark Seiffert, Wes Serafin, Darrell Shambaugh, Andrew P. Sigler, Dawn Smith, Jim Smith, Jim Solum, Anne Straight, Al Stokie, Douglas Stotz, Paul and Janice Sweet, Craig Taylor, Craig and Barbara Thayer, Mike Trahan, Eric Walters, Mike Ward, Dan and Barbara Williams, Geoff and Chris Williamson, and Matthew Winks. Thank you all!