

SUMMARIES FOR THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS FROM LONDON and AREAS

LONDON

It was very strange to plan the 108th London CBC starting in October. By the end of November all parties and most of the feeders were committed. A few routes were not covered as the participants were not available, but hopefully next year they will be back or I can find alternatives for them.

As I headed off to Ghana, I left the final organizing in the hands of Ian Platt, whom I want to thank so much for sorting out the later participants and hosting the Pot Luck supper. Also, many thanks go to Joan Taylor for coordinating the Pot Luck. I heard it was a great one. Thanks also go to Ann Henderson and the others who helped with the kitchen duties, the Wakes for getting the key to the church, and of course all 128 of you who took part in our London CBC.

As I was sweltering in the 35 degree humid conditions of West Africa, I heard that we had a cold snap and heavy snows just before the CBC. I knew the overcast and somewhat poor conditions, with flurries and drizzle, would mean that the field participants would have a terrible time wandering through 23 centimeters of snow and unploughed roads. I was not surprised to find more than a few parties had reduced access, or cancelled entirely, resulting in fewer individuals and species being counted (eight fewer routes covered). As a result, total kilometers and hours that were walked or driven were all below the last few years.

A mere 21,248 were counted, a few thousand less than the average count totals. As perhaps would be expected from such weather conditions, feeder people reported more birds at their feeders making use of easier food sources. Interestingly in the mild winter of last year, fewer numbers were counted as well, probably as the birds were spread out more and fewer were coming to feeders. The number of species counted this year was 74, but that can be the luck of the count as much as weather conditions and lesser coverage.

A note from questions asked of me with regards to collating results from such a concentration of birding parties and feeders, as we have high participation in our CBC, goes as follows: When it is obvious that parties overlap or have a common boundary, one must consider that the parties will be counting the same birds in some cases. I look at timing, the species and numbers involved, and the general numbers found in those areas. For instance, about 47 Bald Eagles were reported. By looking at locations, timing, adult versus juvenile etc., I can come up with an estimation of a total of 24.

Let's look at the general trends in species and on numbers and speculate on the reasons as well. The chart also helps to show the trends. Species with fewer than average numbers may be due to the harsh weather, either in moving lingering species south to find more available food, or because there were fewer people in the field. Likewise, a higher count could be a result of the weather and would generally mean that birds were concentrated, such as at open water or at bird feeders.

This year the ponds were mostly frozen over, but some of the running water was open. Deep snows in the fields lowered numbers of lingering geese and mallards. The few large concentrations of waterfowl were found in open water along the Thames at Springbank and Greenway parks and other usual spots. Many more waterfowl must have moved further south as only a few of the more unusual ones were to be found and they were in small numbers. From year to year some species are variable in numbers; this year, Bufflehead and Goldeneye were up a bit in numbers, but Hooded Mergansers were down.

Unusual and rare species included two Gadwall, found near Komoka by the McFarlane/Foerster Party. Luckily there was a Wood Duck seen by the McLeod/Carey Party on the Thames near Kilworth. A Cackling Goose was spotted by the Payne/Bildy Party south of Oxford on the North Branch of the Thames. A single Ruddy Duck was found west of the Warncliffe Bridge by Jason McGuire, and a Redhead was spotted by Olga Nemerowski and the McLeod/Carey Party near the Kilworth Bridge. A few Red-breasted Mergansers were noted in Springbank by the Welch Group. The only other waterfowl of note were two Pied-billed Grebes, one on the South branch of the Thames, found by Sara Richer and the other by the McLeod/Carey Party. Coots are highly variable in number and in most years we are lucky to get one, so luck it was that one was spotted along the North branch near Gibbons Park, and that eight were found by the McFarlane/Foerster Party at Komoka. Missing from our list this year were the diving ducks and dabbling ducks like Canvasback, scaup, etc., which sometimes linger in open water. This was no doubt due to the frozen ponds and harsh conditions.

Numbers of Wild Turkey and Great Blue Heron continue to be down from average, and all hawks were in numbers lower than average. The only highlights from the hawks were the two Merlins found on the South branch of the Thames by Sara Richer and the Osprey found by the Welch Party at Springbank Park. The latter was only the 3rd record of that species on our CBC. There was a Peregrine Falcon reported from the Forks area and further west along

the river by the Sharman and part of the Coves party that covered Greenway. Though a total of four were reported, it was likely two. I felt with the recent declines in numbers of harrier and kestrel that we were lucky to get some of each of those species.

Probably due to the weather conditions, gulls were found in generally fewer numbers, and no rare gulls were reported from the dump or elsewhere.

Back to more normal numbers were kingfisher and Mourning Dove. However, the number of owls plummeted. Few birders were out owling due to the weather and absentees like me, and we only scratched up two screeches, thanks to the McNeil Party, and only one Great Horned Owl located at Wonnacott's by the Verbooms.

We did well with the woodpecker species. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was found by the Weir/Roedding Party and a Red-headed Woodpecker was located along the River near the golf bridge at Springbank Park by the Welch party. The latter species had been noted on the Children's CBC earlier so the group was glad to find it again. There were fewer flickers reported, but the numbers of that species are variable. What was more important was that the numbers of Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers were up to a more normal level this year. This was probably due to more being found at feeders, which were more enticing to visit due to the weather. We had a new high count for Red-bellied Woodpecker, many found at feeders. Amazingly, we had a new high count of seven for Pileated Woodpecker, which smashes the old record of four. These are numbers you might see on northern counts.

The only shrike seen was one at Komoka Park reported by the McFarlane/Foerster Party.

Corvids, jays and crows were still commonly seen, but jays were up in numbers with many at feeders.

Horned Larks and Snow Buntings were found in good numbers. Look at the averages and you will see that we had a decent number, considering how variable in numbers those species are found.

It was nice to see Black-capped Chickadee in more average numbers. Despite the lower numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, the feeders did provide us with way more White-breasted than last year. The numbers of Carolina Wren coming to feeders increased their numbers to above average. A Tufted Titmouse was found at one feeder.

Kinglets were in good supply and it was good to see the rarely found Ruby-crowned south of Oxford along the Thames by the Payne/Bildy Party. The number of creepers on the Count was lower though.

Moving to thrushes, we found no Hermit, but the Garber/Tingle Party did see 8 Eastern Bluebirds. The number of robins, many found in groups, was much higher than the average.

Cedar Waxwings were reported in higher numbers which are highly variable with this species too.

The sparrow clan was represented well. I imagine the juncos were back to normal as many were visiting feeders, along with several other sparrow species. This is true of one of our rarities, the Chipping Sparrow, found at the feeders of the Thames Talbot Land Trust offices at Westminster Ponds and seen by the McNeil Party. The sparrows in the field were somewhat down in numbers, but there were two Fox Sparrow found by the Neish Party out at Wickerson subdivision. A third one was found by the Read party at a feeder on Gainsborough.

Despite the large increase in Northern Cardinals this year, many visiting feeders, I have heard that a few counts east of us are also reporting larger numbers. We hope to retain the Cardinal Capital self-designation that we usually have for the CBC.

Blackbirds were almost non-existent. Only one Red-winged Blackbird was noted, at the Goodwin feeders. We went from a high count of cowbirds to none in one year. As well, the so-called winter finches were almost non-existent. Only a few Purple Finches were reported, and a lone Pine Siskin represented the highly variable numbers of winter finches we get in this area.

It was another great CBC, and again thank you to all who were involved in making our 108th consecutive London CBC the success it was.

Pete Read
CBC Compiler for Nature London

ST. CLAIR NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

The 37th St. Clair National Wildlife Area Christmas Bird Count was held on Jan 1, 2017. It was sunny, with fairly light winds and temperatures ranging from a bit below freezing to a bit above freezing. There was no snow cover.

Much of the count circle is wide open agricultural field, or Lake St. Clair. Given that historically much of the terrestrial part of the count circle was wet prairie or wetland, there never was much woodland present and that continues today. It is the wetlands associated with the eastern side of Lake St. Clair and the lower reaches of the Thames River that give the potential for good numbers of birds on this count. However, with the extended waterfowl

hunting period, one of the largest privately owned wetlands was not accessible this year. We are fortunate that several large privately owned wetland complexes were in fact available.

Fifteen observers tallied 84 species. This is slightly higher than our most recent 10-year average of 81 but well off our record of 92 species. Five additional species have been noted during the count week period to date.

There has been enough open water to retain significant numbers of waterbirds. Approximately 25,000 individuals of 22 species of waterfowl and approximately 4500 individuals of 7 species of gull were recorded.

The American Crow was, as usual, the most numerous species, with an estimated 126,000 birds.

One new species is now on the overall list: Nelson's Sparrow, but unfortunately is a Count Week only species. However, it raises our cumulative total since the inception of this count in 1981 to 138 species.

New highs (previous high) are as follows: American Coot--406 (226), Red-bellied Woodpecker--29 (23), Brown Creeper--10 (7), Golden-crowned Kinglet--77 (10)

Tied highs are: Northern Goshawk--1, Red-shouldered Hawk--2, Thayer's Gull--1, Iceland Gull--1, Tufted Titmouse--1, White-breasted Nuthatch--26

Other notable species/numbers: Great Blue Heron--37, Bald Eagle--20, Eastern Phoebe--2

Count Week species to date include: American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, Bonaparte's Gull and Short-eared Owl.

Many thanks to the participants for their continued enthusiasm and support, and also to the landowners who gave permission to access!

Allen Woodliffe
CBC Compiler for the St. Clair NWA

SKUNK'S MISERY

First off, I'd like to say thank you for participating this year and hope you all can do it again next year! Sorry it took so long to compile this. Once again, it was a very successful count and the highest total of species for the third consecutive year. I would imagine this will be tougher to achieve next year though.

The total number of species was 66 which is 5 more than last years high. The cumulative total for 3 years is 79 plus 2 more for count week only.

I think the list speaks for itself. Also, feel free to forward this to those that I've missed or forgotten as I don't have their emails.

Jim Burke
CBC Compiler for Skunk's Misery

ST. THOMAS

We have finished compiling the 2016 CBC and the results are interesting again. We had 81 species for count day and 84 for count week. This is the 66th report submitted to Audubon from our club.

A brief explanation of the Maximum Number column on the list. The first number is the maximum number of birds seen and the second number is the count year they were seen. The first one, 5720/100 means it was seen on the 100th count which would be 1999. The counts were started in 1900 and the counts are numbered from then. This year was the 117th count. I hope that clears up the confusion.

The day was cut a little short by the heavy fog in afternoon. We had new species of Dunlin found on the beach in Port Bruce and Black Vulture spotted on the beach at Port Stanley during count week.

We had new highs with Golden Eagle (3), Peregrine Falcon (2), Robin (501) and Fox Sparrow (10). This year we had over 100 American Bluebirds and two Great Horned Owls.

Other nice sightings were Greater and Lesser Scaup, American Coot, Glaucous Gull, Merlin and a good number of Bald Eagles (20). The count has had Turkey Vultures every year this century with the addition of the Black Vulture this year.

Ruffed Grouse have been conspicuously absent for a decade. Also missing were the Snowy Owl and warblers.

The meeting at Tim Horton's for lunch went well and the pot luck at Knox Church afterwards was amazing. There was a great assortment of food to enjoy. The meat balls were very tasty.

We had four new counters this year and welcomed them aboard. A great big THANK YOU to all our volunteer counters. We are looking forward to another great CBC in 2017!

Al Sharpe and Jackie Rochefort
CBC Compilers for St. Thomas CBC

Attached is pdf of results.

