

2001 Christmas Count Report

Reflections on the Eugene 2001 Christmas Bird Count: "Startling Appearances, Notable Absences"

by Herb Wisner

Because of the continuing mild weather and the recent presence of warblers that ought not to be here, we were hoping for an interesting Count on December 30. And we got it. One of the warblers disappeared, but two made an appearance on the right day: a Nashville Warbler (one previous visit in 1986) and a MacGillivray's Warbler (our first Count sighting). Before the Count a Black-throated Green Warbler had been keeping company with the Nashville. This is almost strictly an eastern, summertime species so what could we expect? On the subject of warblers, the regular winter Townsend's and Yellow-rumped did show up. No Orange-crowned, however, an omission for which we hold them responsible.

Now, starting at the beginning of the check list, a Pacific Loon was seen for only the second time in the last 25 years. We had a record high number of Pied-billed Grebes, beating our past record by 38. High counts were also noted for Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Merlins, Greater Yellowlegs, Short-eared Owls, Anna's Hummingbirds, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Western Scrub-Jays, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Western Bluebirds, White-throated Sparrows, the Slate-colored form of Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches and House Sparrows. Impressive.

An unfortunate occurrence was the apparent kidnapping of our two American White Pelicans (regular winter visitors to Fern Ridge Reservoir) by a larger group of that ilk that dropped in for a time last summer. We thought about putting out an all points bulletin but weren't sure it would do any good because we lack DNA samples of the kidnapes.

Cormorants continue to be in good supply, especially along the Willamette River. For some reason, Great Blue Herons were way down in numbers, and the only Green Heron report came after Count Day. At least a sample of Turkey Vultures still think it's possible to make a living here in the wintertime, even without patrolling I-5. The same could be said of the two Osprey, though they, of course, don't pursue carrion to any extent. There were plenty of Tundra Swans, but waterfowl numbers were generally considerably lower than usual. Perhaps their southward migration is delayed due to mild weather. Raptors did well, with just about all expected species showing up, including the lone Peregrine. No Goshawks, but we can't really trust them anyway (a statement supported by lots of birds that are menu items for Goshawks).

California Quail are showing in rather skimpy numbers for some reason (a victim of the visit, but don't stay, campaign?). Coots are sometimes accused of trying to take over the world. Our count won't give much support to that comment since their numbers were only about one-seventh that of our highest Count. Our shorebird counts were not particularly impressive except for the Yellowlegs. The small number we saw is significant, since some years they don't show up at all. I'll disregard those ubiquitous and hard-to-identify gulls.

We are fortunate to have several counters willing to brave the winter elements to tally owls. The results were good, with all our usual species present.

All woodpeckers (except the Lewis's, of course) were below usual numbers, especially the Acorns and Sapsuckers.

Besides the high kinglet and bluebird reports, the songbird category also boasted one Dipper under the I-5 bridge. The Solitaire is one we don't count on, and Hermit Thrushes are nice to find (close to the record of 28). Robins and wrentits were very numerous. Townsend's Warblers were a delight. It's nice to have Spotted Towhees back as a distinct species. It seemed like singing Song Sparrows and House Finches were everywhere.

Next Year? Join us on December 29th!