

## 2003 Christmas Count Report

*by Herb Wisner, compiler*

It's that time again. Time to muse over the results of our annual Christmas Bird Count. The highlight, perhaps, was the one day window of good weather sandwiched between several days of miserable conditions. We lucked out again. In spite of snow, ice, freezing rain and cold temperatures on the days preceding the count, a greater than average number of species was checked off. A compilation by Noah Stryker of selected count data since 1970 has made some quick comparisons with past results possible. Let's take a look, in more or less checklist order.

Common Loons are not common here in Eugene, having been seen in only nine of the past 34 counts. Make that, now, 10 out of 35. The Horned Grebe is another rather rare visitor to Count day. Western Grebes, at 26, were almost a "no show" compared to a high of 245. Clark's Grebes were in residence at Fern Ridge last summer, but not confirmed on January 4. Alas, the two American White Pelicans that were almost permanent residents a couple of years ago have not been returned by their kidnappers. There was never even a ransom note. But, at least they make a summer appearance

Like the little ditty "how much wood would a woodchuck chuck," I'd like to know, "how many fish do all the cormorants gulp since cormorants do gulp fish." Fewer cormorants this year, but still plenty. In my next life, if I return as a bird, I hope I'll be migratory and not a heron, egret or other species that find the dinner table is an occasional sheet of ice. Some low IQ Turkey Vultures seem to have the impression that they can make a living year-round here. Maybe they have noted all our red light runners and decided that there is bound to be a profit in that.

A Canada Goose population of more than 54,000 seems like plenty, but it wasn't a record. Many people think we could do with lots fewer. Six lucky teams didn't report any. Where are all the Tundra Swans this year? A flock of 40 near the airport was the largest bunch. All the expected duck species were present, but mostly in quite reduced numbers. Mallards came in at one sixth the record number. Buffleheads, however, went all out, setting a new record at 1425 (previous high: 83).

We still have a couple of Ospreys that believe in Eugene. If I were an Osprey, I'd reevaluate the virtues of Oregon over Mexico for winter happiness. Maybe Mexican fish are hazardous to their health? Where do all the White-tailed Kites come from? And, where do they go come spring and summer? Thirty beats the previous record by four. Hawk numbers were reasonably normal.

In the shorebird category, all species were down in numbers except Least Sandpipers, which, at 369, beat the record by 163. Gulls, too, were fewer in

number. We need a gull expert to roam the gull hot spots, concentrating on identities and numbers. Mourning Doves boosted their record from 419 to 431. Those people with Dennis Arendt were treated to 148 of these. That ought to be a record for a single segment of our circle.

We could use more owl hunters. Maybe this would appeal to those of you who will celebrate New Years Eve in 2006. Count day will be January 1, so just leave your party shortly after midnight and seek these denizens of the dark. If the party left you with double vision, well, just divide your count by two!

I would have expected home counters to sight the most Anna's Hummingbirds, but field teams had the edge. If we knew of all the backyards that had feeders, there would be a lot more of these. Every team noted at least one Northern Flicker. Lots recorded, but no record. It might be interesting to take a summer count of flickers to make a comparison. Lots of jays too, but nothing to crow about. Oh yes, and neither were the latter. Horned Larks are pretty rare on our counts (eight times). The 85 seen by Fred Chancey's team in the northwest sector more than doubled the previous high. Swallows are unusual in winter, but not unknown. There were two more Barn Swallows than previously recorded. One of our home count people reported seeing swallows on January 13 along West D Street in Springfield.

No one escaped seeing Black-capped Chickadees. I doubt that anyone objected. White-breasted Nuthatch numbers improved compared to the past several years, but were still far short of any record. Ten teams encountered Bushtits and reported specific numbers. Oh yeah? Bushtits are dedicated to keeping their population size a secret. The only wrens of note were the Marsh Wrens: two more than ever before. This year was only the third time for American Dippers to show up.

Thirteen teams and several home counters boosted our record for Hermit Thrushes from 28 to 37. Two teams didn't see any American Robins. Amazing! We usually count on the LCC contingent to supply the Wrentits, but this year they were seen in five additional areas. No increase in total number, however. I don't do Starlings. You're welcome to, if you wish.

Cedar Waxwings were really deficient. Nothing sensational about warblers. Towhees improved their record. This count was the sixth time for a Tree Sparrow (Fisher Butte), the tenth for a Chipping Sparrow and the ninth for a Swamp Sparrow. White-crowned Sparrows, at 453, exceeded their previous high of 325. Juncos are the most numerous species at feeders all over the country but they also abound in the "boonies." We counted many. There are always a few Slate-colored types around, so look carefully at those juncos in your backyard.

Blackbirds were in much reduced numbers, and no one picked out a cowbird this time. Red Crossbills were a good find by one team, but not unknown in the past. Purple and House Finches weren't sensational. I can't help asking how three

teams saw only one Pine Siskin each. Don't they always come in bunches? All told, there weren't very many. Maybe they have suffered from the disease that has hit them in other parts of the country. American Goldfinches were tallied by six teams (48 total) while the rest (66 total) were visiting feeders. There was one all black-backed Lesser Goldfinch seen at a feeder. One last comment: Egyptian Geese have been spotted for several years now, but we don't count them, since they have yet to start a breeding population (heaven forbid).

And so, one more year is added to the history of the Eugene Christmas Bird Count.

Many thanks are due to all the faithful team leaders, who serve year after year, and to all those who volunteer to help them out. Many thanks as well to the home counters who, collectively, provide considerable numbers. Well over 200 collective hours were spent by those in the field.