

2013 Oakridge Christmas Bird Count Report

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The Oakridge Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was active for 14 years from the early 1970s through the mid-1980s, with data recorded from the winter of 1971–1972 through the winter of 1984–1985. We (Cheron Ferland, Lynda Kamerrer, Wanda Wilson and I) restarted the count in December 2009. We ran into some organizational difficulties the next winter, but managed to conduct CBCs in January 2012, December 2012, and December 2013. In addition to organizing the count again this year, Cheron assisted with compiling the results.

So there are now 18 years of data. However, the landscape around Oakridge has gone through some big changes since the logging boom of the 1970s and early 1980s. Some species that thrive in open or patchy landscapes, such as Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and Killdeer, have practically disappeared or at best are present in much-reduced numbers.

Mountain Quail, which thrive in regenerating clear-cuts, are much less common now than in the late 1970s, when counts of around a hundred were regularly recorded. In the winter of 1977–1978 the Oakridge circle established the world record of 235 Mountain Quail; no other North American count has even come close to this record in recent years. Another CBC that I organize, the Antone CBC in Wheeler County, was the top count in North America one year with 56 Mountain Quail, but that took a lot of luck. We haven't come anywhere close to that total in recent years.

(Note: Lane County Audubon Society's roots are in Oakridge, and this newsletter's name, *The Quail*, refers to the Mountain Quail that are regularly found in the Oakridge area.)

While some species are diminishing in numbers, others that used to be scarce in the region have moved in. We recorded two Red-shouldered Hawks again this year. We saw one Wren-tit, which is lower than our high count of four in December 2009; we found it in what seems to have become a reliable spot. This species was only recorded once in the historical 14-year period.

Eurasian Collared-Doves (which have shown up in Oakridge just in the past three years) are now abundant around town. It's hard to get an accurate count since our teams tend to overlap in the town areas, and flocks can move around during the day. However, this year's total of 71 is very high compared with counts of 23 and 12 in the past two years. Rock Pigeons don't seem to be suffering from the competition and also registered a record high count of 172. (Again, hard to be sure that this doesn't reflect some overlap.)

On the other hand, we found no Mourning Doves during the CBC, although 11 were seen during count week.

Volunteer participation was low this year, with just nine counters. However we had

enough experienced birders to field teams in all four of the main sectors, so our party-hour numbers were comparable to recent years.

The weather was reasonably nice on count day, Monday, December 16. It was frosty in the morning, but there was plenty of sunshine and temperatures were generally above freezing in the afternoon. We had limited access to upper elevations in some parts of the circle (any place with a north-aspect slope, where snow up to six inches deep was still hanging around on some of the forest roads), although in a couple of sectors with south exposures we were able to climb up to almost 4,500 feet in elevation.

Like many counts in Oregon this winter, we saw the lingering effects of early December's cold snap, especially for insectivores. Our counts of four Pacific Wrens and five Ruby-crowned Kinglets were record lows in the history of this count (in both cases, the first single-digit count on record in 18 years of data). Our counts of five American Robins and five Varied Thrushes were both just one bird higher than the record low counts. We missed Hermit Thrush, which was only missed in one previous year, and Western Bluebird, which has been found in most years. We only found one Golden-crowned Sparrow, which compares to a previous record low of six, and our count of six Fox Sparrows is the second-lowest count on record.

On the other hand, our counts of hardy species such as Oregon Junco (101), Spotted Towhee (20), and Song Sparrow (34) were fairly typical for this count. Our count of Black-capped Chickadees (11) was a record low but our count of Chestnut-backed Chickadees (50) was in the normal range.

Goose, duck, and grebe numbers were generally low, but not too surprising given that many ponds were frozen solid. Perhaps more surprising, considering the circumstances, is that we recorded the first Northern Shovelers (two) ever for this count, we set a record for the most American Coots (30), and with 45 Mallards we came close to the historical record of 62.

We had a couple of rare count-week raptors (Northern Goshawk and Peregrine Falcon), but couldn't find either on count day. Well, we had one possible goshawk sighting on count day by Cheron Ferland, the same observer who found one for count week, but she said it was too far away to be sure. (She studied this species in Colorado for her M.Sc.) So we'll let that one go for this year.

A pair of Great Gray Owls is still around the High Prairie area, but they evaded detection for this count (and count week). We did not have any nocturnal owling effort this year, so no importance should be attached to our failure to detect other owls, except for Northern Pygmy-Owl, which seems to be on a low cycle.