

# 2014 Oakridge Christmas Bird Count

*Joel Geier, Count Compiler*

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The Oakridge Christmas Bird Count on December 14 benefited from mostly clear, mild weather and snow-free roads that allowed access all the way up to the highest elevations of the circle at 4,600 feet. The 19 volunteers found a total of 67 species. Pine Siskins were the most abundant species of the day with a round tally of 480. Golden-crowned Kinglets made their usual strong showing with 280, followed by 270 Dark-eyed (Oregon) Juncos and 220 Chestnut-backed Chickadees.

Unusual species for this circle included Common Loon and Common Goldeneye on Hills Creek Reservoir, Greater White-fronted Geese on the golf course (consorting with domestic—but apparently wild—white geese), and an immature Northern Shrike that was photographed on High Prairie.

Among the most intriguing birds of the day were two flocks of 20 chickadees that were hanging upside down as they fed on mountain hemlock cones near the summit of Buckhead Mountain. They were quite high up in the trees and very active, so it was difficult to see details. Because their backs were gray, we knew they were not Chestnut-backed Chickadees (the most likely suspect for conifer-dominated forests in this area). Black-capped Chickadees would be very surprising in that habitat zone. Based on their hoarse vocalizations, they were identified as Mountain Chickadees, although they were about 15 miles east of their nearest expected location in the Waldo Lake area.

All six of the expected woodpecker/sapsucker species were found, with Pileated Woodpeckers providing the biggest excitement. All five expected corvids were also found, including seven Gray Jays.

No large owls were found this year – even though Spotted, Barred, and Great Gray Owls are all known to be residents in the circle. Owling efforts turned up two Western Screech-Owls and at least one Northern Saw-whet Owl, not to mention a few unidentified noises in the dark. A total of five Northern Pygmy-Owls were found during daylight hours.

Only one grouse was found this year, and it caused perhaps the most frustration of any bird of the day as it evaded attempts at positive identification. The observers were leaning toward Sooty Grouse. Four Mountain Quail were also found. No California Quail turned up, as the usual town flock seemingly went into hiding in December.

Volunteers for this year's count included Forest Tomlinson, Torrey Gage-Tomlinson, Laars Skalnes, Linda Gilbert, Amy Weih, Marvel Loftus, Laurie Patty, Wil Geier, John Lucachick, Stephanie Lucachick, Brandon Wagner, Eric Clough, Jazlin Sobel, Jody Fairchild, Priscilla Sokolowski, Thomas Meinzen and Tom Mickel. Special thanks to co-organizers Cheron Ferland (who unfortunately had to miss the count, but added a count-week Red-shouldered Hawk) and Mary Lee Sayre.