

2019 Eugene Christmas Bird Count Species Compiler

Notes

by Vjera Thompson, Species Compiler

Rain was forecast for Count Day, December 29, 2019, but only a few sprinkles were felt. A record number of field counters were happy to spend a mostly dry day outside.

Field Observers and Home Counters reported a total of 123 species and 357,948 individual birds on Count Day, and an additional 8 species during Count Week. One unusual count record was a Williamson's Sapsucker. It was last reported in our count in 1965. Another unusual find was 4 Semipalmated Plovers at Fern Ridge. They are typically present during migration, but not in the winter.

Other unusual Count Week additions were: a Golden Eagle, seen while people were chasing the Williamson's Sapsucker a couple days later, a Mountain Chickadee at a feeder, and Tricolored Blackbirds near a dairy. A few expected birds were missed on the count but found during Count Week. See the summary of count results for the full list of Count Week finds. Other misses were Greater Scaup, Rough-legged Hawk, and White-tailed Kite.

Three species seen in large flocks at Fern Ridge led to record highs: Gadwall, Common Merganser, and American White Pelican. The old record for the pelicans was 65, but the wintering flock has grown this year and 105 were found. As they did last year, Eurasian Collared-Doves reached another record high, with 325 counted in 22 different areas. Another record high was set by Anna's Hummingbirds, which were found in almost every area. Twenty-seven Black Phoebes documented the continued growth of phoebes in the circle.

The big surprise of the day was a very large flock of European Starlings that two teams saw streaming across the morning sky. Both teams were flabbergasted by the numbers in this flock and initially had no idea how to estimate the potential number of birds. After studying photos and starling habits, an estimate was generated: 3,000 starlings per second for at least two minutes. That calculated out to 360,000 birds, but due to possible fluctuations and wanting to be conservative, we settled on 270,000 birds. I assumed that all other starlings seen later in the day might have dispersed from the morning flock, so kept the reported total at 270,000 despite other teams reporting a total of 12,869. The team that reported the starlings also had a surprising 5 Merlins in their area, presumably attracted to the starling smorgasbord.

Our Home Counters contributed to high counts of Eurasian Collared-Doves, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Brown Creepers, and Lesser Goldfinches.

We had calm pre-dawn hours for owling, and we were able to find all the expected species of owls except for Short-eared Owl, which has gotten harder to find in the circle in recent years. Northern Pigmy-Owls set a new record, with four reported by three different teams.

Thanks to all the birders who participated on field teams and from homes, who helped make this a successful count.