

## **2004 Christmas Count Report**

**by Herb Wisner, compiler**

Can you believe that it has been a year since the last Christmas Bird Count report? Years really are shorter than they used to be. So, what happened this year? Our 62nd Eugene Christmas Bird Count on January 2 started out cool-- no, I mean *cold*--and foggy. Not a good sign. In spite of that more than 135 field and home counters turned up 134 species. That ties the old record!

### **Surprise!**

The high tally was due to finding a number of unusual species. Species not regularly found here at this time of year, or downright not expected here at all, included Horned and Clark's Grebes, Ross's Goose, Falcated Duck (seldom south of western Alaska), Pacific Golden-Plover, Barred Owl, Black Phoebe, Tree and Barn Swallows and Red Crossbills.

### **AOU changes species list**

As you look over the list, you may notice that the order of species has changed. The powers that be at the American Ornithologists Union (and others) have reordered the list. I suppose this has been done based on DNA studies and other factors as well. Theoretically, the list starts with the least evolved and ends with the most evolved (House Sparrows in the U.S.).

Looking down our tally list, we note that Cackling Goose now appears as a separate entry from other Canada Geese. And there were lots of them! The previous highest number (according to the historic Count data national Audubon compiles for us) was 60 in 1947. I'm not sure we have been trying to separate them since then.

### **Record high counts**

Species with new high counts were: Gadwall, Common Merganser, Horned Grebe (on our Count list only 10 times), Cormorants, Turkey Vulture and Western Gull. Tree Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Wrentit (appearing in more places than ever), American Pipit (a herd animal), Spotted Towhee and Red Crossbill. Most of the increases were modest, but some were substantial, especially percentage-wise. A prime example are the 30 hardy (or maybe optimistic) Tree Swallows. The two that were here in 1999 must have fed a line to their grandkids. Turkey Vultures continue to pursue a trend to cut down on their annual mileage. They apparently find enough carcasses for refueling without the long trek south. Or maybe they are afraid that the newly established California Condors are going to present a competition problem.

### **A few low tallies**

No species was at its lowest count, but some were close. The chicken relatives (pheasants and quail) don't seem to be holding up to their historic numbers.

Turkeys, however, are reported as numerous almost everywhere, though the Count number was not particularly high. Most of the waterfowl (except Gadwall and Common Merganser) were well below record numbers. Clark's Grebes are "Johnny-come-latelys".

### **Species loyal to Christmas Bird Count days**

According to the compiled data national Audubon sends us, species that have shown up on all 62 Counts include only Killdeer and Song Sparrow. Those with 60 or 61 appearances are Pheasant, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Steller's Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch (bad declines in recent years), Winter Wren, Golden- and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Varied Thrush, White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds and Western Meadowlark (these have declined from 380 in 1960). How do these jibe with your recollections? The more southerly location of our Count Circle in earlier years may account for some species' absence from high number of Counts. You might be thinking, "Why not Starlings?" They didn't make it into Oregon until the late '40s. I thought about Robins and Scrub Jays. I can't think of a reason for Robins, but I think maybe the Jays hadn't moved up this far north into Oregon that long ago. In case you're interested (if not, skip ahead), the number of Counts in which various species have been tallied are the following: 50+ Counts: 53 species; 40-50 Counts: 21 species; 20-40 Counts: 29 species; 10-20 Counts: 11 species; fewer than 10 Counts: 10 species.

### **Thank you, teams!**

A grateful thank you is due to all who participated, especially the team leaders, many of whom have been doing this forever (it seems). An additional thanks to Barbara Combs for help with copying and putting the numbers together.

The chili feed on the Count evening was organized and run by Doris Becker, Allison Mickel, Sandy Poinsett and Jane Rodin. And, I can't leave out my spouse, Ruth, who made vegetarian chili that was savored by many. Thank you, to those who brought desserts--I think I tried at least half of them. Additionally, thanks to the attendees who so efficiently put the chairs and tables back in order.