

## 2020 Oakridge Christmas Bird Count

By Joel Geier, Count Coordinator and Compiler

The Oakridge CBC went ahead on December 22nd, following state and Audubon recommendations for COVID-19 safety. Twelve volunteers enjoyed mostly good weather with mild temperatures and no rain until evening. Warm rains in the preceding week cleared most of the prior snow pack from forest roads, allowing relatively easy access up to 3,500 feet, where roads and trees were blanketed with fresh snow from the previous night.

We found 73 species, tying the count-day record for the 11 years of data since this count was re-started in 2009. Finches were the main story, headlined by a flock of 20 White-winged Crossbills just off the Salmon Creek Road, and numerous flocks of Pine Siskins. Two types of Red Crossbill were also found, along with House and Purple Finches. Strangely, goldfinches were scarce, with Lesser Goldfinches barely making it into Count Week, and not one American Goldfinch showed up.

Dabbling ducks were scarce, but diving ducks made a strong showing with 17 Common Goldeneyes plus two Lesser Scaup along with the usual Ring-necked Ducks and mergansers. Eight Horned Grebes and three Western Grebes were seen on Hills Creek Reservoir, several of them feasting on fingerling-sized fish.

Diurnal raptor highlights included a Red-shouldered Hawk, two Peregrine Falcons, and nine Bald Eagles. We didn't manage to find any owls on Count Day, but a Great Gray and a Barred Owl were found during Count Week. Northern Pygmy-Owls, found in most years, managed to hide until just after the end of Count Week.

Forest chickens included both Sooty Grouse and Ruffed Grouse, but we missed Mountain Quail. We found all five expected woodpecker/sapsucker species, but our dreams of Black-backed Woodpeckers in a two-year-old burn were stymied by windfalls blocking Deception Creek Rd. Next year we might need to pack a chainsaw!

Black Phoebes were found in three spots this year, after showing up last winter for the first time on this count. Only two American Dippers were found, likely due to very high river flows causing them to move up into small forest streams. The tally of 47 Red-breasted Nuthatches was encouraging after a very surprising miss last year. We also had good counts of Hermit (15) and Varied Thrush (43), plus a charming flock of 19 Western Bluebirds at the Oakridge State Airport.