

Oakridge Christmas Bird Count

By Joel Geier, Count Coordinator and Compiler

After postponement due to deep, fresh snow on the originally scheduled Count Day, the Oakridge CBC went ahead on January 3, and broke all previous records for most continuous precipitation throughout the day.

Volunteers started off in pre-dawn heavy rain and winds, which eased to a drizzle with local fog as the day grew light (in comparative terms) around 8 am. All types of drizzle were encountered—fine drizzle, medium drizzle, and miserable drizzle—sometimes alternating with cold, heavy rain. Mid-afternoon brought a welcome change in weather as rain changed to snow mixed with freezing rain, or in some areas, rain mixed with snow, or just plain snow. During all of the daylight hours, never was there a moment without some variety of rain or snow falling from above. We only missed hail and graupel (pellet snow) as other possibilities.

Road conditions varied from wet to slushy, to packed snow made slippery by rain, to completely snow-covered with more than a foot of snow on the ground. Driving access above 2,500 feet was impossible on High Prairie, and generally lower than 2,000 feet elsewhere in the circle. Steady rain dampened any ambitions of post-holing on foot up snow-covered roads to higher elevations.

Despite these very challenging conditions, and despite getting skunked on owls and grouse, 13 volunteers managed to find 64 bird species plus one striped skunk scampering through the snow. Highlights included eight Mountain Quail, two Virginia Rails, two Horned Grebes, eight wayward Killdeer, a Red-shouldered Hawk, a Peregrine Falcon, three Wrentits, nine American Dippers, six Hermit Thrushes, and hundreds of American Robins and Varied Thrushes (it was their kind of day). The thrushes were concentrated around madrones, which had a good berry crop this year.

There might well be some rare finch flocks up there, but Count Day was not the day to find them. We had no crossbill detections, small numbers of Purple and House Finches, and just two flocks of Pine Siskins plus one lonely Pine Siskin seen on its own. Despite finding an even 100 Golden-crowned Sparrows, once again we were unable to find any White-crowned or White-throated Sparrows among them.