



MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

34th Annual Christmas Bird Count (2015)

Co-sponsored by the MH Interpretive Program and The Society of Grasslands Naturalists

Dear Birder:

Many thanks to the 37 participants who surveyed territories during this year's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on Sunday, December 20. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 18 feeder watchers who participated. The Interpretive Program continues to ask Hatters with feeders to monitor them and we have been able to maintain a core group of 15 - 25 observers annually. Having these folks participate is crucial as each year a few species are seen exclusively by feeder watchers.

Count day temperatures were relatively mild (Low = -15°/High = 2°C) and snow levels were low; no one reported any difficulty accessing survey locations in 2015. However, wind speeds were between 25-30 km/hr and may have impacted those surveying rural territories. All 24 territories were assigned this year and but 1 territory was not counted because of illness.

A total of 51 species was observed and 29,451 individual birds counted, with individual birds being a record high for the count. Previous highs of 28,441 and 26,398 occurred last year and in 2001, respectively, with mild fall weather the probable reason for these numbers. All 3 high counts correspond with record counts of Canada Geese during those years and relatively large observations of Mallards. Whereas the 2015 total is 4% greater than last year and 134% above the 33-year average, it is important to note that movements of Canada Geese and Mallards can be quite lively and may lead to some double counting. The 51 species observed in 2015 represents a slight decrease from 2014 (53) and is fairly typical of the past 10-year average of 54. Generally when temperatures are "cold" (below -15°C), we see fewer species and count fewer birds than when temperatures are "mild" (near or above 0°C).

Exclusively, feeder watchers saw two species, White-crowned Sparrow (2) and Common Grackle (2). Two species, Brown Creeper and Red Crossbill, were observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. There was 1 unverified species observed; 3 Black-headed Grosbeaks were seen in the Southeast Hill area of town but, unfortunately, were not substantiated with photographic evidence or independent verification. This species has never been seen in our area during winter (Southeastern Alberta Bird Checklist 2013 – December to February) or on previous Christmas Bird Counts. They were not included in bird count totals.

Unlike 2014 when 9 species had high counts, only 2 species had high counts this year despite the record number of individuals observed (see table below). Of course,

Canada Geese had a high of 18,907, which also gave them the number 1 position in the Top Ten. The other species with a record high was Pileated Woodpecker (2).

Corvid numbers were down somewhat in 2015. Black-billed magpie numbers dropped about 16% to 417 from 499 in 2014. Larger declines were observed with American Crow and Common Raven. Both species had record highs in 2014 (41 and 15, respectively). In 2015, their numbers dropped more than 50% to 19 and 2, which were more in-line with long-term averages of 12 and 3. All 4 corvid species, which also include Blue Jays, still appear robust relative to lows from 2004 to 2009 associated with West Nile virus outbreaks.

Also of note was the lack of either waxwing species. Cedar Waxwings had a record high last year (50) and some Bohemian Waxwings were observed (6). Both species were noted as being present earlier in the fall. Likely, the scarcity of chokecherry and other berries, a primary food source, caused by the dry summer conditions was responsible.

No non-native species (Gray Partridge, Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Dove (Pigeon), Eurasian collared-dove, European Starling, or House Sparrow) had highs in 2015.

Further regarding the Top Ten Species, Mallards were second at 5,632, European Starlings third at 1,197, and Rock Doves (Pigeons) fourth at 1,031 individuals counted (see enclosed list below). The biggest change to the Top Ten was the appearance of Common Redpoll in the 9th position. This species can be highly irruptive; redpolls went from a record high in 2012 (1,259) to no observations the next year. The 141 individuals observed is similar to their long-term average (177).

Species generally seen on our CBC that were seen in 2015 but not in 2014 included the following: Snow Goose (2), Green-winged Teal (3), Bufflehead (8), Northern Harrier (1), Snowy Owl (2), Belted Kingfisher (1), and White-crowned Sparrow (2) (see full list below).

Notable species absent from this year's count other than waxwings were Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Northern Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Short-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, Horned Lark, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, Harris's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, and American Goldfinch.

Of these species, perhaps the one that stands out is the Horned Lark. This marks the 6th consecutive year of few to no observations (1 in 2010, 0 the past 5 years). Historically, Horned Larks averaged 287 individuals from 1982 – 1991 (range 1 to 1,151) and 54 from 1992 – 2013 (range 0 to 480).

A complete species list, along with data from the previous 3 years is enclosed below. Birders interested in the results of this and/or other Christmas bird counts can find them at <http://web4.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>. Your comments are welcomed, and should be forwarded to the Nature Line at (403) 529-6225 or marty.drut@natureline.info.

Good Birding!

Marty Drut

Marty Drut, Compiler
January 6, 2015

List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2015.

Species	2015 Total	Previous High	Year of Prev. High
HIGHS:			
TOTAL BIRDS	29,451	28,441	2014
Canada Goose	18,907	17,447	2014
Pileated Woodpecker	2	1	2014, 2013
LOWS:	None Reported		

Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2014 but were seen in 2015:

Species	Number Seen	Year Last Seen
Snow Goose	2	2005
Green-winged Teal	3	2013
Redhead	1	2012
Bufflehead	8	2013
Northern Harrier	1	2005
Mourning Dove	4	2013
Snowy Owl	2	2012
Belted Kingfisher	1	2012
White-crowned Sparrow	2	2013
Common Grackle	2	2012
White-winged Crossbill	1	2012

Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2015:

Species	Year Last Seen
Northern Pintail	2014
Northern Shoveler	2013
Gadwall	2012
Canvasback	2008
Greater Scaup	2009
Ring-necked Duck	2012
Northern Goshawk	2012
Cooper's Hawk	2013
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2014
Red-tailed Hawk	2012
Short-eared owl	2010
Northern Shrike	2013
Horned Lark	2010
Golden-crowned Kinglet	2014
Townsend's Solitaire	2014
Bohemian Waxwing	2014
Cedar Waxwing	2014
Harris's Sparrow	2012
White-throated Sparrow	2013
Evening Grosbeak	2007
Purple Finch	2009
American Goldfinch	2012

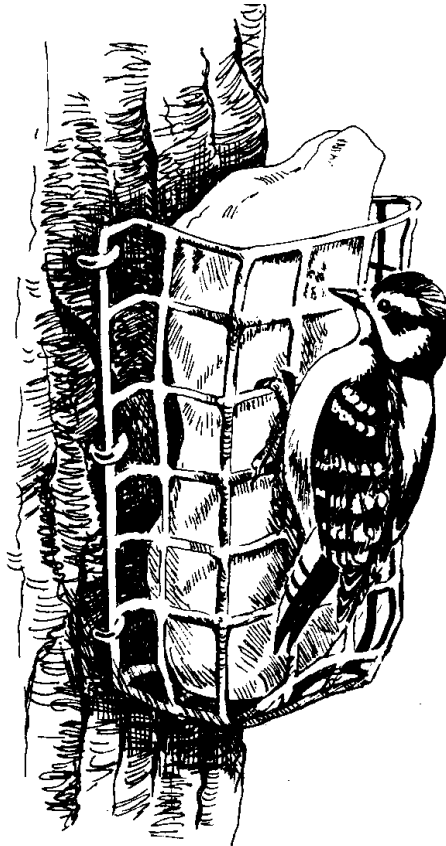
List 1. Top 10 Species:

Canada Goose -	18,907
Mallard -	5,632
European Starling -	1,197
Rock Dove (Pigeon) -	1,031
House Sparrow -	598
Black-billed Magpie -	417
House Finch -	349
Black-capped Chickadee -	240
Common Redpoll -	141
Eurasian Collared-dove -	140



FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein
Dan Schiebelbein
Jen Stroh
Kody Stroh
Ben Velner
Michael Velner
Cam Lockerbie
Jim Knelson
Rob Wapple
Lorrie Sielski
Bob Frew
Gary Martin
Donna Steele
Sue Higgins
Eileen Cowtan
Marty Drut
Lisa Bey
Geno Carlson
Jo-Anne Reynolds
Catherine Reynolds
Angela Turner
Ian Turner
Jim Marshall
Dave McKenzie
Maia Petersen
John Slater
Betty Rainville
Bill Piggott
Taylor Dell
Valerie Martins
Barry Anderson
Lauren Hider
Marie Stein
Darlene Black
Jim Black
Val Felesky
Charmain Trottier



FEEDER WATCHERS:

Barry Anderson
Joan Armour
John Dobbin
Keith Gerrard
Nelson Hogg
Lisa Holmes
George Lukasiewich
Linda Purchase
Dorothy Sager
Tim Sager
Lorrie Sielski
Judy Simmonds
Jack Simmonds
Donna Steele
Sue Higgins

New in 2015:

Dolores Beck
Harvey Beck
Howard Buffun
Verla Diamond
Pat Harding
Kim Marshall
Matt Read

SPECIES	Dec 20 *2015*	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013	Dec 16 2012
Canada Goose	18,907	17,447	6,647	10,475
Cackling Goose	-	3	-	1 NEW
White-fronted Goose	-	-	-	3 NEW
Snow Goose	2	-	-	-
Mallard	5,632	6,117	2,641	2,419
American Wigeon	2	1	-	2
Green-winged Teal	3	-	2	2
Northern Shoveler	-	-	2	2
Gadwall	-	-	-	3
Northern Pintail	-	1	-	-
Common Goldeneye	111	142	80	67
Bufflehead	8	-	2	2
Lesser Scaup	1	1	-	2
Redhead	1	-	-	1
Common Merganser	5	7	10	5
Hooded Merganser	-	-	-	CW ¹
American Coot	8	12	1	-
Bald Eagle	7	11	5	9
Golden Eagle	2	5	1	1
Merlin	4	4	2	7
American Kestrel	2	1	-	CW ¹
Prairie Falcon	2	4	1	2
Northern Harrier	1	-	-	-
Red-tailed Hawk	-	1	-	1
Rough-legged Hawk	9	6	4	1
Northern Goshawk	-	-	-	2
Cooper's Hawk	-	-	1	-
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	1	1	-
Gyr Falcon	-	-	CW ¹	-
Gray Partridge	72	25	55	21
Ring-necked Pheasant	57	103	165	41
Sharp-tailed Grouse	38	117	103	6
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	1,031	932	500	666
Eurasian Collared-dove	140	126	147	98
Mourning Dove	4	-	8	9
Great Horned Owl	8	11	5	2
Snowy Owl	2	-	-	4
Northern Saw-whet Owl	-	1 NEW	-	-
Long-eared Owl	-	-	CW ¹	-
Belted Kingfisher	1	-	-	2
Downy Woodpecker	36	48	31	50
Hairy Woodpecker	6	2	7	4
Northern Flicker	86	143	88	109
Pileated Woodpecker	2	1	1	-

SPECIES	Dec 20 *2015*	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013	Dec 16 2012
Blue Jay	59	61	83	56
Black-billed Magpie	417	499	466	534
American Crow	19	41	37	15
Common Raven	2	15	1	2
Black-capped Chickadee	240	280	191	304
Red-breasted Nuthatch	32	72	31	113
White-breasted Nuthatch	9	8	7	6
Brown Creeper	CW ¹	8	4	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	-	2	-	25
Townsend's Solitaire	-	1	-	2
American Robin	6	15	63	79
Varied Thrush	-	-	-	CW ¹
Bohemian Waxwing	-	6	5	203
Cedar Waxwing	-	50	27	14
European Starling	1,197	1,115	1,305	1,277
Northern Shrike	-	3	1	1
American Tree Sparrow	78	26	25	42
Harris's Sparrow	-	-	2	2
White-crowned Sparrow	2	-	1	-
White-throated Sparrow	-	-	1	-
Dark-eyed Junco	51	49	33	64
Pine Siskin	6	5	-	2
Snow Bunting	41	77	-	477
Common Grackle	2	-	-	1
Red-winged Blackbird	-	-	1	2
Rusty Blackbird	-	13	-	20
Common Redpoll	141	22	-	1,259
Hoary Redpoll	-	-	-	8
Pine Grosbeak	11	15	20	33
House Finch	349	279	329	389
Red Crossbill	CW ¹	1	-	-
White-winged Crossbill	1	-	-	7
American Goldfinch	-	-	-	3
House Sparrow	598	505	493	745

¹CW indicates species seen during count week

Count Statistics					
	Dec 20 2015	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013	Dec 16 2012	33 Year Average
TOTAL SPECIES	51	53	48	62	45
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	29,541	28,441	13,636	19,706	12,615
Participants	37	40	31	35	36
Walking hours	46.5	54.0	45.5	52.0	45.0
Walking km	77.5	91.0	80.5	90.0	83.0
Driving hours	42.5	37.0	88.0	40.0	29.0
Driving km	745	643.0	531.5	636.5	434.0
Feeder hours	47.5	62.0	36.5	72.5	26.0
Temp °C min/max	-15/2	-4/4	-21/-16	-8/0	-12/-4
Snow cover	0-2cm	0-5cm	5-15cm	0-5cm	5-12cm
Weather - Sky	Cloudy Windy	Cloudy Rain in PM	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Sunny	N/A

