



# MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS  
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

## 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count (2016)

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

Dear Birder:

Many thanks to the 41 participants who surveyed territories during the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on Sunday, December 18. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 18 feeder watchers who participated including 3 new contributors. The Interpretive Program continues to ask Hatters with feeders to monitor them on count day and there has been a consistent group of 15 to 25 observers annually. Having these folks participate usually adds one or more species seen exclusively by feeder watchers to the count's species total.

Count day temperatures were relatively mild (Low = -10°/High = -1°C); however, it was a blustery day with wind speeds of 40-50 km/hr and gusts to 90 km/hr. Most observers reported reduced bird activity for their assigned areas and feeder watchers also indicated the same. Snow levels were low and no one reported any difficulties with access. All 24 territories were assigned and surveyed this year.

Despite the windy conditions, 52 species were observed, which was 1 more than 2015, similar to species totals since 2001 (average = 55), and about 15% above the long-term average (34 years) of 45. The wind likely impacted the number of individual birds observed. In 2016, there were 18,337 individual birds counted, which was 38% below last year's record total of 29,451. The 2016 number was still relatively close to the 10-year average (20,400) and 40% above the long-term average (13,262). Declines in individuals observed were most apparent with Canada Geese and Mallards as they were down 48% and 40%, respectively from 2015. It is possible the windy conditions kept these species grounded in areas inaccessible to observers, although some individuals may have left the area because of frigid temperatures earlier in December. One other species, European Starling, exhibited a large decline; this year's total (380) was the lowest since 2010 (471) and 68% less than last year (1,197) and 14% below the long-term average (442). In comparison, Starling's averaged 1,274 from 2011 through 2015. Reasons for the 1-year decline are not clear at this time.

Feeder watchers observed 1 species (Sharp-shinned Hawk) exclusive of those monitoring assigned territories. One species, White-breasted Nuthatch was observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. No new species to the count were found in 2016.

Similarly to 2015, there were 2 species with high counts this year and they were Eurasian Collared-doves (211, previous high 147 in 2013) and American Crows (62, previous high 41 in 2014). Collared-doves first appeared on our CBC in 2003 and have increased steadily since then. The record Crow numbers this year were mirrored by an 34% increase in Black-billed Magpie numbers from 2015 and were indicative of Corvids returning to levels similar to those observed before West Nile impacted populations from 2004 to 2009.

Regarding the Top Ten Species, the list remained consistent from 2015 with Canada Goose and Mallard leading the way despite fewer individuals observed this year. The 2 most noticeable changes were European Starlings dropping down from third to the seventh position and Common Redpolls were replaced by Snow Buntings. The Snow Buntings were seen in 2 flocks by the same observer south of Medicine Hat.

Three species of note reappeared on the CBC in 2016 after short absences. Horned Larks (79) had not been observed in 5 years and the 2 waxwings (Bohemian, 51 and Cedar, 5) were absent from the 2015 CBC. Four other species were observed this year after extensive absences: Hooded Merganser (2, last seen 2004), Song Sparrow (1, last seen 2004), Western Meadowlark (2, last seen 2007), and Brewer's Blackbird (3, last seen 1999). Other species generally counted on our CBC that were seen in 2016 but not in 2015 included: Sharp-shinned Hawk (1), Northern Goshawk (2), Northern Shrike (1), Brown Creeper (3), Golden-crowned Kinglet (1), and Townsend's Solitaire (1).

There were 26 species typically seen on our CBC that were not observed in 2016 (see full list in table below). Of those, 6 species have not been observed for more than 5 years: Canvasback (2008), Greater Scaup (2009), Northern Harrier (2005), Short-eared Owl (2010), Purple Finch (2009), and Evening Grosbeak (2007).

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](mailto:marty.drut@natureline.info).

Good Birding!

*Marty Drut*

Marty Drut, Compiler  
January 4, 2017

List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2016.

Species	2016 Total	Previous High	Year of Prev. High
HIGHS:			
Eurasian Collared-dove	211	147	2013
American Crow	62	41	2014
LOWS:	None Reported		

Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2015 but were seen in 2016:

Species	Number Seen	Year Last Seen
Hooded Merganser	2	2004
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	2014
Northern Goshawk	2	2012
Northern Shrike	1	2013
Horned Lark	79	2010
Brown Creeper	3	2014
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	2014
Townsend's Solitaire	1	2014
Bohemian Waxwing	51	2014
Cedar Waxwing	5	2014
Song Sparrow	1	2004
Western Meadowlark	2	2007
Brewer's Blackbird	3	1999

Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2016:

Species	Year Last Seen
Northern Pintail	2014
Northern Shoveler	2013
Gadwall	2012
Green-winged Teal	2015
Redhead	2015
Canvasback	2008
Greater Scaup	2009
Ring-necked Duck	2012
Northern Harrier	2005
Cooper's Hawk	2013
Red-tailed Hawk	2012
American Kestrel	2015
Short-eared owl	2010
Belted Kingfisher	2015
Pileated Woodpecker	2015
Harris's Sparrow	2012
White-throated Sparrow	2013
White-crowned Sparrow	2015
Rusty Blackbird	2014
Common Grackle	2015
Pine Grosbeak	2015
Purple Finch	2009
American Goldfinch	2012
Red Crossbill	2012
White-winged Crossbill	2015
Evening Grosbeak	2007

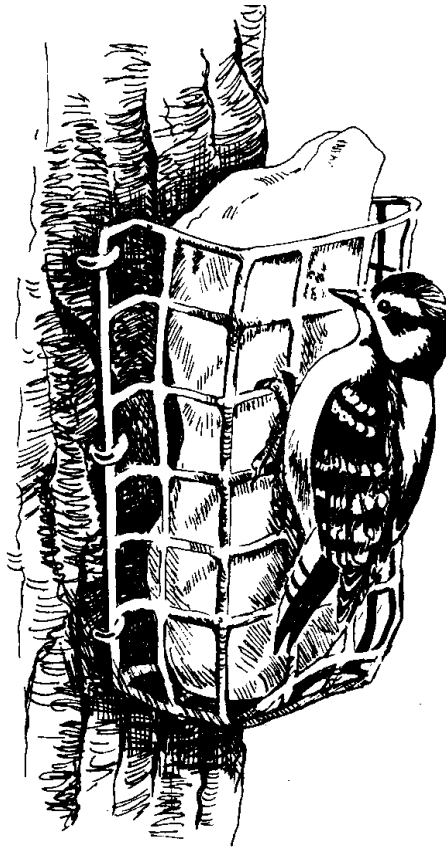
## Top 10 Species:

Canada Goose -	9,889
Mallard -	3,382
Rock Dove (Pigeon) -	1,384
House Sparrow -	757
Black-billed Magpie -	557
House Finch -	473
European Starling -	380
Black-capped Chickadee -	264
Eurasian Collared-dove -	211
Snow Bunting -	118



FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein  
Dan Schiebelbein  
Jen Stroh  
Ben Velner  
Michael Velner  
Nathan Zimmerman\*  
Milt Spitzer  
Ian Wallis\*  
Rob Wapple  
Bob Frew  
Rob Gardner  
Donna Steele  
Sue Higgins  
Eileen Cowtan  
Cam Lockerbie  
Jim Knelson  
Marty Drut  
Cash Moore\*  
Hugh Armstrong  
Dee Armstrong  
Jo-Anne Reynolds  
Ian Turner  
Angela Turner  
Jim Marshall  
Wendy Blackwell\*  
Dave McKenzie  
Dale Holmes  
John Slater  
Bill Piggott  
Betty Rainville  
Taylor Dell  
Barry Anderson  
Judy Anderson  
Lauren Hider  
Marie Stein  
Anneke Baker  
Jim Black  
Darlene Black  
Val Felesky  
Donna Robinson\*  
Genevieve Mathieu\*



FEEDER WATCHERS:  
(If not already listed under  
Field Participants)

Rob Benn  
Verla Diamond  
John Dobbin  
Keith Gerrard  
Nelson Hogg  
Sharon Hogg  
Lisa Holmes  
Rena McVeigh  
Gordon Meyers  
Jennifer Nygaard  
Dorothy Sager  
Tim Sager  
Lorrie Sielski  
Judy Simmonds  
Jack Simmonds

New in 2016:  
Marie AuCoin  
Len Boris  
Bill Haysom

\*New Field Participants in 2016

SPECIES	Dec 18 *2016*	Dec 20 2015	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013
Canada Goose	9,889	18,907	17,447	6,647
Cackling Goose	-	-	3	-
Snow Goose	-	2	-	-
Mallard	3,382	5,632	6,117	2,641
American Wigeon	1	2	1	-
Green-winged Teal	-	3	-	2
Northern Shoveler	-	-	-	2
Gadwall	-	-	-	-
Northern Pintail	-	-	1	-
Common Goldeneye	76	111	142	80
Bufflehead	5	8	-	2
Lesser Scaup	3	1	1	-
Redhead	-	1	-	-
Common Merganser	15	5	7	10
Hooded Merganser	2	-	-	-
American Coot	2	8	12	1
Bald Eagle	26	7	11	5
Golden Eagle	3	2	5	1
Merlin	2	4	4	2
American Kestrel	-	2	1	-
Prairie Falcon	1	2	4	1
Northern Harrier	-	1	-	-
Red-tailed Hawk	-	-	1	-
Rough-legged Hawk	6	9	6	4
Northern Goshawk	2	-	-	-
Cooper's Hawk	-	-	-	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	-	1	1
Gyr Falcon	-	-	-	CW <sup>1</sup>
Gray Partridge	60	72	25	55
Ring-necked Pheasant	111	57	103	165
Sharp-tailed Grouse	58	38	117	103
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	1,384	1,031	932	500
Eurasian Collared-dove	211	140	126	147
Mourning Dove	3	4	-	8
Great Horned Owl	2	8	11	5
Snowy Owl	1	2	-	-
Northern Saw-whet Owl	-	-	1 <i>NEW</i>	-
Long-eared Owl	-	-	-	CW <sup>1</sup>
Belted Kingfisher	-	1	-	-
Downy Woodpecker	27	36	48	31
Hairy Woodpecker	2	6	2	7
Northern Flicker	85	86	143	88
Pileated Woodpecker	-	2	1	1
Horned Lark	79	-	-	-

SPECIES	Dec 18 *2016*	Dec 20 2015	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013
Blue Jay	31	59	61	83
Black-billed Magpie	557	417	499	466
American Crow	62	19	41	37
Common Raven	14	2	15	1
Black-capped Chickadee	264	240	280	191
Red-breasted Nuthatch	46	32	72	31
White-breasted Nuthatch	CW <sup>1</sup>	9	8	7
Brown Creeper	3	CW <sup>1</sup>	8	4
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	-	2	-
Townsend's Solitaire	1	-	1	-
American Robin	9	6	15	63
Bohemian Waxwing	51	-	6	5
Cedar Waxwing	5	-	50	27
European Starling	380	1,197	1,115	1,305
Northern Shrike	1	-	3	1
American Tree Sparrow	15	78	26	25
Harris's Sparrow	-	-	-	2
White-crowned Sparrow	-	2	-	1
White-throated Sparrow	-	-	-	1
Song Sparrow	1			
Dark-eyed Junco	49	51	49	33
Pine Siskin	38	6	5	-
Snow Bunting	118	41	77	-
Common Grackle	-	2	-	-
Red-winged Blackbird	-	-	-	1
Brewer's Blackbird	3	-	-	-
Rusty Blackbird	-	-	13	-
Western Meadowlark	2	-	-	-
Common Redpoll	17	141	22	-
Pine Grosbeak	-	11	15	20
House Finch	473	349	279	329
Red Crossbill	-	-	1	-
White-winged Crossbill	-	1	-	-
House Sparrow	757	598	505	493

<sup>1</sup>CW indicates species seen during count week but not on count day



<b>Count Statistics</b>					
	Dec 18 2016	Dec 20 2015	Dec 21 2014	Dec 22 2013	34 Year Average
TOTAL SPECIES	52	51	53	48	45
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	18,337	29,541	28,441	13,636	13,262
Participants	41	37	40	31	36
Walking hours	38.0	46.5	54.0	45.5	44.0
Walking km	63.0	77.5	91.0	80.5	82.0
Driving hours	38.5	42.5	37.0	88.0	29.0
Driving km	608.5	745	643.0	531.5	448.0
Feeder hours	37.0	47.5	62.0	36.5	27.0
Temp °C min/max	-10/-1	-15/2	-4/4	-21/-16	-12/-4
Snow cover	0-2cm	0-2cm	0-5cm	5-15cm	4-11cm
Weather - Sky	Very Windy	Cloudy Windy	Cloudy Rain in PM	Mostly Sunny	N/A