



MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

36th Annual Christmas Bird Count (2017)

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

Many thanks to the 39 participants, including 4 new contributors, who surveyed territories during the Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on Sunday, December 17. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 17 feeder watchers who participated. 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 = -4°/High = 6°C) and winds were moderate (SW 15 to 25 km/hr). There was a light dusting of snow starting at 9:30 AM that lasted about 30 minutes but by afternoon it had melted and did not impact the count. One of the 24 territories in our count circle was not surveyed because of a last minute illness.

In 2017, 51 species were observed, which was 1 less than 2016, similar to species totals since 2001 (average = 55), and about 12% above the long-term average (35 years) of 46. Total individual birds counted (26,662) were 45% above 2016's total (18,337) and well above the long-term and 10-year averages (13,634 and 19,957, respectively). Most of this increase was attributed to the record number of Canada Geese (19,848) observed in this year's count. However, the individual bird total was not a count record as Mallards were 49% less than 2016 (3,382) and well below their record high in 2009 and their 10-year average (9,461 and 4,395, respectively). One other species that usually contributes heavily to the individual bird total, European Starling, exhibited a decline for the second consecutive year; this year's total (348) was 8% less than last year (360) and 21% below the long-term average (440). In contrast, Starling's averaged 1,274 from 2011 through 2015.

Feeder watchers did not observe any species exclusive of those monitoring assigned territories but had some great observations including Mourning Dove (1), Brown Creeper (1), and Cedar Waxwing (4). Four species, Belted Kingfisher (2), Townsend's Solitaire (1), Pine Siskin (1), and Common Grackle (16), were observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. No new species to the count were found in 2017.

In addition to Canada Goose, there were 3 species with high counts this year (Table 1). They were American Coot (20, previous high 12 in 2014), Eurasian Collared-dove (260,

previous high 211 in 2016) and Red-winged Blackbird (21, previous high 4 in 1993). The high for Geese likely involved some double counted birds as flocks moved across territories during count day. Collared-doves first appeared on our CBC in 2003 and have increased steadily since then.

Regarding the Top Ten Species, the list remained consistent from 2016 with Canada Goose leading the way. Mallards remained in the second spot despite fewer individuals observed this year. The most noticeable change was the return of Common Redpoll to the list as they replaced Snow Bunting. The other 7 species were on the list in 2016.

Two Corvid species exhibited notable observations in 2017: Black-billed Magpies had their highest total (711) since 2003 (624) and appear to be fully recovered from low numbers during 2004 to 2009 (171 in 2008) likely associated with West Nile Virus; Common Ravens were at or near record numbers 3 of the past 4 years. Ravens were observed in 1982, the first year of our count, then not again until 2006 and only in small numbers (≤ 2) up to 2014. Also, Horned Lark (1) returned to its recent trend of few observations (≤ 1 from 2010 through 2015).

Nine species returned to the count in 2017 after relatively short absences. Greater Scaup (1) was last observed in 2009 whereas the other 6 species were last seen within the past 2 to 3 years – see Table 2 below for details.

There were 25 species typically seen on our CBC that were not observed in 2017 (see full list in Table 3 below). One species, Bohemian Waxwing, was observed in 2016 but had exhibited low numbers in recent counts. Of the remaining, 6 species have not been observed for more than 5 years: Canvasback (2008), Northern Harrier (2005), Short-eared Owl (2010), Purple Finch (2009), and Evening Grosbeak (2007).

I have also included a graph of House Sparrow and House Finch observations from our CBC (Figure 1). Some participants commented that House Sparrow numbers seemed low. House Sparrow observations decreased after House Finches appeared in 1995; both populations appear to be stable and observations seem to track annually.

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, 2018

Table 1. List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2017

| Species | 2017 Total | Previous High | Year of Prev. High |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| HIGHS: | | | |
| Canada Goose | 19,848 | 18,907 | 2015 |
| American Coot | 20 | 12 | 2014 |
| Eurasian Collared-dove | 260 | 211 | 2016 |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 21 | 4 | 1993 |
| | | | |
| LOWS: | None Reported | | |

Table 2. Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2016 but were seen in 2017:

| Species | Number Seen | Year Last Seen |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Green-winged Teal | 1 | 2015 |
| Greater Scaup | 1 | 2009 |
| American Kestrel | 1 | 2015 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 1 | 2014 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 1 | 2015 |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 2 | 2015 |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 21 | 2013 |
| Rusty Blackbird | 23 | 2014 |
| Pine Grosbeak | 8 | 2015 |

Table 3. Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2017:

| Species | Year Last Seen |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Northern Pintail | 2014 |
| Northern Shoveler | 2013 |
| Gadwall | 2012 |
| American Wigeon | 2016 |
| Redhead | 2015 |
| Canvasback | 2008 |
| Ring-necked Duck | 2012 |
| Northern Harrier | 2005 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 2013 |
| Short-eared owl | 2010 |
| Belted Kingfisher | 2015 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 2016 |
| Townsend's Solitaire | 2016 |
| Bohemian Waxwing | 2016 |
| Harris's Sparrow | 2012 |
| White-throated Sparrow | 2013 |
| White-crowned Sparrow | 2015 |
| Pine Siskin | 2016 |
| Snow Bunting | 2016 |
| Common Grackle | 2015 |
| Purple Finch | 2009 |
| American Goldfinch | 2012 |
| Red Crossbill | 2012 |
| White-winged Crossbill | 2015 |
| Evening Grosbeak | 2007 |

Top 10 Species:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Canada Goose - | 19,848 |
| Mallard - | 1,740 |
| Rock Dove (Pigeon) - | 1,648 |
| Black-billed Magpie - | 711 |
| House Sparrow - | 569 |
| European Starling - | 348 |
| Black-capped Chickadee - | 275 |
| Common Redpoll - | 272 |
| Eurasian Collared-dove - | 260 |
| House Finch - | 238 |

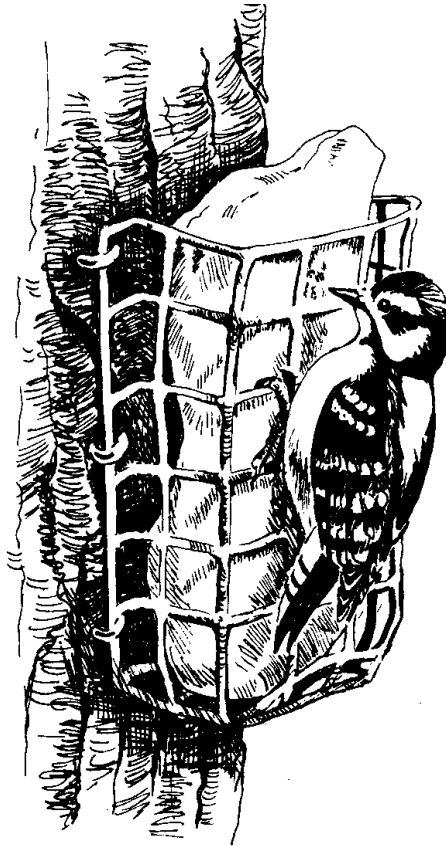


FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein
Dan Schiebelbein
Rob Gardner
Corlaine Gardner
Amy Moores*
Ben Velner
Michael Velner
Alfred Keep
Rob Wapple
Bob Frew
Milt Spitzer
Ian Wallis
Donna Steele
Linda Fisher
Dwayne Myers*
Colton Prins
Cash Moore
Marty Drut
Wendy Blackwell
Debbie Palalia*
Cam Lockerbie
Ian Turner
Angela Turner
Jim Marshall
Lorine Marshall
Dave McKenzie
Dale Holmes
John Slater
Betty Rainville
Taylor Dell
Genevieve Mathieu
Ivan Zigmunic*
Barry Anderson
Judy Anderson
Lauren Hider
Jim Black
Darlene Black
Val Felesky
Charmaine Leidal

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

Marie AuCoin
Rob Benn
Verla Diamond
John Dobbin
Calvin Eddy
Keith Gerrard
Nelson Hogg
Lisa Holmes
Gordon Meyers
Bernice Morrison
Jennifer Nygaard
Linda Purchase
Lorrie Sielski
Judy Simmonds
Jack Simmonds
Randy Stotz
Sandra Wilson



*New Field Participants in 2017

| SPECIES | Dec 17 2017 | Dec 18 2016 | Dec 20 2015 | Dec 21 2014 |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Canada Goose | 19,848 | 9,889 | 18,907 | 17,447 |
| Cackling Goose | - | - | - | 3 |
| Snow Goose | - | - | 2 | - |
| Mallard | 1,740 | 3,382 | 5,632 | 6,117 |
| American Wigeon | - | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Green-winged Teal | 1 | - | 3 | - |
| Northern Pintail | - | - | - | 1 |
| Common Goldeneye | 49 | 76 | 111 | 142 |
| Bufflehead | 5 | 5 | 8 | - |
| Lesser Scaup | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Greater Scaup | 1 | - | - | - |
| Redhead | - | - | 1 | - |
| Common Merganser | 15 | 15 | 5 | 7 |
| Hooded Merganser | - | 2 | - | - |
| American Coot | 20 | 2 | 8 | 12 |
| Bald Eagle | 11 | 26 | 7 | 11 |
| Golden Eagle | 6 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Merlin | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| American Kestrel | 1 | - | 2 | 1 |
| Prairie Falcon | 5 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Northern Harrier | - | - | 1 | - |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 4 | 6 | 9 | 6 |
| Northern Goshawk | 2 | 2 | - | - |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 1 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Gray Partridge | 4 | 60 | 72 | 25 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 82 | 111 | 57 | 103 |
| Sharp-tailed Grouse | 32 | 58 | 38 | 117 |
| Rock Dove (Pigeon) | 1,648 | 1,384 | 1,031 | 932 |
| Eurasian Collared-dove | 260 | 211 | 140 | 126 |
| Mourning Dove | 2 | 3 | 4 | - |
| Great Horned Owl | 6 | 2 | 8 | 11 |
| Snowy Owl | 1 | 1 | 2 | - |
| Northern Saw-whet Owl | - | - | - | 1 NEW |
| Belted Kingfisher | CW ¹ | - | 1 | - |
| Downy Woodpecker | 28 | 27 | 36 | 48 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 3 | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Northern Flicker | 142 | 85 | 86 | 143 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 1 | - | 2 | 1 |
| Horned Lark | 1 | 79 | - | - |
| Blue Jay | 75 | 31 | 59 | 61 |
| Black-billed Magpie | 711 | 557 | 417 | 499 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|
| American Crow | 24 | 62 | 19 | 41 |
| Common Raven | 15 | 14 | 2 | 15 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 275 | 264 | 240 | 280 |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | 54 | 46 | 32 | 72 |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 2 | CW ¹ | 9 | 8 |
| Brown Creeper | 2 | 3 | CW ¹ | 8 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Townsend's Solitaire | CW ¹ | 1 | - | 1 |
| American Robin | 38 | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| Bohemian Waxwing | - | 51 | - | 6 |
| Cedar Waxwing | 7 | 5 | - | 50 |
| European Starling | 348 | 380 | 1,197 | 1,115 |
| Northern Shrike | 2 | 1 | - | 3 |
| American Tree Sparrow | 11 | 15 | 78 | 26 |
| White-crowned Sparrow | - | - | 2 | - |
| Song Sparrow | - | 1 | - | - |
| Dark-eyed Junco | 42 | 49 | 51 | 49 |
| Pine Siskin | CW ¹ | 38 | 6 | 5 |
| Snow Bunting | - | 118 | 41 | 77 |
| Common Grackle | CW ¹ | - | 2 | - |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 21 | - | - | - |
| Brewer's Blackbird | - | 3 | - | - |
| Rusty Blackbird | 23 | - | - | 13 |
| Western Meadowlark | - | 2 | - | - |
| Common Redpoll | 272 | 17 | 141 | 22 |
| Pine Grosbeak | 8 | - | 11 | 15 |
| House Finch | 238 | 473 | 349 | 279 |
| Red Crossbill | - | - | - | 1 |
| White-winged Crossbill | - | - | 1 | - |
| House Sparrow | 569 | 757 | 598 | 505 |

¹CW indicates species seen during count week but not on count day

| Count Statistics | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | Dec 17 2017 | Dec 18 2016 | Dec 20 2015 | Dec 21 2014 | 35 Year Average |
| TOTAL SPECIES | 51 | 52 | 51 | 53 | 45 |
| TOTAL INDIVIDUALS | 26,662 | 18,337 | 29,541 | 28,441 | 13,262 |
| Participants | 39 | 41 | 37 | 40 | 36 |
| Walking hours | 50.5 | 38.0 | 46.5 | 54.0 | 44.0 |
| Walking km | 103.0 | 63.0 | 77.5 | 91.0 | 82.0 |
| Driving hours | 37.5 | 38.5 | 42.5 | 37.0 | 29.0 |
| Driving km | 654.5 | 608.5 | 745 | 643.0 | 448.0 |
| Biking hours | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Biking km | 26 | - | - | - | - |
| Feeder hours | 53.0 | 37.0 | 47.5 | 62.0 | 27.0 |
| Temp °C min/max | -4/6 | -10/-1 | -15/2 | -4/4 | -12/-4 |
| Snow cover | 0-1cm | 0-2cm | 0-2cm | 0-5cm | 4-11cm |
| Weather - Sky | Mostly Sunny | Very Windy | Cloudy Windy | Cloudy Rain in PM | N/A |

Figure 1. Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count Totals for House Sparrow (1982 to 2017) and House Finch (1995 to 2017). House Sparrows were observed each year of the MHCBC and House Finches were first observed in 1995.

