



NEWSLETTER

January / February 2020

Results of the 74th Annual Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 21, 2019 by Jacco Gelderloos

In quite a few respects, the month or so leading up to our 2019 count mirrored the same period in 2018. On Veterans Day, a major snow storm hit southeast Michigan, dumping nearly a foot of the white stuff on most of our count circle. Following this storm a significant cold snap pushed low temperatures into single-digit territory for several days in a row. This push of arctic air also likely brought with it the Gyrfalcon that was present off and on at Grace Lake, around Willow Run Airport, and in the Vreeland-Gotfredson Road corridor for an extended period, bringing joy to many, many birders (and disappointment to quite a few others, due to its habit of moving around extensively).

Although the thrill of seeing that mighty falcon from up north softened the blow of winter having arrived with such a vengeance, it also planted the seed of worry. What if this was the start of a prolonged cold period that was going to affect the success of our CBC?? Well, I need not have worried—the cold snap turned out to be just that, a quick hit. The second half of November and start of December were all seasonable, with little in the way of precipitation and temperatures in a far more normal (or warmer) range—I, for one, cannot recall a more “comfortable” gull trip to the Salem Township landfill. Forecasts for count day turned out to be borderline balmy: lows in the mid-20s and highs into the mid-40s! With little in the way of wind, snow, or rain to worry about, we were all set for an uncomplicated count. The “pleasant” forecast also had a positive effect on the number of people that signed up to volunteer for the count: we ended up with some 70 field observers (the highest since 2012) and a whopping 18 volunteers watching their feeders! That constitutes double the previous high of 9 in that category—and, several goodies were turned up by these folks.

Due to the uneventful weather in the weeks leading up to our count, counters were not at all hampered by snowy roads—some trails had trace amounts of snow, but nothing too worrisome. As is typical, most still water was frozen over (some open spots remained here and there and produced some excellent birds), but running water was essentially

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President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon,

As I write this letter, snow falls here in Ann Arbor, a February storm. It's peaceful and still outside, with nowhere to go, and only these words before me. I'm thinking about the year ahead, about New Year's resolutions present and past. As always, I have the same goals. I want to see more birds and help connect more people with birds and birding.

I am grateful for all our members and greatly indebted to the hardworking Washtenaw Audubon Board. By the next edition of this document, Nancy Davis, our Newsletter Chair, who has been creating our newsletter since the summer of 2014, will be handing off the reins to Christmas Bird Count Compiler and keen birder, Jacco Gelderloos. Please join me in thanking my dear friend, Nancy, for a job very well done, and welcoming Jacco to the WAS Board.

I quote from the January 1971 edition of the Washtenaw Audubon Society Newsletter, from then WAS President, Art Carpenter: "Audubon is for people. And a better world for people to live in. Let's all try to do more in the coming year to make the world better for people and birds." I couldn't say it better.

Here are some upcoming field trips that we don't have room for in the Field Trips section. I hope to see you at these events, and our upcoming programs. And may we meet by happenstance at the next cool bird.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President

Thursdays, Beginning March 26, 2020, 8:00 a.m. (March 26, April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, May 7, 14, 21, 28)

Spring Migration Walks at Nichols Arboretum

Join us at Nichols Arboretum Thursday mornings to observe migrants making their way north. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. Meet at the east end of the Arboretum. Off of Geddes Ave., take a left onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac.

Friday, March 27, 2020, 7:30 p.m.

Woodcock Walk at Barton Nature Area

If you have never witnessed the display of the American Woodcock, you should join us for this event. Meet at the Barton Nature Area parking lot off of Huron River Drive, 250 feet north of Bird Road.

Leader: Ray Stocking



From the Ann Arbor CBC

Left: Northern Mockingbird, Juliet Berger

Above: Red-tailed Hawk, Jacco Gelderloos

74th Annual Christmas Bird Count

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open. As was the case last year, these positives proved to have a negative side as well: without harsher conditions pushing them into concentrations, birds were well spread out throughout the circle. Several counters commented on encountering quite a few areas where avian life was hard to come by. Such are the challenges of CBC birding!

All in all, 69 species (and a hybrid) were found on count day, with four additional species reported during count week (all waterfowl). This total of 73 species is marginally above the 10-year average of 72.2, and just slightly more above the 20-year average of 71.4. Likewise, the 26,843 individual birds we counted were about as close to the 10-year average, i.e., 26,933 birds, as could conceivably be. It seems our CBC has settled into a run of very similar counts over the past decade or so.

Had it not been for the four “extras” turned up during count week, it would be safe to say that this year’s variety of waterfowl was a tad so-so. With the exception of a drake Redhead found in an open patch of the main pond in the Stonebridge subdivision, no unusual ducks (or geese) were located on count day, although the count week drake Northern Pintail and Lesser Scaup are certainly of note. The count week record for Tundra Swan was notable, as was the near-parity between Mute and Trumpeter Swan (34 v. 33), especially after last year’s 5-1 balance in favor of Mute Swan! Interestingly, although pretty much all puddle ducks were scarce, the 13 American Black Ducks were the highest in five years and some 37% above the recent 10-year average. After the 2018 record high of 34, this year’s very paltry tally of only two Gadwall was rather puzzling.

The picture painted by waterfowl basically matched that of the other (more or less) water-dependent species. We turned up a very respectable two Pied-billed Grebes, but somehow missed American Coot. Both Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfisher were well-represented throughout the circle, with the former continuing a now three-year streak of double-digit tallies. On the flip side, both regular gull species posted tallies some 38% below their recent 10-year averages! Perhaps one of the nearby active landfills had drawn them away from our circle?

Birds of prey had an excellent year: all three *buteos* were found, with three Red-shouldered Hawks constituting the highest count since 1959 (not a typo!), and Red-tailed Hawk registering the first three-digit tally since the 1999 record high. Similarly, Bald Eagle continues its upward trend—the record high of 14 most likely involves local nesters that were able to stick around courtesy of the pockets of open water. The three falcon species were thinly spread throughout the circle, but for the fifth year in a row all three were at least recorded. Over the past few years, I have mused about the impending loss of American Kestrel as a regular from our count, but so far it’s hanging in there. Three Turkey Vultures are likely indicative of that species’ efforts to slowly expand its wintering range into southern Michigan (we’ve found them on six of the past 10 CBCs).

Some 15 hours of owling presented a rather confusing set of results: for the first time since 1993, Great Horned Owls ever so slightly outnumbered Eastern Screech-Owls. This state of affairs is unsurprising when you realize that Screech-Owl numbers were down 31%, whereas Great Horned Owls were up by a whopping 64% over the recent 10-year average! We’ll have to see if this parity will persist in years to come, or if the normal balance between the two species will be restored. No other owl species were found—one of these years that Barred Owl will sound off...

As had been more or less expected, Ring-necked Pheasant was missed during this year’s CBC and over the last three years we’ve only posted a count week record for the species. As things stand, three of the four local grouse species (Ruffed Grouse, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Northern Bobwhite) are now gone from the Ann Arbor CBC circle, and they are hanging on for dear life in Washtenaw County in general, I dare say. Contrast that with yet another strong showing of Wild Turkey—it’s safe to say we can now expect to record (well) over a hundred and they continue their expansion into ever more, even urban, areas. I, for one, do not think that the loss of the three is made up for by the success of the fourth, although I love finding a large flock of turkeys as much as anyone.

Instead of recounting yet again how well our woodpecker population is doing (although it is, with yet another 450+ observed), I think it would be no more than appropriate to shine the spotlight on the largest of our seven species, the Pileated Woodpecker. As many of you will recall, the first ever record for this species for our CBC was a mere decade ago, in 2008. That find, courtesy of Andy Johnson (one of a long line of excellent young WAS birders), was the start of an ever-upward trend that shows little sign of slowing. For five years running, Pileateds have either tied or broken the high mark they set the previous year, but more notably, they have expanded their range into every corner of the CBC circle. Previously, they were more or less confined to the northwestern quadrant of the circle but starting this year we can expect

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74th Annual Christmas Bird Count

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to find them in every one of the eight count areas! Maturing woodlots are clearly supporting a serious population boom of this stunning bird. Although we missed Red-headed Woodpecker after last year's impressive three, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (first one since 2015) was a nice consolation prize.

Taxonomically speaking, the highlight of the 2019 Ann Arbor CBC could be found at the beginning of the songbird category. A very hardy EASTERN PHOEBE had found itself a home on private property in the southwestern corner of our circle, making for only the second ever record since adding that species to our cumulative CBC list in 2015. Always a good find, a Northern Shrike was located for the second year in a row, which makes for a very welcome set of records after the drought that started in 2012. American Crows and Blue Jays both posted numbers well above the recent 10-year average and look to continue their recovery from the ravages of the West Nile virus. Open country passerines were, in a word, absent, with only a single Horned Lark preventing a three-way blank in this category.

There was quite a bit of positive news from the group of small, mostly insectivorous species. Black-capped Chickadees posted a roughly average tally, but Tufted Titmouse hit a new record high of 295 and may well break the 300-mark soon. In the absence of an irruption of northern birds, Red-breasted Nuthatches were limited to a few birds associated with the small local breeding population, but their White-breasted relative posted yet another well-above average (+13%) count, as did the closely related Brown Creeper (+39%). Wrens had a banner year, with a whopping four Winter Wrens (highest since 1975) extending the streak of their presence on our count to six years, and Carolina Wren posting a record high of 64. Mild winters and feeding stations are clearly helping these feisty little birds. The two kinglet species did not share in this bounty, unfortunately: the more common Golden-crowned Kinglet was down 42% compared to the 10-year average, and the rarer Ruby-crowned Kinglet was missed altogether—of course, the latter has only been found on three of the last 10 CBCs, so missing it isn't all that surprising. Finding a Yellow-rumped Warbler last happened in 2014, so that hardy parulid was certainly a welcome re-entry on our tally sheet!

Looking over the numbers for berry-eating species, I cannot help but be rather puzzled. On the one hand, European Starling recovered from last year's paltry count (+7%), Eastern Bluebird had another good year (+12%), and for the fourth year in a row we recorded a Northern Mockingbird at "its" patch in Gallup Park. However, the three other "regulars" in this group had yet another poor showing: we missed Hermit Thrush altogether, American Robins were nearly 50% below the 10-year average, and Cedar Waxwing followed up last year's low tally with another one (-43%). Are robins and waxwings simply not in our circle because food is available elsewhere? Based on the bluebirds' good run of form of late (and judging by the presence of plenty of fruit on the trees in our area), I cannot help but think that the grass is simply greener elsewhere. Perhaps next year's results will help clarify things some.

For sparrows, I can essentially re-type my note from 2018: we found seven species (one fewer than last year), Song Sparrows did well (+32%), the other regulars did not. Presumably, mild weather allowed winter migrants to stay to our north, which would explain another year of low numbers for American Tree Sparrow (-73%) and Dark-eyed Junco (-25%). Swamp and White-throated Sparrow were present in roughly average numbers, and a White-crowned and two (!) Field Sparrows brought some excitement in this group. The latter was only the third count day record in the past two decades, and the highest tally since 1992—amazingly, they were found together (and photographed) on the same piece of private property!

Blackbirds continued recent trends, with two species spread over three areas. Brown-headed Cowbirds have now turned up every year since 2012, although numbers have definitely moderated since the two triple-digit tallies at the start of that streak! After a long period of being found only occasionally on our count, Common Grackles were counted for the fourth time in the last five years—will they soon be a more or less expected member of our CBC avifauna?

Finches had a decidedly lackluster year—House Finch was 33% below average, American Goldfinch was 47% below, and, in spite of last year's near-record count, Pine Siskin was missing altogether. No other finches were present, unfortunately. Extending this negative trend, both House Sparrow (-10%) and Northern Cardinal (-14%) also underperformed rather notably.

Much like what happened in 2018, the run-up to the 2019 count was started by a cold period in November, followed by a warming trend in early December. Although many bodies of water were still partly frozen, there was little to no snow cover anywhere in the circle, and birding during count day was about as pleasant as it can get on the year's shortest day. In many other respects, too, the two years matched up quite closely—birds were often quite thinly spread out and difficult to tally in good numbers. Much like last year, several volunteers commented on this, even if the

Board Members

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Juliet Berger
president@washtenawaudubon.org

Vice President & Programs

Mike Sefton
vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org

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Keith Dickey
treasurer@washtenawaudubon.org

Secretary

Dana Novak
secretary@washtenawaudubon.org

Membership

Jessica Adamczyk
membership@washtenawaudubon.org

Co-Chairs, Field Trips

Bryn Martin
Matthew Spoor
fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

Conservation

Cathy Theisen
cathythetvet@comcast.net

Education

Astrid Padilla
education@washtenawaudubon.org

Stewardship

Taylor Myatt
stewardship@washtenawaudubon.org

Webmaster/Technology and Social Media

Rob French
rwfrenchjr@comcast.net

Past President

Sue Johnson
Suejohn62@gmail.com

Board Member/Bird Rescue

Sherri Smith
grackle@umich.edu

Newsletter

Nancy Davis
Jacco Gelderloos
newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org

The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

overall totals are still quite “normal” (if there is such a thing). Area species tallies varied quite a bit (from 33 to 48), as did individual counts (1,100 to 3,150), but, as always, every single slice of our circle found multiple noteworthy birds. In the end, our 80+ observers added yet another valuable piece not only to the ongoing story of the Ann Arbor CBC, but, more importantly, to the hemisphere’s bird population at large as well—the accompanying spreadsheet sums up the end results of our collective efforts on the 74th Ann Arbor CBC. I would also like to pass on a note of appreciation from State compiler John Trapp, who complemented me (and thereby, you) on the excellent details provided in the reporting of unusual birds (largely via eBird)—keep up the good work, everyone!

As count data is posted to the National Audubon Society’s CBC, the information from the multitude of 2019 CBCs will add to the large set of historical data that has been compiled over 120 editions of the Christmas Bird Count. All this information can be searched and viewed here:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>. Impressive though this huge set of data points may be, remember that this is, first and foremost, citizen science: it would not exist without the dedication and commitment of people such as you, the CBC volunteer. A great example of the “extra” commitment you all show is the amazing artwork, created by local birder Jackie Barry (www.jackiebarry.com; @JackieBarry on Instagram), accompanying this article. Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU all, it couldn’t be done without you! I hope to see you all out there for the 2020 edition (our 75th!), on December 19, 2020—make sure to mark your calendars, folks! *[[From the WAS Board: Thank you once again to Jacco for his amazing work on the CBC.]]*



Canada Goose	3,104	Cooper's Hawk	17	Carolina Wren	64 (HC)
Mute Swan	34	Bald Eagle	14 (HC)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	11
Trumpeter Swan	33 (HC)	Red-shouldered Hawk	3 (US)	Eastern Bluebird	179
Tundra Swan	CW (US)	Red-tailed Hawk	104	American Robin	421
Wood Duck	1	Rough-legged Hawk	1 (US)	Northern Mockingbird	1 (US)
Gadwall	2	Eastern Screech-Owl	18	European Starling	3,623
Mallard	1,001	Great Horned Owl	19	Cedar Waxwing	77
American Black Duck	13	Belted Kingfisher	9	House Sparrow	794
Am. Black Duck x Mallard Hybrid	2	Red-bellied Woodpecker	162	House Finch	243
Northern Pintail	CW (US)	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1 (US)	American Goldfinch	264
Redhead	1	Downy Woodpecker	198	American Tree Sparrow	101
Lesser Scaup	CW (US)	Hairy Woodpecker	49	Field Sparrow	2 (US)
Bufflehead	CW	Northern Flicker	31	Song Sparrow	26
Common Goldeneye	2	Pileated Woodpecker	12 (US, HC)	Swamp Sparrow	2
Hooded Merganser	21	American Kestrel	3	White-throated Sparrow	53
Common Merganser	10	Merlin	2 (US)	White-crowned Sparrow	1 (US)
Wild Turkey	160	Peregrine Falcon	1 (US)	Dark-eyed Junco	405
Pied-billed Grebe	2	Eastern Phoebe	1 (US)	Brown-headed Cowbird	9 (US)
Rock Pigeon	516	Northern Shrike	1 (US)	Common Grackle	2 (US)
Mourning Dove	286	Blue Jay	551	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1 (US)
Ring-billed Gull	71	American Crow	12,500	Northern Cardinal	372
Herring Gull	4	Horned Lark	1		
Great Blue Heron	14	Black-capped Chickadee	606		
Turkey Vulture	3 (US)	Tufted Titmouse	295 (HC)		
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch	4		
		White-breasted Nuthatch	288		
		Brown Creeper	15		
		Winter Wren	4 (US)		
				Total Individuals	26,843
CW = count week only		HC = high count		US = unusual species	

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Feb 2020 – Spring 2020)

Matthew Spoor, Co-Chair, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free of charge and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For trips with constraints on the number of participants, WAS members are sometimes given priority in registering (as indicated). We enthusiastically encourage and welcome people with no experience. We will always have extra binoculars for those that need them. Please check the WAS website or Facebook page for updates, additions, and directions. All trips are rain or shine unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, February 23, 2020, 9:00 a.m.

Weekend Walk for Birds at Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Meet in the parking lot in front of the main entrance to the conservatory.

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Matthew Spoor

Saturday, February 29, 2020, 9:00 a.m.

Weekend Walk for Birds at Nichols Arboretum

Meet at the east end of the Arboretum. Off of Geddes Ave., take a left onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at the Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac.

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Matthew Spoor

Sunday, March 8, 2020, 9:00 a.m.

Weekend Walk for Birds at Barton Pond

Waterfowl migration should be heating up in March. Meet at the Barton Nature Area parking lot off of Huron River Drive, (250 feet north of Bird Road.)

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Matthew Spoor

Saturday, March 14, 2020

One Road Challenge

This is a friendly team birding competition where teams pick one road in the county to see how many birds they can see in a morning along that road. If you have a team, great. If not, that's OK too; just visit the WAS website Events page to sign up and we will help set you up with a team. Everyone is welcome to join the teams for lunch and tally rally at the Classic Cup Cafe at 11:30 a.m. No need to participate in the event to join us for lunch. See the WAS site for challenge rules and details.

Sunday, March 22, 2020, 9:00 AM

Weekend Walk for Birds at Ford Lake

Meet at the parking lot off of South Grove Street. Lot is located south of I-94 at the northeast corner of Ford Lake, across from the Citgo Station at the intersection of Service Drive and South Grove Street.

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Matthew Spoor

Please see the President's Letter on page 2 for details on a few more Spring Field trips!

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society—WAS Membership, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$_____		_____ Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		_____ Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		_____ Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	_____ Patron	\$50

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means. **Note:** WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

WAS monthly events usually are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:30 p.m. at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. **Please note: *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens charges for parking at the rate of \$1.20 an hour, enforced 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm. Members of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum park for free.***

February 19 Birding Northern California

Join Len Sander for a photographic tour of Northern California birding sites and birds. Northern California is home to many iconic birds, including Marbled Murrelet, Northern Spotted Owl, Hermit Warbler, and California Condor. Retired University of Michigan professor Len Sander is an avid birder, photographer, and world traveler.

March 18 Architectural Solutions to Reduce Bird Deaths

Join architect Nick Liadis for a program on the alarming number of birds killed in building strikes, and the solutions to the problem that he sees in architectural details and window treatments. Nick Liadis practices architecture in Pittsburg, PA, and is a certified bird bander, currently volunteering as a bander at the Powdermill Avian Research Center in Rector, PA.

April 15 Program to be announced.

For updates, see www.washtenawaudubon.org/events-top/eventlists/programs.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

P.O. Box 130923
Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923