

# Christmas counts

by Dan McAskill

Despite the unpredictable weather the Natural History Society was again able to complete the two registered Christmas Bird Counts and the fun count in Montague. Counters took to their cars, cross country skis, snowshoes, hiking boots, and kitchen tables to count our winter birds.

When this year's National Park Count was first set up it looked like we would have 22 birders out in the field but our first winter storm led to some panic phone calls between 6:00 and 7:00 A.M. on December 18th to cancel the count and reschedule it to December 26th. Considering the change in schedule, the turnout for the counts was quite good with 15 birders registered in the National Park Count on the 26th and 17 in the Hillsborough Count on the 27th. We set new records for the age span of the counters with the youngest counter being Robyn Chan at 51 weeks of age and the oldest reputed to be over 80 (although she never tells). It was exciting to see 5 new counters out on these counts and to have the many "old" friends home from away to help with the counts.

While the Montague Count slipped down to 40 species this year from last years 44 species, the participation level was fantastic and over 1400 more birds were seen! Gary Schneider received feeder reports from 26 people and had 17 counters in the field.

What was seen that was strange or at least unusual? The 19 American Robins, 1 Great Blue Heron, 1 Harlequin Duck, 2 Northern Flickers, 6 Barrows Goldeneye, 16 Iceland Gulls, 6 Mourning Doves, 1 Common Grackle, and 6 White-winged Crossbills in the National Park Count; the 2 male Shovelers, 418 Canada Geese, 2 female Hooded Mergansers, 9 Iceland Gulls, 1 American Robin, 1 Common Grackle, and 30 White-winged Crossbills in the Hillsborough Bird Count; and the 2 Double-crested Cormorant, 3 Great Cormorant, 1 Common Snipe, 1 Rough-legged Hawk, and 1 Northern Flicker in the Montague Count were the strange and/or unusual sightings. There were also some birds that should have been seen such as the Ruffed Grouse and Ring-necked Pheasant in the Montague Count, the Evening Grosbeak in the Hillsborough Count, and the total lack of Surf or White-winged Scoters in all the counts.

The first 2 counts were wrapped up with a great pot luck supper at Diane and Kevin Griffin's. Those in attendance were having such a great time talking and eating that it took some arm twisting to get everyone into the living room to get the count lists together. When all the records were tallied the National Park Count ended up with 45 species (this ties the previous record) and the Hillsborough Count ended up with 38 species. Many thanks to Diane and Kevin for hosting us and to all the great cooks who contributed to the feast.

This year's count was also the focus of a birdathon to raise funds for the Natural History Society's Land Use Appeal on the cottage development on Boughton Island. The "birding team" achieved a total of 45 species during the counts. Congratulations to the team and our thanks to all those who gave their pledges. If you have any pledge cards out, please return them to Dan McAskill as soon as possible.

Thanks also to the following counters and feeder watchers without whom these bird counts could not have taken place: Lenore Andrew; Gwen Beck; Eileen Best; Bill Bowerbank; Jamie Burton; David Cairns; Cathy, Pat and Robyn Chan; Elaine Clark; Donna Collings; Rosemary and Wanda Curley; Anne and Peter Dutton; Stephen Farmer; Peter Feldstein; Geraldine FitzGerald; Francis Fraser; Edith Graffweg; Diane and Kevin Griffin; Don Harris; Hilda Hilchey; Geoff Hogan; Sandra Hume; Connie Ings; Barb and Sonny Johnson; Winston Johnston; Doug Kelly; Charles Keuper; Louise Leeco, Norah Longworth; Gerald MacDonald; Margaret