

THE MOB

During last year's Christmas bird count, I saw a pair of crows chasing and harrassing an adult bald eagle as it soared high over the waters of Orwell Cove. On the 1977 Hillsborough Christmas bird count, crows were observed pursuing and dive-bombing a rough-legged hawk. When small birds gang up to harass larger ones, the process is called mobbing and occurs in many species. In spring, one may see a cloud of common grackles swirling around a black object on a tree-top, which on closer examination, turns out to be a crow. In a tern colony, any intruder (be it gull, fox, or human) is likely to be welcomed by a blitzkreig of screaming and diving birds. Having felt terns rake through my hair, I can personally attest to the effectiveness of mobbing as a strategy to repulse unwanted guests.

Flocks of grackles or terns can successfully drive a predator from their nesting area. However, not all cases of mobbing seem to have a rational explanation and even when no advantage is to be had, birds will continue their stereotyped mobbing of avian predators in an almost automatic fashion. For example, a healthy crow has little to fear from an eagle or hawk, but the sight of either arouses a most violent reaction. Sparrows will dive-bomb a stuffed owl until they are exhausted, and do so with as much vigour as if their nests and young were actually threatened.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REPORT 1977

For some of us Christmas just wouldn't be complete without a Christmas Bird Count or two to round out the season. This year the Hillsborough count was held on Sunday December 18, a mild damp day with a brisk wind blowing. The day of the P.E.I. National Park count, Tuesday December 27, was bright and sunny but tempered somewhat by chilly temperatures. Numbers for both counts may have suffered from the cold stormy weather of earlier winter. Thirty-one species were seen on the Hillsborough count and 30 during the National Park count. Past counts ave averaged about 36 species each.

All those who participated are warmly thanked for helping to make the Christmas Counts as successful as they were. A summary of the results appears below.

species	Hillsborough Count	National Park Count
Great Cormorant		1
Black Duck	130	565
Green-winged Teal	4	
Pintail		1
Common Goldeneye	11	295
Barrow's Goldeneye		6
Oldsquaw	16	43
Black Scoter	4	
Common Merganser	110	139
Red-breasted Merganser		10
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	
Rough-legged Hawk	1	
Ruffed Grouse	2	11
Ring-necked Pheasant	1	5
Gray Partridge	82	
Glaucous Gull	1	
Great Black-backed Gull	76	174
Herring Gull	293	696
Rock Dove	136	123