

The Christmas Bird Count---How It Started

In "Bird-Lore", December 1900, editor Frank M. Chapman proposed "spending a portion of Christmas Day taking a census of the species and number of birds and sending a report of the "hunt" to "Bird-Lore" before retiring that night". Such reports were headed by: "the locality, hour of starting, hour of returning, character of the weather, direction and force of the wind, and temperature .

Mr. Chapman made the suggestion as an alternate activity to the Christmas "side-hunt". What was a "side-hunt?" An old encyclopedia belonging to Bill Reddin of Tea Hill described it as: "a competitive hunt in which the participants are divided into sides. The game killed is recorded according to a fixed scale of credits for each species, and that side wins, which scores the highest total of credit marks".

The bird count took off---it was an idea whose time had come. On Christmas Day, 1900, there were 25 counts done---and Toronto, Ontario was one of them. Since then, the number of count areas has soared until there were more than 1100 in 1974. They cover the whole North American continent from the Panama Canal Zone to Fairbanks, Alaska. Catemaco, Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1974 had the staggering count of 292 species (about 21,357 individual birds sighted), while Haines Junction, Yukon Territory had the lowest count of 9 species (about 171 individual birds).

The count period was expanded from Christmas Day only, to include about two weeks or more in the latter part of December and early January. Any date in the count period may be selected as the day for the count, and all counters in any one area must go out on the same day. Species seen in the count area by any observer (not necessarily a counter) during any day during the count period may be included in the number of species recorded, but they may not be included in the total number of individual birds seen.

For 24 years Rock Doves (pigeons) were dropped from counts because they were not considered to be truly wild birds. In 1974, they were reinstated and are now included in the bird count.

Dec. 14, 1974

22. Prince Edward Island National Park, P.E.I. 46° 23'N 63° 08'W, center on Rte 25, about ¼ mile S of junction with Rte 6, as described 1972. ---Dec. 14; 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Overcast. Temp. 28° to 32° F. Wind N, 10-20 m.p.h. No snow cover. Fresh water partly open. Salt water open. Wild food crop excellent. Ten observers in 5 parties. Total party-hours, 37½ (16 on foot, 21½ by car); total party-miles, 327 (24 on foot, 303 by car).

• Com. Loon 2; Great Blue Heron 1; Canada Goose 255; Black Duck 854; Greater Scaup 233; Com. Goldeneye 139; Barrow's Goldeneye 22; Bufflehead 3; Oldsquaw 46; White-winged Scoter 2; Com. Merganser 143; Marsh Hawk 2; Ruffed Grouse 1; Great Black-backed Gull 100; Herring Gull 426; Rock Dove 75; Snowy Owl 1; Downy Woodpecker 4; Horned Lark 31; Blue Jay 54; Com. Raven 45; Com. Crow 579; Black-capped Chickadee 46; Boreal Chickadee 26; Red-breasted Nuthatch 6; Brown Creeper 1; Am. Robin 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet 28; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2; N. Shrike 1; Starling 782; House Sparrow 1716; Com. Grackle 2; Pine Grosbeak 4; Dark-eyed (Slate-col.) Junco 6; Swamp Sparrow 1; Lapland Longspur 3; Snow Bunting 3.

Total, 38 species; about 5646 individuals. (In count area count week but not seen count day: Ring-necked Pheasant, Hairy Woodpecker.)---Bob Butler, David Cairns, Dave Joslin, Margaret Mallett, Phil Michael, Bonnie Rogerson, Joan Saunders (compiler---RR 1 Little York, P.E.I.), Rick Swain, Bill Warning, Mary Willms.

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P.E.I. Sixth Christmas Bird Count

The Natural History Society of P.E.I. is organizing the Christmas Bird Count to take place on Saturday, December 18th, weather permitting---alternate dates are December 19 or December 26.

The count area includes much of the P.E.I. National Park Area, and is a circle 15 miles in diameter, with its centre in Covehead at the junction of Routes 25 and 25A. This circle passes through Rustico Island, Wheatley River, Springvale, Milton, Sherwood, East Royalty, Frenchfort, Ten-mile House, Tracadie Cross, Blooming Point, and the base of the Blooming Point sandspit.

The circle is divided into seven zones. We hope to have a team of at least two persons for each zone, and at least one of them should be an experienced birder. Others on the team need only be

interested observers. The Count Day is a full 8-hour day---from dawn until dusk. Leaders have been assigned to the areas as follows: