

American Birds

The 104th Christmas Bird Count Volume 58

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The 104th Christmas Bird Count



Always a treat to find, but especially so on a Christmas Bird Count in New England, this Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) was impeccably photographed on the Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts, count. Photo/Blair Nikula

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The 104th Christmas Bird Count

December 14, 2003, to January 5, 2004

Geoffrey S. LeBaron

By some measures, birds could be considered the Ephemeroptera of the vertebrate kingdom. The Ephemeroptera, of course, are insects—the marvelous, delicate mayflies that emerge in uncountable numbers during spring and summer, then disappear seemingly overnight. Mayflies live very short lives as adults—unlike most birds—but their sudden appearance and disappearance, graceful flight, and reliance on favorable environmental conditions for survival all have parallels to the class Aves. Mayflies are there and gone—such as birds seem to disappear so quickly in the fall.

If you happen to be a bird somewhere in southern Canada or the United States between December 14 and January 5, what are the chances that you would be counted by a human observer—a Citizen Scientist—on a Christmas Bird Count (CBC)? It is estimated that at any given time there are 6 billion birds in North America, and on the 104th CBC about 1 percent were counted: an astounding statistic. The nearly 2000 Christmas Bird Counts held across the Americas this past season found a total of 63,523,744 birds, with the United States recording 59,552,857, Canada tallying 3,282,460, and the remaining 688,427 found in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. The results show how amazingly powerful the Christmas Bird Count—and by extension, Citizen Science—can be to bird conservation.

Given all those birds and the tremendous area of coverage of the Christmas Bird Count, as always, an impressive roster of species was unearthed during the 104th Count: 2474 species all told, plus an additional 124 forms. In the United States, 654 countable species, 37 additional forms, and 31 exotic species were tallied. For the first time in many years, no new species were added to the cumulative United States CBC list. In Canada,

292 species were recorded, including the Gray Flycatcher, a Canadian first.

What makes the Christmas Bird Count tick, of course, is the people who do it—you, in fact, as you have received this magazine. Without the tens of thousands of participants in thousands of areas over more than 100 years, our understanding of early-winter bird distribution and population health would be far less comprehensive than it is now. And in fact, we've only just scratched the surface as we begin to mine the CBC database to shed new light on long-term trends. Citizen Science is a new field, and one only recently accepted by the scientific community, and yet it is the core of what birdwatchers—and Christmas Bird Count participants—have been doing for more than a century. It's regular people going out and doing what they love (watching and counting birds) and sharing their findings with others. The vast volume of sightings could never be replicated in a study conducted by professional scientists alone, and as described elsewhere in this issue, new techniques are being developed to utilize this incredible wealth of information. In the 104th CBC, participants numbered 55,431, just shy of last season's record. Of that total, 46,598 were field observers (37,503 in the United States, 7741 in Canada, and 1354 in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands), while 8833 watched feeders (4754 in the United States, 4063 in Canada, and 16 elsewhere). Participants conducted 1996 individual Christmas Bird Counts during in the 104th CBC (a record), including 45 new counts (19 in Canada, 16 in the United States, and 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean). Counts conducted for the first time on the 104th CBC are listed in Table 1.

Unlike some seasons past, the weather was generally favorable for many participants across the hemisphere during the

Table 1. New counts in the 104th (2003–2004) Christmas Bird Count.

Count Code	Count Name
CANADA	
ABBA	Barrhead, Alberta
ABBE	Bergthal, Alberta
ABHR	High River, Alberta
ABMA	Manyberries, Alberta
BCAH	Apex-Hedley, British Columbia
BCCA	Cawston, British Columbia
BCHS	Lower Howe Sound, British Columbia
BCLK	Logan Lake, British Columbia
BCLP	Little River-Powell River Ferry, British Columbia
BCTL	Tlell, British Columbia
BCVF	Vanderhoof, British Columbia
ONCH	Chapleau, Ontario
ONLH	Lanark Highlands, Ontario
NBSL	St. Leonard, New Brunswick
NBSM	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska, New Brunswick
NSGB	Glace Bay, New Brunswick
NUCI	Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut
SKLL	La Loche, Saskatchewan
YTCA	Carcross, Yukon Territory
UNITED STATES	
AZSR	Superior, Arizona
CACI	Santa Clarita, California
CAEL	Eagle Lake, California
COGB	Granby, Colorado
COSI	Silverton, Colorado
NCKL	Kerr Lake, North Carolina
NMCH	Clabber Hill Ranch, New Mexico
NMEL	Eunice-Lea County, New Mexico
PAPB	Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania
SDBI	Bison, South Dakota
TNDK	DeKalb County, Tennessee
TXIV	Canadian River, Texas
UTAI	Antelope Island, Utah
UTTO	Tooele, Utah
WAP0	Pend Oreille, Washington
WYRT	Riverton, Wyoming
CARIBBEAN, LATIN AMERICA, PACIFIC ISLANDS	
BAAO	Abaco Outback, Bahamas
CRGD	Osa Peninsula, Golfo Dulce Reserve, Costa Rica
ECLA	Loma Alta, Ecuador
ECNA	Napo, Amazon, Ecuador
MXCS	Canon del Sumidero, Mexico
MXCZ	Coast of Central Veracruz, Mexico
MXEY	East Coast of Yucatan Peninsula (El Cuyo), Mexico
MXNY	Northeast Coast of Yucatan Peninsula (Rio Lagartos), Mexico
MXWY	West Coast of the Yucatan Peninsula (Celestun), Mexico
PRAR	Arecibo, Puerto Rico



One of the major features of the 104th Christmas Bird Count season was a big flight of Common Redpolls, especially down the eastern coast of North America. Included in the flight were a surprising number of Hoary Redpolls (*Carduelis hornemanni*), such as this one photographed on the Keene, New Hampshire, count. Photo/James Smith

104th count period (with some exceptions, of course, especially during the first weekend of the count period). Cool weather punctuated by some major storms preceded the count period in many regions, but water was open surprisingly far north, and despite the relatively unforgiving fall, a rather amazing array of lingering migrants was found across North America. Given the good counting conditions compared with the 103rd Count, participation was up in some regions; the number of counts with 100 or more total participants is listed in Table 2. Notable is the increase in participation on the coastal California counts—this region was hammered by severe storms last year.

The variety of lingering neotropical migrant species was something of a surprise, given the lead-up conditions expected to hasten such birds on their way. The aforementioned Gray Flycatcher was a Christmas Bird Count first for Canada, and while no new species were tallied in the United States, the variety of unusual birds was amazing. Several species that “can’t” be found on Christmas Bird Counts in North America *did* show up, and were well documented. Not one, but *two* Scarlet Tanagers were discovered—and well photographed—one on the Stellwagen Bank count at the far tip of Cape Cod in Massachusetts, and the other in Fort Collins, Colorado. A

Table 2. Counts with 100 or more participants in the 104th (2003–2004) CBC.

Code	Count Name	# Observers	(Field + Feeder)
ONNB	North Bay, ON	752	(31 + 721)
ABED	Edmonton, AB	533	(190 + 343)
MACO	Concord, MA	293	(198 + 95)
VAFB	Fort Belvoir, VA	209	(206 + 3)
BCVI	Victoria, BC	201	(169 + 32)
ABCA	Calgary, AB	195	(87 + 108)
CAPR	Point Reyes Peninsula, CA	176	(176 + 0)
CASB	Santa Barbara, CA	174	(171 + 3)
CAOA	Oakland, CA	167	(153 + 14)
NSHD	Halifax-Dartmouth, NS	154	(90 + 64)
BCVA	Vancouver, BC	144	(110 + 34)
SCHH	Hilton Head Island, SC	140	(140 + 0)
ONOH	Ottawa-Hull, ON	138	(108 + 30)
OHCF	Cuyahoga Falls, OH	136	(94 + 42)
CAMC	Marin County (southern), CA	133	(125 + 8)
CTHA	Hartford, CT	131	(121 + 10)
MANO	Northampton, MA	131	(117 + 14)
MBWI	Winnipeg, MB	130	(70 + 60)
NYIT	Ithaca, NY	129	(113 + 16)
WASD	Sequim-Dungeness, WA	129	(113 + 16)
NSWO	Wolfville, NS	127	(46 + 81)
DCDC	Washington, DC	126	(125 + 1)
CAWS	Western Sonoma County, CA	124	(124 + 0)
ABSR	Strathcona, AB	123	(46 + 77)
TXBF	Buffalo Bayou, TX	123	(84 + 39)
COBO	Boulder, CO	118	(97 + 21)
SKSA	Saskatoon, SK	117	(69 + 48)
RIBI	Block Island, RI	116	(116 + 0)
ABSA	St. Albert, AB	114	(47 + 67)
BCNN	Nanaimo, BC	114	(75 + 39)
PAPI	Pittsburgh, PA	114	(86 + 28)
TXMM	Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, TX	114	(107 + 7)
LABR	Baton Rouge, LA	113	(41 + 72)
ONHA	Hamilton, ON	113	(87 + 26)
MIPO	Pontiac, MI	112	(78 + 34)
CODV	Denver (urban), CO	110	(78 + 32)
FLSC	Sanibel-Captiva, FL	110	(110 + 0)
CAOC	Orange County (coastal), CA	109	(109 + 0)
CASJ	San Jose, CA	109	(109 + 0)
QCQU	Quebec, QC	109	(108 + 1)
ECNM	Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador	108	(108 + 0)
OREU	Eugene, OR	107	(73 + 34)
AKFA	Fairbanks, AK	104	(70 + 34)
AKAN	Anchorage, AK	103	(57 + 46)
CABE	Benicia, CA	103	(98 + 5)
CAON	Orange County (northeastern), CA	103	(103 + 0)
OHPR	Preble County, OH	102	(102 + 0)
AZCF	Carefree, AZ	101	(85 + 16)
CAHF	Hayward-Fremont, CA	101	(100 + 1)
CODE	Denver, CO	100	(67 + 33)

Swainson’s Thrush was photographed on the St. Catherine’s Island, Georgia, count, and three species of vireos were tallied in New England (Blue-headed, White-eyed, and an astounding Philadelphia Vireo at Plymouth, MA). Yellow-throated Warblers were truly out of range (as well as season) at Western Macomb County, Michigan, and Penrose, Colorado.

All the participants’ efforts and all the unusual sightings, of course, result in many excellent species totals; a list of counts that tallied 150 or more species is included in Table 3. Matagorda

County-Mad Island Marsh, Texas, remains at the top of the North American species total list this season, but the tremendous effort by Corpus Christi, Texas, resulted in a tie for top honors, as both counts recorded 231 species. In Latin America, two counts in Ecuador generated species totals of over 400—Mindo-Tandayapa, with 407, (which also, for the first time on a South American count, had more than 100 participants) and the new Napo, Amazon count, with an amazing 423 species. Given that this total was generated on the

Table 3. Counts with 150 or more species recorded on the 104th (2003–2004) CBC.**Table 3a. Counts north of the United States-Mexican border.**

Count Code	Rank	Count Name	Species Recorded
TXCC	1	Corpus Christi, TX	231
TXMM	1	Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, TX	231
CASB	2	Santa Barbara, CA	208
TXFR	3	Freeport, TX	206
CAPR	4	Point Reyes Peninsula, CA	201
CAOC	5	Orange County (coastal), CA	198
TXSB	6	San Bernard N.W.R., TX	196
CAMR	7	Morro Bay, CA	193
CACS	8	Crystal Springs, CA	192
CASD	8	San Diego, CA	192
CARS	9	Rancho Santa Fe, CA	189
CASC	10	Santa Cruz County, CA	184
CAMC	11	Marin County (southern), CA	183
CAAR	12	Arcata, CA	180
CAOA	13	Oakland, CA	179
CACB	14	Centerville Beach to King Salmon, CA	178
CAWS	14	Western Sonoma County, CA	178
CAAN	15	Año Nuevo, CA	177
CAMD	16	Moss Landing, CA	175
CAMP	16	Monterey Peninsula, CA	175
CAOV	16	Oceanside-Vista-Carlsbad, CA	175
CAVE	16	Ventura, CA	175
TXBP	16	Bolivar Peninsula, TX	175
CASF	17	San Francisco, CA	173
CATO	17	Thousand Oaks, CA	173
CABE	18	Benicia, CA	171
CAHF	18	Hayward-Fremont, CA	171
CASS	18	Salton Sea (south), CA	171
TXCF	18	Corpus Christi (Flour Bluff), TX	171
TXKI	18	Kingsville, TX	171
TXAP	19	Attwater Prairie Chicken N.W.R., TX	169
CALB	20	Long Beach-El Dorado, CA	166
CAPA	20	Palo Alto, CA	166
NCSB	21	Southport-Bald Head-Oak Islands, NC	164
LASA	22	Sabine N.W.R., LA	163
FLJA	23	Jacksonville, FL	162
FLNR	23	West Pasco (New Port Richey), FL	162
CAON	24	Orange County (northeastern), CA	161
CASJ	24	San Jose, CA	161
MDOC	25	Ocean City, MD	160
NCBP	25	Bodie-Pea Island, NC	160
NCMC	25	Morehead City, NC	160
TXHO	25	Houston, TX	160
TXPA	25	Port Aransas, TX	160
CAPP	26	Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA	159
SCCA	26	Charleston, SC	159
TXAR	26	Aransas N.W.R., TX	159
VACC	26	Cape Charles, VA	159
NCWI	27	Wilmington, NC	158
SCMC	27	McClellanville, SC	158
ORCB	28	Coos Bay, OR	157
SCLP	28	Litchfield-Pawleys Island, SC	157
LALT	29	Lacassine N.W.R.-Thornwell, LA	155
TXLA	29	Laguna Atascosa N.W.R., TX	155
NJCM	30	Cape May, NJ	154
TXRO	30	Rockport, TX	154
TXSR	30	Sea Rim S.P., TX	154
TXST	30	San Antonio, TX	154
CALU	31	La Purisima, CA	153
CASM	31	Sacramento, CA	153
NCMA	31	Mattamuskeet N.W.R., NC	153
TXCK	31	Choke Canyon, TX	153
TXGA	31	Galveston, TX	153
CARC	32	Rio Cosumnes, CA	152
CASU	32	San Juan Capistrano, CA	152
FLAB	32	Aripeka-Bayport, FL	152
FLCB	32	Choctawhatchee Bay, FL	152
AZRC	33	Ramsey Canyon, AZ	150
TXAZ	33	Anzalduas-Bentsen S.P., TX	150
TXSA	33	Santa Ana N.W.R., TX	150

inaugural count, it's very possible that with more participation and experience in the circle, the total may well go even higher. (*Editor's note:* Due to difficulties with the bird checklist for this count and the data entry interface during the 104th CBC, online count information was incomplete as of this publication date.)

While few regions can hope to challenge coastal California, coastal Texas, or Latin America for high species tallies, participants on nearly every CBC annually compete with other counts in their region (and, of course, themselves) to generate the highest possible species total. Table 4 lists the regional high species totals in the 104th CBC.

In addition to the surprising and very nice array of rarities, the big story of the 104th Christmas Bird Count was redpolls. While most irruptive species (northern diurnal raptors, owls, Bohemian Waxwings, and most winter finches) were found in either low or modest numbers, redpolls put on a very interesting show. Given the biannual cycle of redpoll irruptions, this had been predicted to be a good redpoll year, and while the CBC period only samples the beginning of the irruptive season for winter finches, observers in many areas, especially in the East, were not disappointed. While the actual numbers of redpolls in the 104th Count were not spectacular, the distribution of the flight was very unusual.



Out of season and out of range, this Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) was photographed on the Fort Collins, Colorado, count. Photo/Rachel Hopper

Table 3b. Counts south of the United States-Mexican border.

Count Code	Rank	Count Name	Species Recorded
ECNA	1	Napo, Amazon, Ecuador	423
ECNM	2	Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador	407
CRLM	3	Fila Costera (La Merced), Costa Rica	385
CRRF	4	Rain Forest Aerial Tram, Costa Rica	376
CRMO	5	Monteverde, Costa Rica	344
CRLS	6	La Selva, Lower Braulio Carillo N.P., Costa Rica	336
RPAC	7	Atlantic Canal Area, R.P., Panama	309
CRGD	8	Osa Peninsula, Golfo Dulce Reserve, Costa Rica	282
RPPC	9	Pacific Canal Area, R.P., Panama	272
RPVC	10	Volcan, Chiriqui, Panama	235
RPCC	11	Central Canal Area, R.P., Panama	232
CRGR	12	Grecia, Costa Rica	228
PEPA	13	Posada Amazonas, Peru	222
MXSB	14	San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico	219
MXES	15	Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico	203
BLGJ	16	Gallon Jug, Belize	192
TRTR	17	Trinidad, W.I.	183
ECLA	18	Loma Alta, Ecuador	173
MXCZ	19	Coast of Central Veracruz, Mexico	168
MXRC	20	Rio Corona, Tamaulipas, Mexico	164
PETR	20	Tambopata Research Center	164
MXEY	21	East Coast of Yucutan Peninsula (El Cuyo), Mexico	163
MXGF	22	Gomez Farias, Tamaulipas, Mexico	161
MXOJ	23	Oaxaca de Juarez, Oaxaca, Mexico	158
MXAL	24	Alamos, Sonora, Mexico	155
MXRR	25	Rancho Rincon de Anacahuillas, Tamaulipas, Mexico	150

Additionally, given the modest numbers of Common Redpolls in this flight, there was a relatively high number of Hoary Redpolls included in the movement.

Beginning in November and early December, small- to modest-sized flocks of Common Redpolls began to appear in southern Canada and the northeastern United States. Continuing into the early days of the Christmas Bird Count period, most of these flocks were nomadic, seldom staying at one location for any period of time, and often noted only as flyovers. Since most of the flocks were relatively small and few were sedentary, the magnitude of the movement may have been underestimated in its early stages.

Weather patterns combined to produce strong westerly and northwesterly winds across eastern Canada and New England beginning the day after Christmas, and counts along the East Coast conducted the weekend after Christmas documented a large and unusual redpoll event. While inland counts (and even inland parties on coastal counts) found only sporadic, small numbers of redpolls, observers directly on the coast, from Martha's Vineyard through the mid-Atlantic and south to North Carolina, tallied record numbers of redpolls—and all in large flocks coming in

off the North Atlantic. Although held earlier in the season, the CBC on Bermuda also had multiple Common Redpolls. The strong offshore winds must have blown tremendous numbers of redpolls to sea from the Atlantic Provinces, and they were fighting to return to shore after the winds subsided on the weekend of December 27 and 28. The redpoll irruption had become a redpoll fallout, with flocks of birds struggling to get back to shore. One can only imagine the number of birds that were lost at sea. The flocks of redpolls descended to seed heads in weedy areas along the beaches and voraciously fed for a period of time. They then quickly dispersed inland—there and gone.

Continently, the redpoll irruption was strongest across Canada, through Ohio, and down the East Coast, with the southernmost records on CBCs reaching North Carolina. Eventually a few Common Redpolls got as far south as Georgia. Redpolls were notably absent on Christmas Bird Counts in the Midwest, but moved southward into Washington and Oregon just east of the Cascades. As often happens, this flight showed the stronger southward movement in the eastern portions of the continent, but the “lopsidedness” was

more pronounced this season than average, as is documented on the animated maps on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site <www.birdsource.org/gbbc>.

Given that this was a redpoll year, it was fitting that the post-count period analyses of Christmas Bird Count data focused on species of the boreal forest. Initial analyses of Breeding Bird Survey data by ornithologists working with the Boreal Songbird Initiative have showed some alarming declines in numbers of birds that utilize the boreal forest of Alaska and Canada as their nesting ground. Many of these birds winter primarily in southern Canada and the United States, and are common and familiar species on Christmas Bird Counts—Rusty Blackbird, White-throated and White-crowned sparrows, and Purple Finch, to name a few. As reported by Dan Niven and others in their article on page 10 of this issue, the in-depth analyses of Christmas Bird Count data over time, utilizing newly developed statistical techniques, has shed light on the status of many of these familiar backyard birds. While there has been concern about Rusty Blackbird numbers for some time, these analyses document just how drastically numbers of Rusties have dropped over the past few decades. Some surprises were detected as well—Harris's Sparrow also appears to be in a major decline. Not all species that breed in the boreal forest are declining of course; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and especially Merlin are being found increasingly on Christmas Bird Counts. The root cause of the steep declines in some species remains unknown, but armed with the information that significant changes in populations are occurring, further studies can be developed to discover the reasons, and can help protect the birds and other wildlife of the boreal forest for the future.

These analyses represent only the tip of the iceberg and demonstrate how valuable the Christmas Bird Count database is to our understanding of continental bird populations. Analyses of WatchList bird species found frequently by CBC partic-

ipants are now under way, and over time trend data will be developed for all species well represented in the historical Christmas Bird Count database. These studies, when combined with similar analyses of Breeding Bird Survey data, will give us an even better portrait of the status of bird populations across North America, and eventually, the Western Hemisphere.

As a healthy mayfly population is a sign of good water quality, birds are also indicators of the quality of the environment they—and we—live in. When a relatively common and widespread species like the Rusty Blackbird shows major declines, we must begin to wonder what is happening in that species' environment. Concern about the health of the boreal forest is based on such threats as spruce budworm infestations, the harvesting of large areas for the forest-products' industry, and habitat alteration due to global climate change. But what is apparent from other articles in this magazine is that the complete picture about the boreal forest is not yet clear, as some boreal bird species are increasing even while others are in precipitous decline.

As the article referred to above analyzes land birds, one species it does not address is Bonaparte's Gull. This bird is a widespread breeder in areas of the northern forest, from Alaska across Canada. It is unique among gulls both in that it does not breed in dense colonies and that it makes its nest in trees (unique among the genus *Larus*), around ponds and marshes in the boreal. By using the "Historical Results" tool on the CBC web site, which can quickly generate information on what's happening with a particular bird species over time, we were able to look at Bonaparte's Gull records on Christmas Bird Counts in Canada and the United States from the 60th CBC to the 103rd CBC. The findings are very interesting. (Chart 1).

While obviously there is much variation from year to year, there certainly does appear to be a significant decline in the number of Bonaparte's Gulls being reported on Christmas Bird Counts in North America over the past

40 years (reinforced by anecdotal information by observers from several regions). Interestingly, Bonaparte's Gulls breed in very much the same area—and *habitat*—as Rusty Blackbirds, the species showing the steepest decline of those analyzed by Dan Niven et al. It would certainly make one wonder what is happening to the ponds and wetlands in the boreal forest across the high latitudes of North America. This will be an interesting topic of further study for researchers, both ornithologists and forest ecologists.

We are also pleased to be able to present to you in this *American Birds* issue the final report from the independent scientific peer review of the Christmas Bird Count, conducted in November 2003 at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's Acopian Center for Conservation Learning. (See "Improving the Christmas Bird Count: Report of a Review Panel," page 34.) Panel members from across North America gathered for three days, and in free-ranging discussions pondered the strong, and not-so-strong, points of the Christmas Bird Count. A similar exercise was undertaken a few years back for the Breeding Bird Survey, with the result that data collected in future seasons on the BBS will give an even better indication of what's happening with breeding birds across the continent. We are happy to report that all our CBC efforts over the past 104 years have not been in vain—we've been doing a good job—but we can make improvements in the way data are collected in the field, stored in the database, and displayed to the public. Have no fear, there will be no major changes to

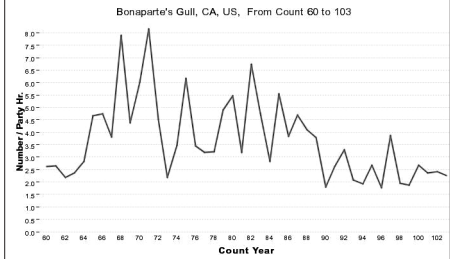


Chart 1. Effort-corrected Bonaparte's Gull numbers from the 60th to 103rd CBC.

the way we do Christmas Bird Counts, as that would functionally end what has been done in the past and create a new census in the future. The recommended changes will further enhance the value of CBC participants' efforts across the Americas, and should have little or no impact on compilers and observers in the field. The full list of recommendations of the panel is included in the article, and many of them may be concerns and wishes that you yourself may have had about the Christmas Bird Count. Audubon's job over the next few years will be to properly implement the recommendations of the report, although some will take time and significant funding through grants and other sources.

The ebb and flow of bird populations across the Americas is a truly miraculous event. Christmas Bird Count participants are fortunate to be able to experience a small part of those tremendous migrations firsthand. The comings and goings of birds vary on a wide scale—from resident nuthatches and woodpeckers visiting a bird feeder to hundreds of thousands of Eared Grebes or Long-tailed Ducks converging on wintering grounds to millions upon



Remarkably, two Scarlet Tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*) were documented during the 104th CBC. This winter male was photographed at a feeder on the Stellwagen Bank, Massachusetts, CBC, at the far tip of Cape Cod. Photo/Laine Quinn

Table 4. Regional high counts for the 104th (2003–2004) Christmas Bird Count.

Region	# of CBCs	Highest Count (species total)
St.-Pierre et Miquelon	2	Île Saint-Pierre (51)
Newfoundland	13	St. John's (76)
Nova Scotia	20	Halifax-Dartmouth (116)
Prince Edward Island	3	Hillsborough (56)
New Brunswick	11	Cape Tormentine (64)
Quebec	29	Quebec (68)
Ontario	104	Long Point (110)
Manitoba	17	Winnipeg (41)
Saskatchewan	21	Saskatoon (41)
Alberta	40	Calgary (78)
British Columbia	74	Ladner (140)
Northwest Territories	3	Fort Simpson (14)
		Norman Wells (14)
Nunavut	2	Chesterfield Inlet (2)
Yukon Territory	6	Whitehorse (22)
Alaska	37	Kodiak (74)
Maine	26	Greater Portland (95)
New Hampshire	17	Coastal New Hampshire (104)
Vermont	15	Ferrisburg (81)
Massachusetts	33	Mid-Cape Cod (132)
Rhode Island	4	South Kingstown (127)
Connecticut	16	New Haven (135)
New York	70	L.I.: Montauk (140)
New Jersey	28	Cape May (154)
Pennsylvania	64	Southern Bucks County (101)
Delaware	7	Cape Henlopen-Prime Hook (136)
Maryland	21	Ocean City (160)
District of Columbia	1	Washington (118)
Virginia	37	Cape Charles (159)
North Carolina	45	Southport-Bald Head-Oak Islands (164)
South Carolina	18	Charleston (159)
Georgia	22	Savannah (146)
Florida	62	Jacksonville (162)
		West Pasco (New Port Richey) (162)
		Cincinnati (91)
Ohio	53	Ona (77)
West Virginia	16	Land Between the Lakes (94)
Kentucky	11	Reelfoot Lake (115)
Tennessee	26	Gulf Shores (146)
Alabama	12	Jackson County (146)
Mississippi	17	Southern Hancock County (146)
		Rockwood (92)
Michigan	53	Lake Monroe (100)
Indiana	37	Milwaukee (76)
Wisconsin	42	Mermet Lake, Massac County (112)
Illinois	55	Bloomington (64)
Minnesota	47	Keokuk (89)
Iowa	29	Mingo N.W.R. (101)
Missouri	27	Arkadelphia (121)
Arkansas	19	Sabine N.W.R. (163)
Louisiana	21	Garrison Dam (56)
North Dakota	20	Pierre (79)
South Dakota	16	Lake McConaughy (105)
Nebraska	9	Lawrence (92)
Kansas	26	Oklahoma City (128)
Oklahoma	20	Corpus Christi (231)
Texas	96	Matagorda County-Mad Is. Marsh (231)
		Yellowstone N.P. (102)
Montana	30	Nampa (88)
Idaho	21	Cody (64)
Wyoming	19	Pueblo Reservoir (116)
Colorado	39	Caballo (123)
New Mexico	31	Logan (98)
Utah	18	Trukee Meadows (113)
Nevada	13	Ramsey Canyon (150)
Arizona	34	Sequim-Dungeness (142)
Washington	39	Coos Bay (157)
Oregon	42	Santa Barbara (208)
California	116	Honolulu, O'ahu (52)
Hawaii	10	Saipan (46)
Northern Mariana Islands	5	San Blas, Nayarit (219)
Mexico	20	Gallon Jug (192)
Belize	1	Fila Costera (La Merced) (385)
Costa Rica	6	Atlantic Canal Area (309)
Panama	4	Rio Blanco, Caldas (147)
Colombia	4	Napo, Amazon (423)
Ecuador	4	Posada Amazonas (222)
Peru	2	Omora Park, Navarino Island (57)
Chile	2	Itirapina, Sao Paulo (140)
Brazil	1	Trinidad (183)
Trinidad	1	New Providence Island (103)
Bahamas	5	Salinas-Bani (58)
Dominican Republic	1	Cabo Rojo (122)
Puerto Rico	4	St. Croix (63)
Virgin Islands	4	Bermuda (100)
Bermuda	1	

millions of blackbirds flocking to an evening roost. The wonder of birds, and their freedom of movement, often awes us as human observers, and is something we strive to witness whenever possible. The mystery and chance of an encounter with some rare, vagrant, or shy species also draws CBC participants afield. As a group, owls are high on the wish list of most CBC observers, whether it's a Snowy Owl recently arrived from the high Arctic or a resident—and territorial—Great Horned Owl. The mystique of owls and their primarily nocturnal habits enhance any encounter, and the smaller owls can be a special challenge to find. Northern Saw-whet Owls are at the tiny end of the owl spectrum, and are notoriously difficult to find during the daytime. From an ornithologist's standpoint, they are of significant interest because they are long-distance migrants, cavity-nesters, objects of banding studies, and voracious predators for their diminutive size. From a human standpoint, they're too cute for words! Saw-whets have occasionally been found in one of the areas covered by the count circle I participate in, but never by me. I had hoped to change that last season, and spent some extra time combing through enticing cedar and pine stands, looking for whitewash and pellets. While I did find a number of old pellets, nothing seemed fresh—and no saw-whets were seen.

At the compilation gathering, I learned that for the first time a nocturnal party had covered that same portion of my area early in the pre-dawn hours—and found not just one, but four saw-whet owls! The owls were there and gone—ephemeral waifs of the darkness. Like you, I'll be back, and so will the owls, in another season, and one of these years our paths will cross.

Thanks

Many thanks to all compilers for their perseverance and patience during last season's difficult data-entry period. We all look forward to a smoother-running system for the 105th and future counts.

Christmas Bird Count Canada: 2003–2004

Richard J. Cannings

It was yet another year of growth for Canadian counts, the count total rising to 345 from 334 last season. As usual, these figures include counts from Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, a French *département* off the coast of Newfoundland. The number of participants rose slightly this year, with a total of 11,804. The number of birds tallied dropped very marginally, to 3.28 million, while the species total inched up to 292 from 291. Table 1 summarizes the counts by province and territory.

For the third year in a row, Ladner reported the highest species total in the country, with 140, bouncing back somewhat from last year's low of 136. Traditional rival Victoria was close behind, with 137. In other provincial rivalries, Calgary added 14 species to last year's total for an astounding 78, while Edmonton slipped to 57. Long Point took back the Ontario crown from Kingston with a respectable total of 110 species, while in Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's easily topped the list with 76 species. With the Grand Manan circle not done this year, the New Brunswick title was up for grabs;



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Cape Tormentine, with 64 species, edged out Sackville, with 63. North of 60, Whitehorse was far ahead of all rivals, with 22 species.

As can be seen in Table 2, the top four species have maintained their places this year. Four of the top 15 species (European Starling, Rock Pigeon, Herring Gull, and Glaucous-winged Gull) showed a decline of more than 15 percent; interestingly, these are species that are closely associated with human-altered environments. Only one of them, however—the Herring Gull—shows a clear downward trend over the past two years. American Crow showed a 14 percent decline this year, suggesting that it may finally be feeling the effects of West Nile virus. On the other hand, about a third of the Canadian crow count comes from Cedar Creek, ON, and the entire drop in this year's numbers can be attributed to that one count. If you look at numbers outside of Cedar Creek, crows

actually increased slightly this year. Another species of West Nile concern, the Blue Jay, decreased even more drastically on Canadian counts this year, with only 24,312 reported, down from 34,177 last year. Whether this was due to a die-off or migration out of the country remains to be seen. Two coniferous forest finches—Common Redpoll and Pine Siskin—demonstrate the biannual cycle typical of those species, and Bohemian Waxwing shows a similar pattern. All three have rebounded after low numbers last year; much of this change is simply due to more of their populations leaving the boreal forest for southern towns where they have access to garden trees and shrubs as well as seed put out in feeders. Three species have shown sizeable increases over the past two years: American Wigeon, Dunlin, and Dark-eyed Junco. The first two are dominated by numbers from one count—Ladner, BC—so probably are affected more by daily weather on the Fraser Delta than other factors.

Another way to look at bird count results is in the distribution of species. Table 3 gives the top 15 species in

Table 1. Provincial and territorial summaries for the 104th Christmas Bird Count.

Province or Territory	Counts	Field observers	Feeder watchers	Individual birds	Total species	Highest species total and count
Alberta	40	930	872	189,457	120	78, Calgary
British Columbia	74	1930	504	1,138,878	225	140, Ladner
Manitoba	17	269	122	62,688	72	41, Winnipeg
New Brunswick	11	203	73	49,145	93	64, Cape Tormentine
Newfoundland and Labrador	13	169	64	55,965	121	76, St. John's
Northwest Territories	3	34	5	2837	20	14, Fort Simpson, Norman Wells
Nova Scotia	20	494	434	212,741	162	116, Halifax-Dartmouth
Nunavut	2	2	0	41	2	2, Chesterfield Inlet
Ontario	104	2672	1759	1,300,760	186	110, Long Point
Prince Edward Island	3	53	1	27,507	81	56, Hillsborough
Quebec	29	615	115	180,701	127	68, Québec
St.-Pierre et Miquelon	2	24	0	8717	60	51, Île Saint-Pierre
Saskatchewan	21	268	93	51,437	80	41, Saskatoon
Yukon	6	78	21	1586	34	22, Whitehorse
TOTALS	345	7741	4063	3,282,460	292	

Table 2. The top 15 bird species by total number on the 104th Christmas Bird Count in Canada, with a comparison of results from the previous two years.

Species	Total 104th Count	Total 103rd Count	Total 102nd Count
European Starling	334,702	445,741	412,908
Canada Goose	233,240	267,320	236,760
American Crow	213,781	249,382	246,627
Mallard	205,199	222,468	220,214
House Sparrow	147,013	134,638	142,345
Black-capped Chickadee	129,437	112,361	123,571
Rock Pigeon	115,158	138,770	137,259
Dunlin	107,972	99,885	71,852
American Wigeon	91,064	75,970	62,789
Herring Gull	81,439	98,361	117,855
Common Redpoll	76,852	5602	96,395
Dark-eyed Junco	76,671	67,045	61,184
Glaucous-winged Gull	73,825	120,582	100,746
Greater Scaup	66,203	65,134	64,580
Bohemian Waxwing	65,946	38,344	57,800

Table 3. The most widespread species on Canadian Christmas Counts, as measured by the number of counts on which they were reported.

Species	No. of counts	Rank 104th	Rank 103rd	Rank 102nd
Hairy Woodpecker	314	1	3	5
Black-capped Chickadee	308	2	1	1
Downy Woodpecker	305	3	2	4
Common Raven	290	4	4	8
Red-breasted Nuthatch	288	5	8	6
European Starling	284	6	5	7
Common Redpoll	279	7	47	5
House Sparrow	272	8	6	9
Dark-eyed Junco	271	9	10	2
Rock Pigeon	269	10	7	10
Blue Jay	240	11	9	12
American Crow	235	12	11	13
White-breasted Nuthatch	222	13	19	15
Bald Eagle	218	14	14	16
Pine Siskin	216	15	33	19



As more observers become proficient with the identification of winter- and immature-plumaged loons, there is an increasing number of records of Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), even in areas where this largest of all loon species is not usually expected. This bird (right) was photographed in remarkable comparison with a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) on the Nanoose Bay, British Columbia, CBC. Photo/Ralph Hocken

Canada based on the number of counts on which they were reported. In this case, Hairy Woodpecker moved up a notch to displace Black-capped Chickadee as the most widely distributed bird where counts are done in Canada. As mentioned above, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins were both common across the country this year after last year's lows. One species that not too many people would place on this list offhand, the Bald Eagle, again ranked 14th, being reported from 218 counts, four more than last year.

The northern owls are always popular finds on Christmas counts, but only Great Gray Owls showed some sign of drifting south this year—25 were seen on 17 counts. The number of Snowy Owls reported dropped by 50 percent for the second year in a row, with 56 on 36 counts. Northern Hawk Owl reports inched upward, with singles reported at St. Paul, AB; Haileybury, ON; Carleton Place, ON; and Québec, QC, and count week birds in Alberta at Banff-Canmore and Cold Lake.

Unusual species were more spread out this year. Of the 31 species seen on only one count, 11 were in British Columbia, 11 in Ontario, five in Nova Scotia, and four in Newfoundland. Bird of the year honors has to go to the **Gray Flycatcher** seen and photographed on the Fisherville, ON, count, a first Christmas count record for Canada. A Canada Warbler on Saint-Pierre et Miquelon would have been new for a Canadian count but was only seen during count week, and some sticklers might point out that it wasn't technically in Canada either. A Fieldfare on the Pitt Meadows, BC, count was the first ever seen in that province at any time. Discovered by Larry Cowan while he was alone in the field, the bird, fortunately, was photographed, as it was never seen again. Another thrush, a Gray-checked, was seen at Halifax for only the second Canadian Christmas count record. Another second record was the Western Scrub-Jay seen on the Ladner, BC, count.