

Winter Bird Count - January, 2007

Last January (2006) we inaugurated what we called our First Annual Winter Bird Count. Our team of 8 encountered 57 species and a total of 22,613 individual birds. This did exceed our expectations and we were extremely happy. But, we did notice that many of the birds that had been common in good amounts in past years simply were not represented with the expected numbers. We surmised that the relatively warm weather might have had something to do with it. As this was our first count, we thought that subsequent years would give us a better idea of the trends that might be developing. We looked forward to January of 2007 to be able to place the second reference point on our graph (so to speak) and see the beginning of a trend of sorts.

This year, we were fielding a team of 10, some of whom could only participate for the early part of the day. But, more eyes and ears is always better and we were ready to go.

While we weren't scheduled to begin until 7:15 AM (on January 6th), team member Tom Smith had already located a **Screech Owl** around Ireland Book on Riva Avenue. This was a good start as we didn't have one last year. Also, Dave Moskowitz saw 2 **Mute Swans** on Fresh Ponds Road and **Blue Jays** at Giamaerese Farms. So, we started with 3 species right away.

We began as a full team at 7:15 AM at Dallenbach Lake. This is usually a very good spot in which to begin. However, we were aware of what we considered 'off' numbers last year because of the relatively warm temperatures. This time, it was already warm when we began and the temperatures rose to the lower 70's during the day.

Note: with each listing below, we only display NEW species for the day seen at that specific site as there are many sighting overlaps that occur during such count days.

We spent less than 1 1/2 hours at Dallenbach but saw the following species:

- Ring-billed Gull**
- Canada Goose**
- Downy Woodpecker**
- Dark-eyed Junco**
- Ring-necked Duck**
- Hooded Merganser**
- Carolina Wren**
- Mourning Dove**
- Brown Creeper**
- Mallard**
- Tufted Titmouse**
- Carolina Chickadee**
- Great-blue Heron**
- White-breasted Nuthatch**
- American Crow**

**Fish Crow
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Black-capped Chickadee
Northern Flicker
Cardinal
Song Sparrow
Common Grackle
House Sparrow**

**Total new species at Dallenbach Lake: 23 species
Running total for the day: 26 species**

Not a bad start but we expected at least a few more species. And, as with last year, many of the numbers sighted were low. We wondered where the birds could be.

Next stop was the Edgeboro Landfill where we always expect to find many species that we may not see again during the day, including large numbers of gulls and blackbirds. We have been fortunate, and grateful to have the cooperation of the landfill's administration in allowing us to make periodic visits for our counts.

Additional species seen at Edgeboro included:

**Red-tailed Hawk
Great Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
Kestrel
Black Duck
Common Merganser
Northern Harrier
Starling
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Tree Sparrow
Goldfinch
Turkey Vulture
Horned Lark
Savannah Sparrow
Peregrine Falcon
American Coot
Bufflehead
Pied-billed Grebe**

**Total new species at Edgeboro Lake: 19 species
Running total for the day: 45 species**

Not bad, but again, we expected a few more species. In particular, we were looking for Lesser Black-backed Gull and Bald Eagle, both of which had been seen at Edgeboro on

a winter count the previous week. As usual, the numbers of gulls and various blackbirds was huge, but the gull and eagle were nowhere to be found. Of note at Edgeboro, however, were **2 Sulfur Butterflies**. Amazing...in January, and a beautiful surprise.

Next we went to Keystone Park at the very southeastern corner of East Brunswick and to Duhernal Lake at the southern end of town. We picked up **Rock Dove** while driving on Old Bridge Turnpike and **Red-bellied Woodpecker** at Keystone Park. Nothing new was seen at Duhernal Lake but we did have a good time trying to key out a Harrier fairly well hidden, sitting on the ground in the tall grass of a small island in the middle of the lake. The problem was that its silhouette somewhat resembled a Short-eared Owl and it was too far away to see well. After some time, and with a bit of movement by the bird, we confirmed it as a Harrier.

Total new species while driving to and at Keystone Park: 2 species
Running total for the day: 47 species

Our next site was one that we learned from past counts could offer some surprises...the western end of Ireland Brook Park, an undeveloped county park that runs from the Salamander Migration area on Beekman Road to Riva Avenue. This was commonly known as The Pig Farm, but no remnants of the previous inhabitants remain.

Species seen at Ireland Brook included:

House Finch
Northern Mockingbird
Eastern Towhee
White-throated Sparrow
Black Vulture

Total new species at Ireland Brook Park: 5 species
Running total for the day: 52 species

With daylight beginning to grow short, we headed to an area that few know about, but we have visited (and mentioned) before. It is the beautiful pine forest at the shore of Farrington Lake near the Elks Club property. Our objective was **Great-horned Owl**. We had seen evidence of it on previous visits but never an owl. This time we were more fortunate. Dave Moskowitz found one and then another owl pellet. Two of our team were in just the right spot and looking in the right direction to see the owl moving through the trees.

Total new species at the Elks Club Pine Forest: 1 species
Running total for the day: 53 species

With the day beginning to wane, and with relatively low numbers of birds, we wondered if we should try any other areas in town, but decided against it. We thought we had squeezed out everything we could find on public land in town.

However, we did receive additional reports during the evening. Dave said he saw the ONLY **Robin** of the day while on the way home. The count in which I participated the previous week counted about 1,500 Robins at Rutgers Gardens as they emerged from the Bamboo Forest. Too bad the gardens are on the wrong side of Westons Mills Pond for us to count. And, Bob Dodelson e-mailed me with the news that he had a **Hermit Thrush** in his backyard late in the afternoon.

Total new species: 2 species
Running total for the day: 55 species

It's funny how it always seems that we have seen and counted fewer birds than we actually did. Perhaps it's good to have high expectations. ***But, this year's count totaled 10,351 individual birds, less than half the number we tallied last year.*** I wonder how significant this really is, or whether it is simply a statistical bump that should be expected. Only subsequent count data will help us answer this question. Next winter, we will aim to beat the high count of 57 species and over 22,000 individual birds from the 2006 count. IF the weather cooperates, it shouldn't be difficult to accomplish.

After we all said our goodbyes, and while on the way home, I stopped back at Dallenbach Lake for a quick walk through. I did find a flock of Juncos and 2 more Carolina Chickadees, but nothing new.

The extremely warm weather has had many of us thinking that numerous species had stayed north, awaiting really cold weather to descend to our area. I had spoken with several expert birders about this and they all had the same thoughts. Now, from the perspective of 2 1/2 week after our Winter Bird Count, and with cold weather finally upon us, it would seem that this has been borne out. Finally, such birds as Juncos and White-throated Sparrows are here in such numbers that my backyard is often blanketed with them as in past (cold) winters. This is in contrast the the very low numbers we had of these species during the count.

Our team was excellent and very willing to keep looking. And, we thank all participants, including those who e-mailed in their sightings (and a few photos) over a 20 day period or so after the count.

Do we see any trend developing here, with two Winter Bird Counts under our belts? Possibly. But it will certainly take at least several more counts to improve our chances of discerning any direction with regard to bird species and numbers.

Next up is the **Great Backyard Bird Count, February 16th - 19th**, and then our **Big Day Bird Count in May**. We hope to have many of you either join us or send in your very important observations to add to our data.

Some of you reading this will not be familiar with many of these birds. We would suggest (and encourage) that you purchase a good field guide such as **A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America** by Roger Tory Peterson and Virginia Marie Peterson ([amazon review](#)) or **The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America** by David Allen Sibley and Rick Cech ([amazon review](#)). (I very much prefer the Peterson guide for everyday and in the field use, but the Sibley book includes some very useful information that Peterson does not. RW). Both field guides are readily available at any local bookstore.

Please refer to the [Winter Bird Count page](#) for exact numbers and species count for this year's count. Comparisons with 2005 are interesting and provide an idea of what trends might be developing. Of course, if subsequent years are closer to normal with temperature and precipitation, then our mix and numbers total will change accordingly. Only by being part of these counts will you really see how things are developing.

Thanks to all who participated with such enthusiasm. We're looking forward to getting out in the field with you again soon.

Rich Wolfert
February 4, 2007

Team members:

Ray Deeney
Tom Gillen
Bob Krutzel
Elaine Long
Donald Lorey
Jan Lorey
Elizabeth Melhorn
Dave Moskowitz
Tom Smith
Justin Whitehurst
Rich Wolfert

Additional sightings were reported by:

Steve Albert
Jennifer Kurdyla
Diana Toto

Time in field: 9 hours 00 minutes

Distance Traveled: 43 miles