

London Christmas Bird Count 2018

On December 22 CBC day, we had a total of 74 species, about average over the last few years. Total number of individuals was 17602, which is much lower than the average of almost 22000.

Our highlights included a few waterfowl, such as a flock of Tundra Swan near the city dump, a Canvasback near the Forks, a Wood Duck near Komoka, and a Northern Pintail at Sunningdale Golf Course. As well, a Double-crested Cormorant, our 5th, was found at Greenway Park.

A couple of raptors were in our highlights. There were a record number of Merlins reported, as well as three Peregrine Falcons, none of the latter at the downtown site. A Red-shouldered Hawk that was hanging out in Komoka Park was not found on Count Day. A single Northern Shrike was located, the first in a few years.

Out at the dump there were a good number of Great Black-backed Gull, as well as two Lesser Black-backed and Iceland Gulls. Passerines were represented by a couple of Red-winged Blackbirds, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet along the Medway River, Tufted Titmouse in two spots along the Thames River, an Eastern Phoebe found at Westminster Ponds, several Hermit Thrush, a Fox Sparrow out near Delaware, and a Gray Catbird at Sunningdale.

The real scoop was three Orange-crowned Warblers, located at the old orchard in the Coves. This is a new species for our Count. There was also a Yellow-rumped Warbler seen along the south branch of the Thames near Egerton Rd.

For details on these special sightings please contact me.

We did have higher than the 10 year average for both nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Mute Swan, Mourning Dove, Rock Pigeon, Great Blue Heron, Great Black-backed Gull, Peregrine Falcon, Blue Jay and some sparrows like Whitethroats and Swamp Sparrow, But in no less than 22 species were found missing or in lower than average numbers.

Just two species had new high numbers, Merlin and Mute Swan. Our numbers of gulls were up, especially the rare ones, as we had some people looking for and locating the flock of gulls out at the City Dump.

Why are the numbers quite odd, with about 33 species showing quite a change in numbers? Let me try to rationalize it.

We had a very good day for getting out and about for our 110th London Christmas Bird Count. It was mild, ranging from 0 to plus 3 with no precipitation and not much wind. But with no snow and mild weather, it was easier on the counters, but actually much harder to find the birds. They were not clustered in specific locations, nor were they huddled at feeders. We seem to get higher numbers when winter is a bit tough.

From our usual experience with mild winters, we have more waterfowl species but since the water at places like Komoka froze in late November, and early December, it drove the ducks out to find better feeding areas, perhaps further south or out on the rivers.

It appeared that many of our usual wintering birds that might have come southward in the fall, perhaps did not arrive yet. Or perhaps moved on with the poor weather in the Fall. If you look at the number of juncos, American Tree Sparrows, Horned Lark, the winter finches, and some raptor species, it seems that either might be the case. You might note that no harrier or Rough-legged Hawks were found and no Snow Buntings, longspurs, and but a very few Horned Lark and winter finches. We were pleased to get a few redpolls, some Purple Finch and a fair number of siskins. At least the latter stayed in numbers.

And despite the lower numbers of some sparrows like junco and tree, the higher number of Swamp and Whitethroats might have been gained from the milder weather not being too bad to force them out. Apparently, they are still able to find food.

Despite their survival, many of us noted little food like wild grapes, poison ivy berries, juniper berries, etc, which might have prompted some of our potential wintering birds and lingerers to move further south...

Despite the poor Fall, with the milder winter, we were still able to host some non-winter type birds like the warblers, the phoebe and the catbird. Apparently, some insects and berries are available to them. We even saw insects around on the Count.

Lower numbers of some feeder birds could have been the result of mild weather so that birds did not have to scramble into feeders to get food. You have probably noted at your own feeders, after a snow, the birds congregate more at your feeders.

All this is very speculative of course, but typically, a poor weather Fall and less wild food availability drives our potentially lingering birds out, and milder winters allow us to gain lingering species but keeps birds away from feeders, so the combination of these factors complicates our results.

Thank you to all the 138 participants, 32 at feeders, for your help and dedication to the CBC. It is wonderful to have so many folks involved. I try to accommodate all to make sure we all can enjoy counting the birds of winter.

I would remind you that in order to keep our great tradition going in the future, that we need to try to interest young birders or interested parties in taking part. I have had a few retirements over the last few years, and no one to replace them. A few new folks joined us this year, so that only a few routes are vacant, but please try to find people to join your parties to keep your route working.

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Since 1983
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