

# 2017 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count

## Chris Edwards and Diana Pesek

The 67th annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 17, 2017. The count area is a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Hwy. 965 and Penn Street in North Liberty. The total of 71 species was above the ten-year average of 66. The all-time high count of 81 species was set in 2012. Temperatures on count day were above average at 31-41° F with light E winds. Partly cloudy skies in the morning gave way to cloudy skies and some light rain in the early afternoon. Area rivers and streams were mostly open, the Coralville Reservoir and other bodies of water partly open, and there was no snow cover.

### *Highlights*

Several rare species were found this year: Greater White-fronted Goose (fifth count record), Ross's Goose (third count record), American White Pelican (fourth count record), Red-shouldered Hawk (third record in last 50 years), and Snowy Owl (third count record). Several other uncommon species (not seen in most years) were found: Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, and Merlin.

Species seen in numbers significantly *above* the ten-year average were Canada Goose, Northern Shoveler (all-time high), Cooper's Hawk (all-time high), American Kestrel (ties ten-year high), Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Barred Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker (all-time high), Blue Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren (ten-year high), European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird (ten-year high), and Pine Siskin.

Species seen in numbers significantly *below* the ten-year average were Wild Turkey, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Northern Flicker, American Crow (lowest count since 1977), American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, and Dark-eyed Junco.

Common species (seen in most years) missed entirely were Common Goldeneye, Herring Gull, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Horned Lark (fourth straight year).

Species seen during the count week but not on the count were Snow Goose and Northern Pintail.

### *Some Interesting Trends*

The Red-shouldered Hawk found on this year's count was only the second in the last 50 years. In the early years of the Iowa City count, from 1951-1966, the species was seen nearly annually, with a high count of six. But starting in 1967, none were seen until 2012 and 2016. This decline was noted on other CBCs throughout Iowa in the 1960s, and corresponded to a rapid decline in the species' population in Iowa and nationwide. This decline was due primarily to habitat loss and forest fragmentation, and pesticides may also have been a factor. This species is an interior forest specialist that requires large stands of mature bottomland forest habitat for nesting. It is currently listed as Endangered in Iowa.

Our three common resident owl species – Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, and Eastern Screech-Owl – were all found in above-average numbers this year, and the combined 19 individuals were the highest since 1994. Our owling effort this year, at 3.4 party-hours, was about average for the last ten years, so perhaps these owl populations are increasing. On the other hand, we found no individuals of two wintering owl species – Long-eared Owl and Short-eared Owl – for the fourth straight year. From 1951-1983, these owls were found in most years (29/33 years for Long-eared, 26/33 for Short-eared). Since 1984 they have been found only occasionally (8/23 years for Long-eared, 9/23 for Short-eared). Habitat

loss is likely responsible for long-term declines in these species. Much of the grassland in our area, favored by Short-eared Owls for roosting and foraging, has been converted to row crops or housing subdivisions, and the dense conifer groves preferred by Long-eared Owls have become less common in our landscape.

The three most populous species on this year's count include one reintroduced species – Canada Goose – and two introduced species – European Starling and House Sparrow. It is hard to fathom now, but from 1951 to 1974, no Canada Geese were found on our count. The species was once common in Iowa, but nesting populations were extirpated by about 1900 due to hunting and habitat loss. Following a reintroduction effort by the Iowa Conservation Commission starting in 1964, the nesting population in Iowa was reestablished. From 1975 to 1994, about 100 per year were seen on our count. Now we are seeing an average of 2,500 per year – although it is difficult to determine a truly accurate number since the birds move around so much during the day.

### *Count Effort*

This year there were 30 field observers, including 6 first-time participants, in 10 parties: Elizabeth Aubrey, Kyle and Dena Belcher, Fawn Bowden, Mark Brown, Barry Buschelman, Theresa Carbrey, Chris Caster, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim and Karole Fuller, Peter Hansen, Rick Hollis, Andy and KT Long, Terri Macey, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble, Jason Paulios, Nicole Pearson, Diana Pesek, Linda Quinn, Carole Rocco, Ben Rowold, Jim Scheib, Joan Schnabel, and Sharon Somers.

There were 12 feeder watchers in 11 locations, a slight increase from recent years. Feeder watchers were Barbara Beaumont, Anne Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim and Karole Fuller, Janet Hollis, Kate Kostenbater, Nancy Lynch, Aurelia Moreton-Gotwals, Jim Scheib, Lydia Somers, Ronnye Wieland.

This year's count was organized by Diana Pesek, and the results were compiled by Chris Edwards. On the day of the count we met for lunch at the North Liberty Community Center, at which time we had 67 species. We met for an evening meal and compilation at Gus' Food & Spirits in Coralville. We collected \$92 in donations for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count program. Thanks to everyone who donated.

Nationally, this year marked the 118th consecutive Christmas Bird Count. More than 70,000 observers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and many Pacific Islands participate in this annual bird census. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are available online at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc), through a cooperative project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

### **SPECIES LIST**

Ross's Goose	1	Red-breasted Merganser	1	Eurasian Collared-Dove	22
Greater White-fronted Goose	3	Ring-necked Pheasant	3	Mourning Dove	294
Cackling Goose	10	Wild Turkey	18	Great Horned Owl	3
Canada Goose	4,082	American White Pelican	2	Snowy Owl	2
Northern Shoveler	90	Northern Harrier	3	Barred Owl	8
Gadwall	1	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Belted Kingfisher	2
American Wigeon	1	Cooper's Hawk	8	Red-headed Woodpecker	16
Mallard	550	Bald Eagle	61	Red-bellied Woodpecker	80
American Black Duck	2	Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Downy Woodpecker	94
Canvasback	7	Red-tailed Hawk	64	Hairy Woodpecker	19
Lesser Scaup	30	Rough-legged Hawk	5	Northern Flicker	17
Bufflehead	2	Ring-billed Gull	156	Pileated Woodpecker	8
Hooded Merganser	1	Gull sp.	22	American Kestrel	31
Common Goldeneye	1	Rock Pigeon	213	Merlin	2

Shrike sp.	1	American Robin	4	Northern Cardinal	180
Blue Jay	173	European Starling	1,707	Red-winged Blackbird	948
American Crow	134	Cedar Waxwing	182	House Finch	132
Black-capped Chickadee	198	Yellow-rumped Warbler	4	Purple Finch	16
Tufted Titmouse	49	American Tree Sparrow	229	Pine Siskin	92
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	Fox Sparrow	1	American Goldfinch	176
White-breasted Nuthatch	81	Dark-eyed Junco	364	House Sparrow	698
Brown Creeper	6	White-crowned Sparrow	36	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	26
Carolina Wren	9	White-throated Sparrow	37	TOTAL SPECIES	71
Eastern Bluebird	23	Song Sparrow	8	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	11,460
Hermit Thrush	2	Swamp Sparrow	1		