

2019 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count

Chris Edwards

The 69th annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 15, 2019. The count area is a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Hwy. 965 and Penn Street in North Liberty. The total of 64 species was below the ten-year average of 67. The all-time high count of 81 species was set in 2012. Temperatures on count day were below average at 5-19° F with light variable wind. The sky was mostly clear in the morning but turned cloudy by mid-afternoon. Area rivers and streams were mostly open, the Coralville Reservoir and other bodies of water were mostly frozen, and there was no significant snow cover.

Highlights

Two very rare species were seen this year. Two male Yellow-headed Blackbirds, found in an immense blackbird flock several miles south of Tiffin, provided the first record of this species on our count. A Savannah Sparrow, seen along the bike trail near the Finkbine Commuter Lot, was only our second record of this species, and the first since 1994. Other unusual species (not seen in most years) were Snow Goose, Trumpeter Swan, American Black Duck, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

In contrast to 2018, many species were seen in numbers significantly *above* the ten-year average, including three record high counts: Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan (record high), Bald Eagle (ten-year high), Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker (ten-year high), Downy Woodpecker (ten-year high), Hairy Woodpecker (ten-year high), Northern Flicker, Northern Shrike (record high), Blue Jay (ten-year high), White-breasted Nuthatch (ten-year high), Cedar Waxwing, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow (record high), Purple Finch (ten-year high), Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird (record high), Brown-headed Cowbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler (ten-year high), and Northern Cardinal.

Some species were seen in numbers significantly *below* the ten-year average: Cackling Goose, Mallard, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Ring-billed Gull, Great Horned Owl, American Crow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Pine Siskin, White-crowned Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow. Common species (seen in most years) missed entirely were Lesser Scaup, Herring Gull, and Hermit Thrush. Greater White-fronted Goose, Wood Duck, American Coot, American White Pelican, and Common Grackle were seen during the count week but not on the day of the count.

Count Effort

This year there were 37 field observers in 11 parties: Elizabeth Aubrey, Jules Bacon, Kyle Belcher, Katya Boltanova, Fawn Bowden, Mary Bowler, Brian Broderick, Mark Brown, Russell Brown, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Seth Dudley, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim Fuller, Karole Fuller, Peter Hansen, Rick Hollis, Jim Kettelkamp, Lisa Lombardo, Ken Lowder, Nancy Lynch, Terri Macey, Ramona McGurk, Cheryl Miller, Milana Mitchell, Mary Noble, Jason Paulios, Linda Quinn, Deb Rolfes, Mark Rolfes, Linda Rudolph, Mariko Sato, James Scheib, and Torin Waters. The 66.3 total party-hours was above the 10-year average of 60.2 hours. Three parties spent 3.3 hours in the field owl-watching, which matched the 10-year average of 3.3 hours. There were 13 feeder watchers in 12 locations: Cindy Asmussen, Barbara Beaumont, Kaci Carolan, Julie Englander, Linda Fisher, Janet Hollis, Jenny Hollis Miller, Kate Kostenbader and Ted Lepic, Milana Mitchell, James Scheib, Cindy Spading, and Ronnye Wieland. Feeder watchers spent 28.5 hours watching, compared to the 10-year average of 18.4 hours. This year we collected \$126 in donations for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count program. Thanks to everyone who donated.

SPECIES LIST

Snow Goose	1	Barred Owl	6	European Starling	685
Cackling Goose	2	Belted Kingfisher	1	Cedar Waxwing	488
Canada Goose	4756	Red-headed Woodpecker	16	House Sparrow	902
Trumpeter Swan	9	Red-bellied Woodpecker	107	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	62
Mallard	245	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	House Finch	142
American Black Duck	1	Downy Woodpecker	136	Purple Finch	17
Common Goldeneye	9	Hairy Woodpecker	32	Pine Siskin	8
Hooded Merganser	1	Northern Flicker	30	American Goldfinch	125
Common Merganser	1	Pileated Woodpecker	4	American Tree Sparrow	390
Ruddy Duck	1	American Kestrel	27	Dark-eyed Junco	536
Ring-necked Pheasant	4	Northern Shrike	5	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Wild Turkey	20	Blue Jay	222	White-throated Sparrow	20
Rock Pigeon	188	American Crow	280	Savannah Sparrow	1
Eurasian Collared-Dove	1	Black-capped Chickadee	193	Song Sparrow	21
Mourning Dove	187	Tufted Titmouse	50	Swamp Sparrow	1
Ring-billed Gull	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	Yellow-headed Blackbird	2
Northern Harrier	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	93	Red-winged Blackbird	4181
Cooper's Hawk	6	Brown Creeper	3	Brown-headed Cowbird	27
Bald Eagle	163	Carolina Wren	2	Yellow-rumped Warbler	8
Red-tailed Hawk	78	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	Northern Cardinal	324
Rough-legged Hawk	3	Eastern Bluebird	19	TOTAL SPECIES	64
Great Horned Owl	1	American Robin	16	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	14867

Some Interesting Trends

The table below shows the average annual count in each of the last three decades for some representative species. A few species such as Canada Goose, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, and Eastern Bluebird have increased. Many more species including Mallard, Great Horned Owl, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and American Goldfinch have shown significant declines. Many relatively common species including Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, House Finch, and Northern Cardinal increased in the 2000s but then declined in the 2010s, sometimes sharply. Overall, the total species and total birds found each year have remained remarkably consistent over the last three decades.

Species	1990s	2000s	2010s	Species	1990s	2000s	2010s
Canada Goose	814	1493	3484	Tufted Titmouse	59	68	46
Mallard	1709	1497	546	Red-breasted Nuthatch	15	7	3
Ring-necked Pheasant	24	48	3	Eastern Bluebird	4	16	32
Wild Turkey	38	76	26	House Sparrow	1420	878	641
Mourning Dove	107	260	170	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	0	2	25
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	3	1	House Finch	85	118	109
Cooper's Hawk	1	3	5	American Goldfinch	236	208	134
Bald Eagle	35	80	83	Dark-eyed Junco	588	720	484
Red-tailed Hawk	77	74	68	White-throated Sparrow	16	41	31
Great Horned Owl	7	4	4	Song Sparrow	35	19	11
Barred Owl	8	5	4	Northern Cardinal	314	486	242
Red-bellied Woodpecker	49	90	72	Total Species	66	64	67
Downy Woodpecker	118	136	97	Total Individuals	10835	10385	10697
Northern Flicker	25	34	17	Field Observers	30	35	31
American Kestrel	19	19	24	Field Hours	69	69	60
American Crow	1054	757	390	Owling Hours	3.3	3.6	3.3
Black-capped Chickadee	347	300	203	Feeder Watchers	11	16	9

Nationally, this year marked the 120th consecutive Christmas Bird Count. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are available online at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc. A table showing the results of every Iowa City Christmas Bird Count from 1951 to the present is available on our website at www.iowacitybirdclub.org.