

INDIAN PEAKS FOUR SEASON BIRD COUNTS

Spring, Summer 1999

Newsletter

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Spring Count Summary

It was a very wet and snowy spring but mixed in were some periods of nice weather. A number of count parties delayed their excursion until the end of the count period; the result was a record number of species. This was in spite of the fact that subalpine and tundra areas were deep in snow; there was no coverage of the tundra so ptarmigan, rosy finches and horned larks were missed but American pipits were smart and seen in meadows at lower elevations. Some of us had bad days with high winds; I managed to see 6 species and 21 birds near the Mountain Research Station and most of those were at their feeder. Other participants had great days for seeing birds. Linda Andes- Georges finally got a perfect day at Lefthand Reservoir and had "probably the best spring count I'll ever have up there."

Spring Count Summary

Number of Species - 95

(Average - 82)

Individuals - 39 per hour

(Average - 36)

There were many good finds and several first time sightings for the spring count. New sightings included merlin (JB, MI), Say's phoebe (NM, MT, BK, GM, AC) and chestnut-sided warbler (KG, FF, JH). Other good sightings included: bald eagle (2nd time; KG, FF, JHv), Swainson's hawk (4th time; DH), ferruginous hawk (4th time; DH), greater yellowlegs (2nd time; JH, CN-H, M&SM), Hammond's flycatcher (4th time; KG, FF, JHv), dusky flycatcher (4th

time; DH), cordilleran flycatcher (4th time; KG, FF, JHv), canyon wren (2nd time; BK, GM, AC), Bohemian waxwing (2nd time; KG, FF, JHv), yellow warbler (2nd time; NM, MT), Virginia's warbler (4th time; KG, FF, JHv), MacGillivray's warbler (2nd time; SJ), Wilson's warbler (3rd time; NM, MT), rose-breasted grosbeak (2nd time; KG, FF, JHv), black-headed grosbeak (3rd time; NM, MT, KG, FF, JHv, DH), and lark sparrow (2nd time; BK, GM, AC).

There were good numbers of mountain chickadee (3.37/hour, historic average of 2.77/hour - greater survival rate due to mild winter?), dark-eyed junco (5.25/hour, historic average of 3.32/hour) and American dipper (16 observed).

Accipiters made a poor showing, including the absence of northern goshawks for the third consecutive count (fall, winter, spring). Pygmy nuthatch also had low numbers (.14/hour, historic average of .65/hour). Cone seed-eaters are still in relatively low numbers with a few red crossbills scattered throughout the count circle.

Breeding Count Summary

Breeding Count Summary

Number of Species - 105

(Average - 98)

Individuals - 40 per hour

(Average - 42)

We cracked the century mark for the 7th time with only three other counts equaling or exceeding the 1999 species total (with 109 species being the all-time high).

The best find, a first time sighting for the counts, was a Cassin's kingbird. It was seen by Dr. Robert Cohen on the Arapaho Ranch while he was inventorying his tree swallow nest-boxes. Other good finds included: ring-billed gull (3rd time; PH, KG, MG), black swift (2nd time; BK, AM, DW, TD), rufous hummingbird (5th time; TVZ, KG), eastern kingbird (4th time; DH), blue jay (5th time; DH) and western meadowlark (5th time; RC).

Overall numbers of individuals were slightly below normal. Most of this can be attributed to low numbers of American robins (2.3/hour, historic average of 3.4/hour) and pine siskins (1.7/hour, historic average of 2.8/hour). Other notable low counts included green-winged teal (.03/hour, historic average of .11/hour), mallard (.26/hour, historic average of .41/hour) and pygmy nuthatch (.10/hour, 1992-1996 average of .18/hour).

There were some good counts for white-tailed ptarmigan (7), osprey (3) and northern goshawk (3). Local information has it that osprey have shown some interest in nesting at a location within the count circle.

Cone seed-eaters showed a slight increase from the fall count. Red crossbills were seen in small groups throughout the count circle. Clark's nutcrackers also made a decent showing.

Return of the Snows of Yesteryear?

Local archeologist Jim Benedict recently had an article published in *Arctic, Antarctic and Alpine Research* entitled "Effects of changing climate on game-animal and human use of the Colorado high country since 1000 BC." For this 3,000 year period, he correlates human population declines at high altitude with significant periods of upslope snowstorms which were triggered by colder temperatures and intensified cut-off low pressure systems in

the southwestern United States. The persistent snow covered ground resulted in poor quality forage, lower game populations and fewer human predators.

The current century has had periods of intensified spring upslope storms, though on a much smaller scale. One of these periods was ending in the early 1980s as the Indian Peaks Bird Counts were beginning.

Another period of intensified spring snows began in 1994 and continued into this spring. We noted in the 15 year summary a trend of increasing amounts of spring precipitation. The pattern was punctuated by the spring of 1995 which brought 132" of snow. For 1999, after a mild winter, we were treated to heavy snows in April and May. The subalpine and tundra areas were almost totally covered for the spring bird count.

So what does this have to do with the bird counts? We have noticed over the past several years that horned larks have been more difficult to find on the tundra. From 1994 - 1999 we found half the number of horned larks than from 1982 - 1993. American pipits, on the other hand, showed no change. Are horned larks showing a different breeding strategy, maybe opting for alternate sites on the prairie when the tundra is covered by snow so late into the breeding season, an option that pipits don't have?

We have also seen an increase in savannah sparrow sightings. The increased spring precipitation may be enhancing mountain wetlands and savannah sparrows breed in wet meadows. On the breeding count, from 1982 - 1993 the sparrows were seen only 3 times and only at one location, while from 1994 - 1999 they were seen on every count and normally at several locations. The spring count revealed the same trend of increased sightings after 1994.

Also of note, though non-avian in nature, the timing of the spring movement of the Winiger Ridge elk herd has changed. During the 1980s and early 1990s there was generally a movement of most of the herd from winter grounds along Magnolia Road to the Arapaho Ranch during the last half of April. With the deep snows of recent springs there are movements of only small herds of elk to the Arapaho Ranch, with many animals staying east of the Peak-to-Peak Highway through May and into June. We even suspect calving occurring east of the highway.

So we have another pattern to track. We will try to work up some tables and graphs to better depict what might be occurring.

Field Notes

There were sightings of other critters during both counts including pine squirrel, Abert's squirrel, least chipmunk, golden-mantled ground squirrel, snowshoe hare, Nuttall's cottontail, pika, marmot, mule deer and elk. Paula Hansley, while out alone in the Rainbow Lakes area, thought she heard a bear growl! One rooster showed up for the South St. Vrain group (Bev Baker, Linda Andes-Georges and Paul Mintier) on both counts.

Looking Ahead

Next Counts

Fall

Count Day - September 18th
Count Period - Sept. 11th - 26th

Winter

Count Day - January 8th
Count Period - Dec. 15th - Feb. 15th

Sorry about the notice of winter. Remember, Fall Counts go to Bill Kaempfer and Winter Counts are sent to me in AZ.

Fall Count Compilation Get-Together

Since last year's get-together was so successful, we'll do it again. It will be on count day, Saturday Sept. 18th, starting around 3 p.m. at our home in Eldora (2478 Eldora Rd). The fare will include snacks and refreshments as well as any leftover trail mix from the day's field work. Give me a call if you plan on coming or you need further directions (303-258-3672). Easiest parking is across the road from our driveway.

Happy Birding
Dave Hallock

1999 INDIAN PEAKS SPRING BIRD COUNT

Count day - May 8; Count period- May 1-18. Weather: colder and more precipitation than normal. Twenty-nine observers, 18 of 25 areas covered. Total party hours: 104.75.

Canada Goose	2	Great Horned Owl	1	Common Raven	35
Green-winged Teal	4	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	75	Black-capped Chickadee	53
Mallard	60	Belted Kingfisher	3	Mountain Chickadee	353
Gadwall	9	Red-naped Sapsucker	37	Red-breasted Nuthatch	27
Ring-necked Duck	12	Williamson's Sapsucker	12	White-breasted Nuthatch	17
Turkey Vulture	6	Downy Woodpecker	3	Pygmy Nuthatch	15
Osprey	2	Hairy Woodpecker	23	Brown Creeper	13
Bald Eagle	1	Three-toed Woodpecker	3	Rock Wren	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Northern Flicker	98	Canyon Wren	1
Cooper's Hawk	3	Hammond's Flycatcher	1	House Wren	22
Accipiter species	5	Dusky Flycatcher	2	American Dipper	16
Swainson's Hawk	1	Cordilleran Flycatcher	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	26
Red-tailed Hawk	16	Empidonax species	4	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	293
Ferruginous Hawk	1	Say's Phoebe	3	Western Bluebird	1
Golden Eagle	3	Tree Swallow	89	Mountain Bluebird	63
American Kestrel	3	Violet-green Swallow	42	Townsend's Solitaire	66
Merlin	1	N. Rough-winged Swallow	1	Hermit Thrush	9
Blue Grouse	1	Barn Swallow	30	American Robin	394
Greater Yellowlegs	1	Gray Jay	4	American Pipit	197
Spotted Sandpiper	4	Steller's Jay	136	Bohemian Waxwing	5
Common Snipe	22	Clark's Nutcracker	26	Loggerhead Shrike	1
Band-tailed Pigeon	38	Black-billed Magpie	44		
Mourning Dove	13	American Crow	82		
European Starling	25	Oregon	(7)		
Orange-crowned Warbler	1	Gray-headed	(335)		
Virginia's Warbler	2	Red-winged Blackbird	103		
Yellow Warbler	4	Brewer's Blackbird	62		
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1	Common Grackle	37		
Yellow-rumped Warbler	213	Brown-headed Cowbird	53		
MacGillivray's Warbler	1	Pine Grosbeak	13		
Wilson's Warbler	2	Cassin's Finch	37		
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1	House Finch	7		
Black-headed Grosbeak	6	Red Crossbill	33		
Green-tailed Towhee	7	Pine Siskin	172		
Chipping Sparrow	82	American Goldfinch	10		
Vesper Sparrow	7	Evening Grosbeak	2		
Lark Sparrow	1				
Fox Sparrow	17				
Lincoln's Sparrow	5				
Song Sparrow	33				
White-crowned Sparrow	14				
Dark-eyed Junco	550				

Totals: 95 species plus 2 additional races; 4046 individuals, 39 individuals per count hour.

Participants: Linda Andes- Georges, Bev Baker, Jay Berger, Diane Brown, AndyCowell, Mike Figgs, Fern Ford, Beverly Gholson, Kathy Gibson, Audrey Godell, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Susan Harris, Elaine Hill, JimHolitza, Jody Hovorka, Maureen Ivy, Steve Jones, BillKaempfer, Dawn Kummli, Nan Lederer, Cherie Long, Gary Mathews, Merle & Sally Miller, NaseemMunshi, Carol Newman-Holitza, Mark Pscheid, Michael Tupper.

1999 INDIAN PEAKS BREEDING BIRD COUNT

Count day - June 12th; Count period - June 1 - July 17th. Weather: Average for the count period with periods of precipitation and cool weather during the first three weeks of June, then warm and dry through the first week of July, finishing with increased precipitation during the remainder of July. Thirtytwo observers, 18 of 25 areas covered. Total party hours 150.

Great Blue Heron	6	Western Wood-Pewee	26	American Pipit	232
Turkey Vulture	2	Hammond's Flycatcher	8	Virginia's Warbler	5
Mallard	39	Dusky Flycatcher	63	Yellow Warbler	39
Green-winged Teal	5	Cordilleran Flycatcher	94	Yellow-rumped Warbler	319
Ring-necked Duck	18	Cassin's Kingbird	1	MacGillivray's Warbler	29
Osprey	3	Eastern Kingbird	1	Wilson's Warbler	247
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Warbling Vireo	246	Western Tanager	18
Cooper's Hawk	1	Gray Jay	13	Green-tailed Towhee	79
Northern Goshawk	3	Steller's Jay	89	Spotted Towhee	1
Accipiter species	1	Blue Jay	3	Chipping Sparrow	56
Red-tailed Hawk	8	Clark's Nutcracker	73	Vesper Sparrow	11
Golden Eagle	1	Black-billed Magpie	24	Savannah Sparrow	5
American Kestrel	1	American Crow	58	Fox Sparrow	47
White-tailed Ptarmigan	7	Common Raven	31	Song Sparrow	62
Blue Grouse	8	Horned Lark	54	Lincoln's Sparrow	172
Sora	3	Tree Swallow	188	White-crowned Sparrow	283
Killdeer	5	Violet-green Swallow	114	Dark-eyed Junco	303
Spotted Sandpiper	20	N. Rough-winged Swallow	1	Oregon	(1)
Common Snipe	25	Cliff Swallow	14	Gray-headed	(302)
Ring-billed Gull	1	Barn Swallow	57	Black-headed Grosbeak	23
Band-tailed Pigeon	77	Black-capped Chickadee	26	Red-winged Blackbird	52
Mourning Dove	22	Mountain Chickadee	235	Western Meadowlark	1
Great Horned Owl	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	45	Brewer's Blackbird	59
Small owl species	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	16	Common Grackle	3
Common Nighthawk	8	Pygmy Nuthatch	15	Brown-headed Cowbird	64
Black Swift	3	Brown Creeper	27	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	4
White-throated Swift	1	Rock Wren	15	Pine Grosbeak	12
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	359	House Wren	89	Cassin's Finch	33
Rufous Hummingbird	1	American Dipper	10	House Finch	5
Belted Kingfisher	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	36	Red Crossbill	84
Williamson's Sapsucker	5	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	336	Pine Siskin	252
Red-naped Sapsucker	18	Mountain Bluebird	74	American Goldfinch	3
Downy Woodpecker	9	Townsend's Solitaire	46	Evening Grosbeak	3
Hairy Woodpecker	16	Swainson's Thrush	14	House Sparrow	5
Three-toed Woodpecker	7	Hermit Thrush	143		
Northern Flicker	67	American Robin	345		
Olive-sided Flycatcher	15	European Starling	12		

Totals: 105 species plus 1 additional race; 5935 individuals; 40 individuals per count hour.

Participants: Linda Andes-Georges, Bev Baker, Barbara & Earl Bolton, Diane Brown, Robert Cohen, Tom Delaney, Marty & Don Dick, Lee & Virginia Evans, Mike Figgs, Kathy Gibson, Maddy Goldhawk, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Susan Harris, Elaine Hill, Jim Holitza, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Dawn Kumli, Nan Lederer, Cherie Long, Alberto Marcone, Merle & Sally Miller, Paul Mintier, Naseem Munshi, Michael Tupper, David Waltman, Tom VanZandt.