

INDIAN PEAKS BIRD COUNTS

Winter 2021

Newsletter

Vol.40 No.1

Winter Count Summary

The numbers of species and total birds were quite similar to last year, which we called a good count. But the two counts were very different in terms of composition. Species that were common last year, particularly cone seed eaters (crossbills, Clark's Nutcrackers, Red-breasted Nuthatches) were uncommon this year. Total numbers this winter were kept up by flocks at feeders - Red-winged Blackbirds, Rosy-Finches, Pine Grosbeaks, Cassin's Finches, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks. This made the birding experience for participants quite different from last year. There were lots of statements about a lack of birds out in the forests, even on those counts that were lucky to find a calm day.

Winter Count Summary

Number of Species

2021 - 31

Last Winter - 31

35-year Average - 35

Record High - 42 (1982)

Record Low - 22 (2018)

Number of Individuals

2021 - 27/count hour

Last Winter - 26/count hour

35-year average - 19/count hour

Record High - 29/count hour (1999)

Record Low - 9/count hour (2018)

There were many national reports of a superflight of finches from the north - Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and others. It was called one of the biggest irruptive years of northern finches in recent memory. That could explain some of the flocks we counted. But it is difficult, as all of these boreal species call our mountains

home and all go searching for food when the local forests don't meet their needs - locally, that meant congregating at feeders.

Other species with above average numbers included Pygmy Nuthatch (2nd highest for the Winter Count), Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, and American Three-toed Woodpecker. The number of Cassin's Finches was an all-time high for the Winter Count. Evening Grosbeaks saw their highest numbers since 2005.

A group that I call foothill ground feeders - Northern Flicker, Townsend's Solitaire, American Robin, and Dark-eyed Junco - all had very poor counts. The majority of the count reports indicated a high percentage of the ground was covered by snow when the participants went out.

There were no new species observed on this winter count. Two Ruby-crowned Kinglets were observed (Sugarloaf count area), only the third time seen on the Winter Count.

Species normally seen at least 50% of the time during winter that were missed or absent included Dusky Grouse (seen on 21 Winter Counts), White-tailed Ptarmigan (32 counts), American Dipper (19 counts), Golden-crowned Kinglet (29 counts), American Robin (28 counts), Bohemian Waxwing (21 counts), and Northern Shrike (24 counts).

End of Winter Count

This was the 40th and last year for the Winter Count. The Indian Peaks Bird Count began in 1982 with a formal Christmas Bird Count. Since it was a one-day count, we used to meet at a restaurant in Nederland for compilation and share stories of the day - like spending 8 hours cross-country skiing only to find 3 Mountain

Chickadees, and cheering on a fox captured by a trapper as it escaped from the burlap bag. We went to a Four Season Bird Count that year when we conducted the Breeding and Fall Counts and then added the Spring Count the following year. We stayed with a single-day count for the first 10 years. But we realized that a one-day count was as much an indication of the weather that day as the birds present - especially for the Winter Count. So we then went to a count period that allowed more flexibility for people to find a day with better weather - and for people to do more count areas if they had time.

Weather and age have played a part in seeing the number of field hours greatly diminish on the Winter Count. In the early years we regularly hit 100 hours and when we went to a count period we went over 130 field hours a few times. But now we generally do between 30-40 field hours per count. We still have good participation, but it is hard to put in 8 hours on a cold and windy day - something we were able to do when younger. This is not a criticism, just an observation and a bit of reality. Heck, the winter drove Diane and myself out of the area 25 years ago. Keeping a winter bird count going for 40 years at high elevation is pretty good.

We have seen that the numbers of birds present during the winter are driven by

such things as conifer cone crop (crossbills, nutcrackers, and red-breasted nuthatches), snow cover (Northern Flickers, American Robins, Townsend's Solitaires, and Dark-eyed Juncos), and irruptions from the north (Bohemian Waxwings, Snow Buntings and others). And then, just the fluctuations in Mountain Chickadee numbers can be the single most important factor driving total count numbers - during base years (no irruptions), they can comprise 1 in 4 birds observed.

Looking Ahead

Breeding Count
Count Day – June 20
Count Period – June 1 – July 15

Truly, a big thanks for making the Winter Count last 40 years and for your continued participation. The Breeding Count will continue this year and beyond. This will be the final year for the Fall Count.

Happy Birding,

Dave Hallock

2021 INDIAN PEAKS WINTER BIRD COUNT

Count period: December 15 - February 15. Twenty-one observers, 12 (of 25) areas covered.
Total party hours: 36.95.

Red-tailed Hawk	Pygmy Nuthatch.....	4	81
Great Horned Owl.....	Brown Creeper	3	7
American Three-toed Woodpecker.....	Ruby-crowned Kinglet.....	3	2
Downy Woodpecker	Townsend's Solitaire	5	1
Hairy Woodpecker	Evening Grosbeak.....	8	35
Northern Flicker.....	Pine Grosbeak	2	43
Canada Jay	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch.....	12	42
Steller's Jay.....	Black Rosy-Finch.....	61	1
Clark's Nutcracker	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	18	52
Black-billed Magpie.....	House Finch	29	9
American Crow	Cassin's Finch	105	34
Common Raven	Red Crossbill.....	29	3
Black-capped Chickadee.....	Pine Siskin	28	82
Mountain Chickadee	Dark-eyed Junco	147	10
Red-breasted Nuthatch.....	Red-winged Blackbird	11	54
White-breasted Nuthatch	passerine species	22	1

Totals: 31 species; 944 individuals; 26 individuals per count hour. Participants: Linda Andes-Georges, Alex Brown, Gillian Brown, George Coffee, Virginia Evans, Audrey Godell, Paula Hansley, Jim Holitza, Elena Klaver, Nan Lederer, Greg Massey, Carron Meaney, Loren Merrill, Eric Maxfield, Holden Maxfield, Naseem Munshi, Carol Newman-Holitza, Jeannie Reynolds, Cara Stiles, Michael Tupper, and Susan Wagner.