

**Detroit Audubon Society December 16, 2018 Christmas Bird Count
Summary by Tim Nowicki**

The longevity of the Detroit Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, formalized to a 15 mile diameter circle, has now extended to 74 years with the completion of the December 16, 2018 count. Weather on count days during these years has been as varied as Michigan winter weather. This year was mild and except for some early morning fog, a very tolerable day. Prior weather caused lakes to freeze limiting the locations for waterfowl, but surprisingly few species of waterfowl were seen. However, a remarkable three new species to the count history were added this year – that is 5% of the 60 species seen on the count day. The addition of those three brings the total to 134.

Throughout the history of the count, hundreds of people have volunteered their time to help benefit birds and our understanding of their populations. One person, Richard Jensen, participated in 45 counts for the Detroit Audubon Society. He and his team would start early and call for owls and stay late to catch waterfowl coming to the lakes. Over the years he spent at least 450 hours counting birds. Richard retired this year and graciously instructed the new leaders of his section on “hot spots” he discovered over the years. We greatly appreciate all the years and hours he helped with the count and wish him the best in the coming years.

If you are interested in learning more about the data accumulated by Christmas Bird Counts around the country, visit the Audubon web site that features the Christmas Bird Count. Data from the Detroit Audubon Society’s counts over the years is accessible and can be manipulated into charts and graphs. Population trends maps are now available for various species charting the areas of increases and declines based on statistical analysis. Audubon and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology have done a remarkable job of organizing and analyzing the mountains of data into an accessible format to the public.

Below are some of my observations from the 2018 count:

Three new species for the count history – Lesser Black-backed Gull (2), Great Egret (1) and Baltimore Oriole (1).

It was not until 1993 that the Mute Swan began to occur regularly in numbers greater than 100 individuals.

This was the fourth highest Red-tailed Hawk count (66).

The last Winter Wren seen was in 2011. Only 14 have been seen during the count history. Four were seen in 1950.

Only two previous years had counts of American Robin higher than this year: 2002 (587) and 2004 (366).

The total number of species identified during the 74 year history of the standardized 15 mile diameter circle for the Detroit Audubon Society now stands at 134. Fifteen species or 11%, have been seen on only one count. Eight were seen on one count spanning the years 1945-1981, seven were seen on one count from 1982-2018. Seven species have been seen on only two counts and six species were counted in only three count years.

Mergansers and three species of diving duck have seen a remarkable resurgence during the second half of the count history. Below are the number of counts each species was seen.

1945-1981		1982-2018
4	Hooded Merganser	22
11	Common Merganser	23
1	Red-breasted Merganser	5
5	Ring-necked Duck	22
6	Redhead	12
13	Canvasback	24

Several open country/fallow field/meadow dwelling species have shown changes in their occurrence during the count history. These are the number of years they have been seen on the count, they do not reflect the number of individuals seen. Though the Ring-necked Pheasant indicates many years for the period 1982-2018, the individual numbers are drastically different from the period 1945-1981. In addition, during the last 14 years the number of individual Am. Kestrel has dropped remarkably. Other areas of the country have noticed the same decline. Though most species indicate a reduction in numbers from the first half to the second half of the count, the Eastern Bluebird frequency has increased.

1945-1981		1982-2018
37	Ring-necked Pheasant	28
37	American Kestrel	27
26	Bobwhite	1
30	Horned Lark	18
12	E. Bluebird	35
18	Field Sparrow	9
14	E. Meadowlark	1
15	Snow Bunting	6
9	E. Towhee	3
22	Rough-legged Hawk	6
25	Northern Harrier	8

During the history of the count, the 15 mile diameter circle changed twice before 1958 when the third and final circle was defined. From 1945-2018 the number of species seen each of the 74 years was (14).

Mallard	Mourning Dove	House Sparrow
Am. Tree Sparrow	N. Cardinal	Starling
Am. Crow	Dark-eyed Junco	White-breasted Nuthatch
Tufted Titmouse	Black-capped Chickadee	Blue Jay
Downy Woodpecker	Hairy Woodpecker	

If we look at the current circle that started in 1958, the number of species seen each of the 61 years is (18). The four species added are the Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and American Goldfinch. These 18 species could be considered the core of our wintering species, but a handful could have been added had they not missed one or two counts.

The following is a list of the species seen during the 2018 count.

SPECIES	TOTAL
Great Blue Heron	1
Great Egret	1
Mute Swan	117
Trumpeter Swan	1
Canada Goose	585
Mallard	804
Redhead	14
Ring-necked Duck	2
Bufflehead	2
Hooded Merganser	2
Cooper's Hawk	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3
Red-tailed Hawk	66
Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Bald Eagle	1
Merlin	2
Wild Turkey	58
Sandhill Crane	60
Ring-billed Gull	59
Herring Gull	23
Lesser Blk-backed Gull	2
Rock Dove	237
Mourning Dove	318
Screech Owl	5
Great Horned Owl	1
Barred Owl	3
Belted Kingfisher	4
Pileated Woodpecker	2
Blue Jay	444
Common Crow	253
Black-capped Chickadee	534
Tufted Titmouse	148
White-breasted Nuthatch	185
Red-breasted Nuthatch	11
Brown Creeper	6
Carolina Wren	2
Winter Wren	1
American Robin	317
Eastern Bluebird	146
Golden-crowned Kinglet	3
Cedar Waxwing	299
N. Shrike	1
Starling	1014
House Sparrow	790
Red-winged Blackbird	1
Baltimore Oriole	1
Northern Cardinal	234
Purple Finch	4
House Finch	120
Pine Siskin	6
American Goldfinch	226
Dark-eyed Junco	311
Tree Sparrow	103
White-throated Sparrow	4
Song Sparrow	12
Swamp Sparrow	4
gull sp.?	11

Common Flicker	5		duck sp.?	1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	102		hawk sp.?	1
Hairy Woodpecker	19		owl sp.?	1
Downy Woodpecker	106		accipiter sp. ?	1
			Total Species	60
			Total Individuals	7808

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