

Detroit Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count Summary
December 20, 2020 by Timothy Nowicki

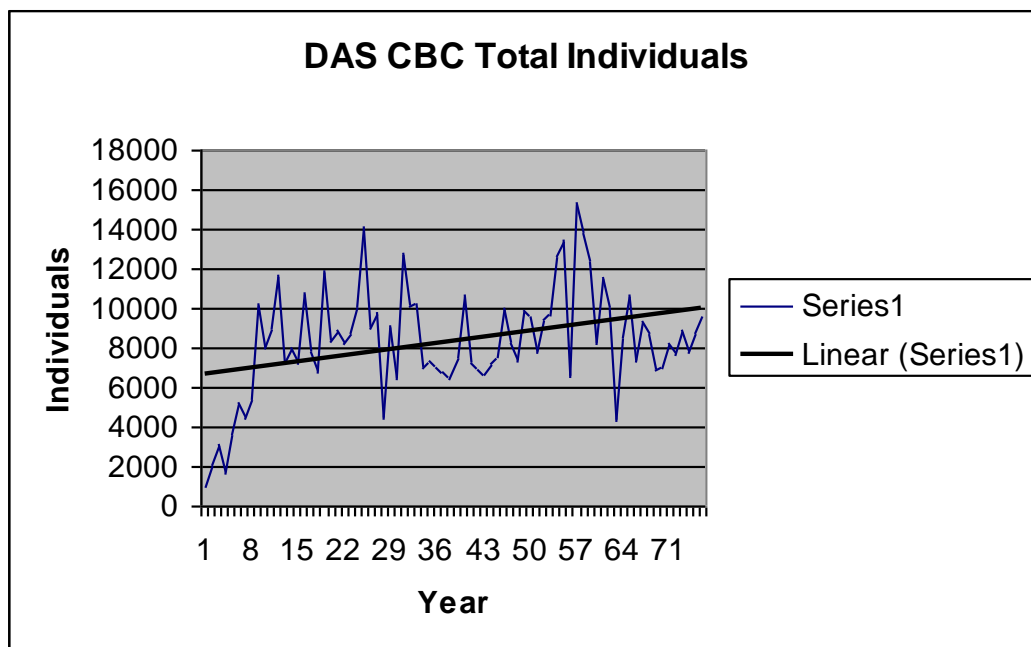
Despite the pandemic that plagued us this year, leaders from all 15 sections of the count agreed to participate and survey their respective areas - observing necessary safety protocols. Fortunately, birding is one of those activities many people participated in during the pandemic because it allowed social distancing and people enjoyed being outside.

We did not have to concern ourselves with inclement weather on the 20th, it was cold, but not too cold. Fog shrouded long distance views in the morning and lakes were partly open, but there was enough open water to concentrate waterfowl and other birds.

We added a new species to our count, two Hoary Redpolls were seen in a group of about 75 Common Redpolls – photos and independent follow-up identification verified the sighting. This year's species count ranked among the third highest: 1974 – 71, 1975 – 78, 1977 – 70, 2020 – 70. Individuals counted (9622) were almost 2000 above average.

All in all a very good count thanks to the volunteers who agreed to help survey. Several of the leaders have introduced their children, grandchildren and friends to the ranks of the counters – training recruitments for the future! Nice to see young faces in the group.

Here are some observations regarding this year's count:



Over the years the number of individuals counted has fluctuated to highs of 15369 in 2001 to lows of 4383 in 2007 when a very bad storm hit, or even on an average day in 1972 (4463). But the trend line indicates a general increase in individuals counted.

Great Blue Herons have been seen in about 50% of the counts. During the second half of the count history, they have been observed twice as often as during the first half of the count history. Is warmer weather resulting in more open water?

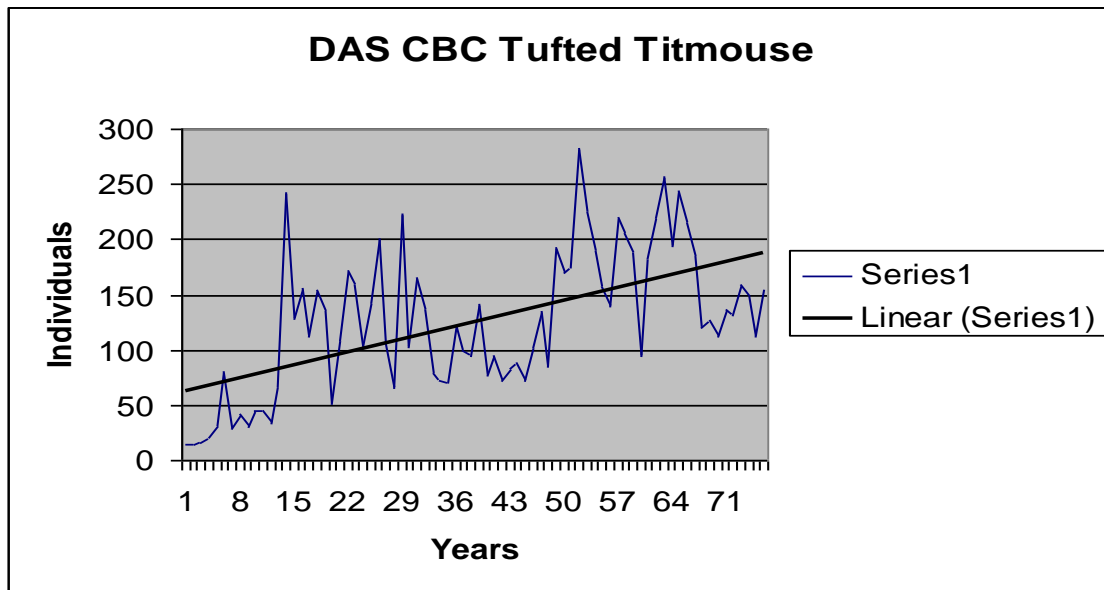
A flock of 14 Snow Geese were observed this year. Previous sightings were 2001 (1), 1948 (5).

The four year long drought of observing an American Kestrel has been broken, when two were seen this year.

The previous record of 204 Sandhill Cranes was broken this year with a new record of 355.

This year's total of 438 Rock Dove is second only to the 2003 total of 564.

Belted Kingfisher numbers from past years are fairly equal for the first half of the count history versus the second half. Three previous years' totals were eleven or above, five years, including 2020, totaled eight. They need open water but their requirements differ from open water needed by Great Blue Herons.



Though Tufted Titmouse numbers are not as high as they have been, the trend indicated by the graph above shows there has been a steady upward increase.

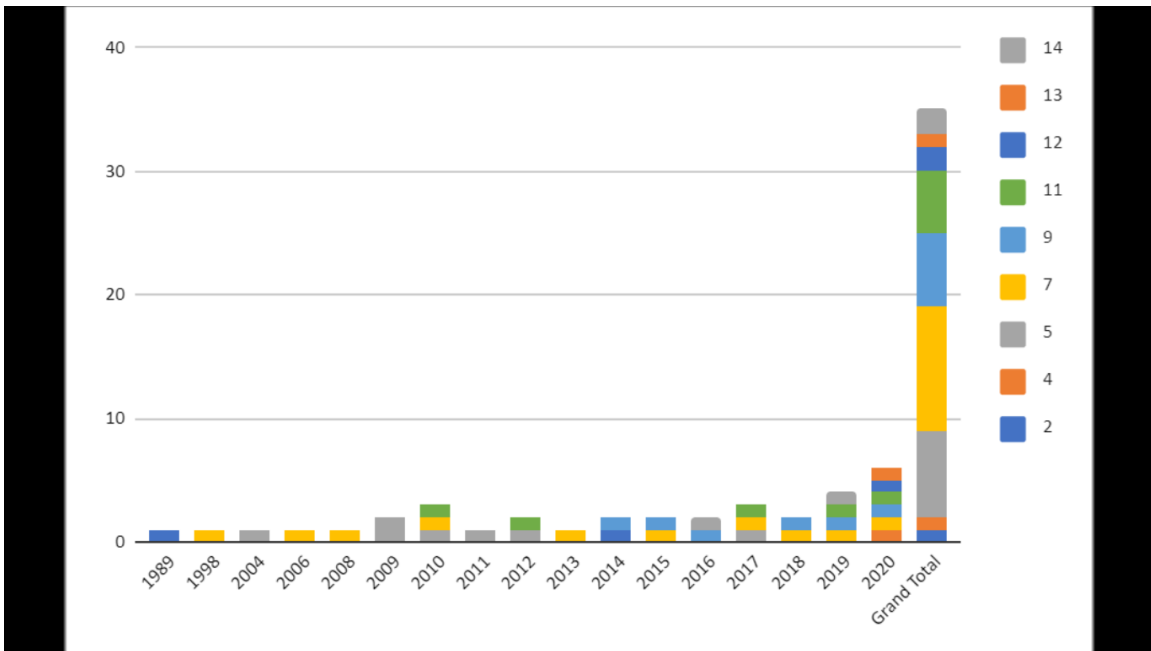
Though we did not have notable numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches during this finch invasion year, we did record seven Evening Grosbeaks, last seen in 1990 (11). Prior to 1990 they were seen 24 of 38 years.

A winter finch we did see this year was the Common Redpoll (125). The last year redpoll numbers were equal to or greater than 120 was in 1986. In addition to the Common Redpoll, two Hoary Redpolls were spotted in a group of about 75 Common Redpolls.

One Brown-headed Cowbird was seen this year. From 1958-1988 a total of 13 cowbirds were counted. During the period 1989-2020 three birds were seen. I think loss of dairy farms in the area have had an impact on their ability to survive the winter.

Golden-crowned, have been seen as often in the first half of the count as compared with the second half. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are not seen as frequently, but they were seen three times more frequently in the first half of the count when compared with the second half.

This was an exceptional year for Pileated Woodpecker sightings (8). The counts first sighting was in 1989 (1) in section 12, which is just north of Indian Springs Metro Park. Mike Wells began seeing birds in the mid 80's in the metro park and the mid 90's on the north edge of Pontiac Lake Rec. area. The next sighting was documented in 1998 (1) in section 7, which includes Indian Springs Metro Park. During the years 2004 (1), 2006 (3), 2008 (2) birds were seen either in section 7 or section 5 (just south of section 7). In 2009 new sections of the count reported seeing birds. By 2014 birds started to appear in the western most section of the count area and by 2020 birds were counted in six of the 15 different sections. This pattern of gradual dispersion suggests to me that the Indian Springs Metro Park area was the original "nursery" for pileateds' in the count area. As young survived their numbers became too great for available habitat and so individuals began to disperse. The following graph illustrates this idea. The far right hand column represents the different count sections.



Count Tally:

SPECIES	TOTAL
Great Blue Heron	2
Mute Swan	193
Tundra Swan	71
Trumpeter Swan	4
Canada Goose	1034
Snow Goose	14
Gadwall	4
Mallard	1238
Am. Black Duck	12
N. Pintail	1
Green-winged Teal	8
Wood Duck	2
Ring-necked Duck	1
Bufflehead	61
Common Goldeneye	34
Hooded Merganser	35
Common Merganser	19
Cooper's Hawk	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	41
Bald Eagle	2
American Kestrel	2
Wild Turkey	88
Sandhill Crane	355

Red-bellied Woodpecker	69
Red-headed Woodpecker	1
Hairy Woodpecker	18
Downy Woodpecker	109
Horned Lark	1
Blue Jay	297
Common Crow	295
Black-capped Chickadee	467
Tufted Titmouse	156
White-breasted Nuthatch	179
Red-breasted Nuthatch	7
Brown Creeper	23
Carolina Wren	5
American Robin	305
Hermit Thrush	5
Eastern Bluebird	102
Golden-crowned Kinglet	2
Cedar Waxwing	243
Northern Shrike	1
Starling	1274
House Sparrow	452
Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Northern Cardinal	167
Evening Grosbeak	7

Ring-billed Gull	315	Purple Finch	1
Herring Gull	162	House Finch	120
Greater Black-back Gull	3	Common Redpoll	125
Rock Dove	438	Hoary Redpoll	2
Mourning Dove	339	Pine Siskin	5
Screech Owl	2	American Goldfinch	190
Great Horned Owl	1	Dark-eyed Junco	260
Barred Owl	2	Tree Sparrow	126
Belted Kingfisher	8	White-throated Sparrow	2
Pileated Woodpecker	8	Song Sparrow	16
Common Flicker	7	Swamp Sparrow	1
		gull sp.?	73
		accpt. Sp?	1
		Total Species	70
		Total Individuals	9622

Many thanks to the following leaders and participants:

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Hull, Chris	Stewart, Elizabeth
Joswick, Jeremy	Stewart, Robert
Kaye, Travis	Summers, Chris
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