

## Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir Audubon Christmas Bird Count

The **71st** annual Ulster County **Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir** (NYML) Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was conducted on December 19, 2020. Forty-two (42) participants in eighteen (18) field parties encountered a total of **13,345 individuals** representing **79 species**, plus one additional count week species. Compared to our recent past, diversity was one species above our ten-year average (78) and total abundance dipped slightly below 13,805 individuals/count. Our all-time record high count for this circle is 87 species and 22,307 individuals, both recorded in 2017. Birds that typically flock in large numbers and have a significant influence on our abundance number were relatively scarce this year (geese, crows, starlings, robins, etc.).

Environmental conditions also influenced the final tally again this year. Clear morning skies with bright sunlight and little to no wind made for reasonably pleasant viewing and listening conditions, despite rather frigid air temperatures ranging from -3° F to 27° F. The challenge this year was negotiating deep snow cover (12-18") and high roadside snow banks that limited access to some sites, including most roadside pull-off opportunities. Snow-covered cornfields were largely devoid of geese, crows, turkeys, and other associated field birds. Most bodies of still or slow-moving water were frozen solid, including 90% of Stone Ridge Pond, further limiting habitat available to waterfowl.

Conversely, extensive deep snow cover provided incentive for a few species to congregate on roadside edges, where they were easy to spot and count. Unprecedented numbers of sparrows, most notably Dark-eyed Juncos, were frequently encountered foraging on plowed roadside shoulders. For the first time in our count history, two lingering **Eastern Phoebes** were found on count day, one foraging roadside along Fording Place Road in Lomontville, the second at a pond in the Ulster Park Maple Ridge Community. Recorded as single individuals on five previous counts, the roadside flycatcher did not appear to be finding much in the way of sustenance picking at the narrow strip of bare ground.



Eastern Phoebe - Fording Place Road, Marletown. Steve Chorvas

Perhaps the most interesting observation during the count was a potential flight of **Brant**. A flock of 20 birds was observed for 30 seconds as they flew fairly low in a disorganized formation over the New Paltz sector. Initially assumed to be Canada Geese, their appearance was described as starkly different from flocks of Canada Geese seen earlier and later in the day. Closer scrutiny revealed a smaller size and faster wing beat, too large to be ducks. If accepted, Brant would be a new addition to the historical count composite.

A single **Fish Crow** was heard vocalizing in New Paltz (6<sup>th</sup> count record) and a **Vesper Sparrow** (4<sup>th</sup> count record) was observed associating with a small flock of sparrows that included two first-winter **White-crowned Sparrows** along Hurley Mountain Road. Two presumably different **Peregrine Falcons** (7<sup>th</sup> count record) were observed, one high in flight over the Rondout area in Kingston, the second perched on a tree overlooking a cornfield on the Hurley Flats. One **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was our 11<sup>th</sup> count record, and a **Merlin** was seen in fading light at the Wiltwyck Golf Course in Kingston for our 12<sup>th</sup> count record. One **Eastern Towhee** was seen during the count week period by a feeder-watcher in Ulster Park, but not on count day.

New record high counts were established for **Common Merganser** (63, exceeding 59 recorded in 1973), **Cooper's Hawk** (18, eclipsing 16 in 2017), **Belted Kingfisher** (11, eclipsing 9 in 2012), **Common Raven** (71, nearly three times the previous high count of 25 in 2015, a remarkable increase for a species that was typically encountered in low single-digits a decade ago), **Red-breasted Nuthatch** (101, considerably more than the previous record count of 43 in 1987 and our



Red-winged Blackbirds visiting a CBC Feeder Watch on Martin Sweedish Road, contributing to a new record high count for the species. Debbie Bushby.

ten-year average of 7/year, accurately reflecting what has been a major irruption of this species into our area this past season). **Dark-eyed Junco** (3,385, a mega increase from the previous high count of 1,828 in 2016 and our ten-year average of 1,169/year, perhaps highlighting how many individuals are typically missed on a CBC when birds are spread throughout the landscape with no compelling elements to mass in easily accessible areas.). **White-throated Sparrow** (1,055, eclipsing 1,029 in 2019), **Song Sparrow** (289, eclipsing 234 in 2019), **Northern Cardinal** (282, eclipsing 257 in 2014), and **Red-winged Blackbird** (233, supplanting a 64-year old record 221 established in 1956, largely the result of 190 birds counted at a feeder-watch on Martin Swedish Road in New Paltz).

Irruptive winter finches were relatively few in number and diversity, consisting of **Purple Finch** (6), **Common Redpoll** (7), and **Pine Siskin** (16). One **Gray Catbird**, one **Rusty Blackbird**, three (3) **Great Blue Herons**, sixteen (16) **Bald Eagles**, and eight (8) **Red-shouldered Hawks** were tallied on count day. **Red-headed Woodpecker** was missed for the first time on this count since 2010, and we failed to find any **Black Vultures** or **Turkey Vultures**, despite favorable sky conditions. Only one **Ring-billed Gull** (163 ten-year average) and two **Great Black-backed Gulls** represented the Laridae family, with **Herring Gull** missed entirely (186 ten-year average). No species detected on this year's survey set a new record low count.

The following table summarizes the count results by sector, followed by area descriptions with observer and effort information. Asterisks indicate unusual species for this count circle, "cw" indicates a count-week only species. Thanks to all of the field participants and feeder watchers (FW) for excellent coverage, commitment, and organization as traditional field party structures were split-up to accommodate and comply with concerns and an altered CBC protocol in this unforgettable and challenging pandemic year. Hopefully the tradition of group field parties and post-count compilations and camaraderie will return in 2021. Next year's Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir CBC is scheduled for the traditional first Saturday of the count period, **December 18, 2021**.

Steve M. Chorvas – Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir CBC Compiler

71st Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir (NYML) Christmas Bird Count Sector Summary – December 19, 2020																
Total	Species	A	B	C1A-C	C2A	C2B	C2C	C3	D	E	F1	F2	F3	G1/3	G2	H
20	Brant**			20												
1,436	Canada Goose	3	276	337		66	97	78	287	89	115	60	9	19		
1	Mute Swan						1									
51	American Black Duck						2	7	8		2	30	2			
221	Mallard		39			8	62	24	11	7	65	2				3
10	Ring-necked Duck								10							
1	<i>Scaup sp. *</i>													1		
3	Bufflehead													3		
8	Hooded Merganser								8							
63	Common Merganser		5	2			6		22	4				1		23
30	Wild Turkey	24			6											
3	Great Blue Heron			1			1								1	
4	Northern Harrier	1					1	1				1				
1	Sharp-shinned Hawk					1										
18	Cooper's Hawk		1	2	3			1	6		1				2	1
1	<i>Accipiter sp.</i>						1									
16	Bald Eagle			1		1	3		4		1	3	1		1	1
8	Red-shouldered Hawk		1	1			1	1	4							
63	Red-tailed Hawk	4	4	10			4	2	8	3	5	4		5	3	11
1	Ring-billed Gull					1										
2	Great Black-backed Gull		2													
378	Rock Pigeon			25		3			137	20	122	22	7			42
410	Mourning Dove	8	29	17	29	15	17	4	54	8	29	95	1	51		53
4	Eastern Screech-Owl										1			2		1
12	Great Horned Owl								3		2			2		5
5	Barred Owl			1										2		2
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl															1
11	Belted Kingfisher		1			1	3		3	1	1			1		
115	Red-bellied Woodpecker	9	14	10	12	2	4	8	11	6	10	3	5	13	2	6
38	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	4	7	6		1	1	8	2	4		1	3		

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Total	Species	A	B	C1A-C	C2A	C2B	C2C	C3	D	E	F1	F2	F3	G1/3	G2	H
154	Downy Woodpecker	6	21	19	17	6	9	7	11	8	11	1	7	18	4	9
34	Hairy Woodpecker	2	2	2	5		2	3	3		2		5	6		2
21	Northern Flicker	1	1	3	4		1		4		1	1	1	3		1
30	Pileated Woodpecker	3		9	4		1	2	2	3	2	1	1		1	1
2	American Kestrel											1				1
1	Merlin								1							
2	Peregrine Falcon *		1								1					
2	Eastern Phoebe *							1			1					
357	Blue Jay	2	30	29	38	14	28	8	51	13	26	6	10	54	11	37
790	American Crow	403	86	109	2	16	15	20	48	9	25	7		21	4	25
1	Fish Crow *			1												
71	Common Raven	42	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	8
25	Horned Lark											13				12
397	Black-capped Chickadee	28	40	60	20	10	22	20	59	7	37	2	9	39	10	34
350	Tufted Titmouse	12	35	24	48	15	28	10	46	9	27	1	20	25	3	47
101	Red-breasted Nuthatch		6		4	1	5	1	63	3	2		11	2	1	2
203	White-breasted Nuthatch	5	19	25	15	6	11	5	37	7	20	1	15	17	4	16
13	Brown Creeper		2	2	1				5		1		2			
8	Winter Wren			2			1		1	1	1		1	1		
112	Carolina Wren	3	7	17	9	6	7	3	18	5	15	5	4	7		6
3	Golden-crowned Kinglet			2												1
3	Ruby-crowned Kinglet								3							
110	Eastern Bluebird	4	8	24	4		2		8		26	3	10	9	3	9
10	Hermit Thrush			1					3		2			1	1	2
40	American Robin	6		2	1		1	1	14		8			4	1	2
1	Gray Catbird													1		
33	Northern Mockingbird		3	4	1	3	4	1	4		4	2		4		3
889	European Starling	155	74	68	5	78	35	21	93	91	56	18		78		117
9	Cedar Waxwing													9		
5	Snow Bunting							4				1				
4	Yellow-rumped Warbler								1			3				
192	American Tree Sparrow	4	10	46	8		5	1	15		6	71	3	15		8
3	Field Sparrow		1						2							
2	Fox Sparrow				1				1							
3,385	Dark-eyed Junco	146	387	212	260	184	305	120	231	162	290	39	200	277	222	350
3	White-crowned Sparrow										2	1				
1,055	White-throated Sparrow	66	85	50	64	53	138	30	166	14	165	17	85	18	52	52
1	Vesper Sparrow *										1					
12	Savannah Sparrow		1									10				1
289	Song Sparrow	35	42	22	6	10	18	4	49	3	42	24	5	1	4	24
7	Swamp Sparrow		1	1					2				1	2		
cw	Eastern Towhee				cw											
282	Northern Cardinal	7	30	31	36	10	24	16	43	5	22	6	10	20	6	16
233	Red-winged Blackbird				197			30	6							
1	Rusty Blackbird				1											
11	Brown-headed Cowbird		1		10											
93	House Finch		20	14	16	7	6	3	9		5	1	1	8		3
6	Purple Finch		2						1					3		
7	Common Redpoll								4							3
16	Pine Siskin		10		1		1		4							
218	American Goldfinch	21	24	26	49	1	4		28	2	12	7	27	5		12
813	House Sparrow	1	49	74	7	90	33	5	288		24	36		48	13	145
13,345	<b>Total Individuals</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>1,376</b>	<b>1,314</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>1,909</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>1,196</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>1,072</b>
79	<b>Total Species (+1 cw)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>40</b>

CW - Denotes species found during the count week (three days before or after count day), but not on count day. Not included in totals.

\* Denotes unusual species for this count circle. \*\* Record under review, not included in species total.

**71st Mohonk Lake/Ashokan Reservoir (NYML) Christmas Bird Count - December 19, 2020**

Area Description and Observers (Sector leaders are listed first.)	Daylight Party Hours			Daylight Party Miles			Nocturnal	
	Foot	Car	Total	Foot	Car	Total	Hours	Miles
<b>Area A: Mohonk Lake - Mohonk Preserve</b> Megan Napoli, Natalie Feldsine.	7.5	0	7.5	7.5	0	7.5		
<b>Area B: Walkkill River West - New Paltz to Rosendale</b> Wendy Tocci, Jessica Prockup. FW: Lynn & Allan Bowdery, Annie Mardiney.	7	3	10 (1.5)	2	63	65	1.5	19 (1.25)
<b>Area C1A/B/C: Walkkill River East - New Paltz/Esopus</b> Christine Guarino, Nicholas Martin, Tom O'Dowd, Liz Olivere, Dan Porter, Steve Stanne.	11	8	19	9	45	54	0.75	3.5
<b>Area C2: Ulster Park</b> A: Lynn and Allan Bowdery. FW: Joe Bridges and Barbara Hart, Deborah Busby, Peter Relson, Jim Yates.	0	3.25	3.25 (19)	0	23	23		
B: Lin Fagan.	0	3	3	0	18.5	18.5		
C: Deb Welch, Jim Sullivan.	1	6.75	7.75	1.3	51	52.3		
<b>Area C3: Maple Ridge Community</b> Arnold Meier, Kelian Meier, Susan Nelson.	3	0	3	4	0	4		
<b>Area D: Hurley/Kingston</b> Mark DeDea, Jim Clinton.	2.75	7	9.75	3	79	82	2	21
<b>Area E: High Falls/Alligerville Central</b> George and Mary Moxham, Maeve Maurer.	3.5	4	7.5	3.2	57	60.2	0.75	0.5
<b>Area F1: Hurley/Lomontville</b> Steve Chorvas, Mark Damian.	2	3.5	5.5	1	24	25	2	23
<b>Area F2: Hurley/Lomontville Farm Hub</b> Anne Bloomfield, Paige Cranfield, Dixon Onderdonk, Loren Quinby.	8	0.25	8.25	3	0.5	3.5	0.75	0.75
<b>Area F3: Ashokan Reservoir</b> Ariane Giudicelli, Wes John-Alder	5	4.75	9.75	2	32	34		
<b>Area G1 and G3: Marbletown South</b> G1: Glen VanGorden, Jeff Nerp.	4	4	8	4	41	45		
G3: Dave Nyzio.	8	0	8	2	0	2	2	0
<b>Area G2: Marbletown North</b> Dave Hayes.	2	5	7	1	38	39		
<b>Area H: Kripplebush/Accord</b> Peter Schoenberger.	4.25	5	9.25	2.5	77.5	80	2.75	25
<b>Total Effort: Field Parties: 18 Observers: 36 + 6 Feeder Watchers = 42</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>126.5</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>549.5</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>92.75</b>

Note: Feeder Watch (FW) hours not included in total party hours.