

THE BIRD OBSERVER SUMMARY FOR DECEMBER

With the arrival of December we are thinking of coming cold weather, wondering whether snow will hamper our birding or whether the arctic blasts will provide us with glimpses of boreal species. This month also means some added work for active birders who participate in the annual Christmas Censuses sponsored by the National Audubon Society. More comment will be made on these later on but as leaders of census groups begin to scout their areas toward the middle of the month some interesting birds are turned up. Then with military precision on Count day all living wild birds are tallied and often amazing results are compiled. In the past there have been two weekends in the last half of December used for censusing but this year three weekends were available including the early weekend of the 16th and 17th. A number of censuses chose the early dates in the hopes of catching some last minute stragglers in order to swell the totals. Unfortunately the weather played a double-cross that weekend. Instead of the unseasonably mild weather enjoyed the first two weeks a rip-snorting northeast storm brought cold and snow to Eastern Massachusetts on the 15th and it still snowed on the 16th. As the storm departed the wind swung around to the northwest bringing bone-shilling temperatures quite discouraging to birds and birders. Nonetheless very good results were obtained and we have the highlights of most of the reports here. Since most of the bird records were from the Christmas Censuses and fewer observers were out in the field so we will highlight the bird species for the month including the various censuses rather than advance through the month from week to week as in November, a migratory month.

Red-throated Loon:	three reports submitted although this species is regular in small numbers at various coastal points such as Rockport all month	
Red-necked Grebe:	12/3 & 9 at Cape Ann	B.B.C. Hotz and Murphy
Pied-billed Grebe:	12/10 Falmouth (3)	B.B.C. Pease
	12/28 Jamaica Plain (2)	Angush
Greater Shearwater:	12/27 Emerson Rocks, Plum I. (1)	Alexander
Great Cormorant:	12/23 Rockport (40)	B.B.C. Weisburg
Great Blue Heron:	12/3 Spy Pond, Arlington (9)	Hansen
	various other reports of 1 or 2 birds	
American Bittern:	12/16 Plum Is. (1)	Berry
Snow Goose:	12/8 Cohasset (5)	Hunt
Gadwall:	12/10 Clark's Pond, Ipswich (1)	Berry
Pintail:	12/9 Plum Is. (80)	Alexander
European Widgeon:	12/1-9 Niles Pond, Gloucester	Various observers
Redhead:	12/2-10 Falmouth (6-9)	B.B.C. Moore, Pease
Canvasback:	12/2 Falmouth (150)	Moore
Barrow's Goldeneye	12/2-10 Falmouth (2)	B.B.C. Moore, Pease
Oldsquaw:	12/10 Falmouth (11)	B.B.C. Pease
Belted Kingfisher:	scarce but a small number reported from several locations	
King Eider:	12/10 Plum Is. (2)	Stymeist & Berry
	12/27 Plum Is. (1)	Alexander
Common Merganser:	12/11 Horn Pond, Woburn (3)	Angush
Goshawk:	12/11 Lincoln (1)	Alden
	several other reports of individuals	
Sharp-shinned Hawk:	12/13 Upton	Alden
Cooper's Hawk:	12/19 World's End, Hingham (1 imm.)	Brown
	several other reports, Wellesley & Middleboro	

Marsh Hawk:	12/3 Plum Is. (2)	Forster
Osprey:	12/3 Wellesley (1)	Quinlan
Pigeon Hawk:	12/6 Wollaston (1)	Brown
Ruffed Grouse:	12/22 Harwich (1)	Argues
Turkey Vulture:	12/2 Newburyport (1)	Stymeist, et al.
Virginia Rail:	12/18 Chatham (1)	Rieh
Killdeer:	12/3 Gloucester (5)	D'Entremont, et al.
Common Snipe:	12/10 Middlesex Fells (1)	Stymeist
Purple Sandpiper:	12/5 Cohasset (75)	Hubbard
White-rumped Sandpiper:	12/9 Gloucester (1)	Murphy
Long-billed Dowitcher:	12/9 Plum Is. (3)	Alexander
Glaucous Gull:	12/23 Gloucester	B.B.C. Weisburg
Iceland Gull:	12/27 Plum Is. (5) several reports from north shore	Alexander
(Kumlien's Gull:)	12/27 Plum Is.	Alexander, et. al.
Black-headed Gull:	12/17 Squantum (26)	Brown & Higginbotham
Little Gull:	12/3 Cohasset (1) 12/3 Newburyport (3)	Higginbotham Forster
Forster's Tern:	12/3 Plum Is. (1)	Forster, et al.
Razorbill:	12/24 Roekport (1)	Leahy
Dovekie:	12/24 Roekport (hundreds)	Leahy
Black Guillemot:	12/23-27 Roekport (3)	Glancy & Angush
Common Puffin:	12/25 First Encounter Beh., Eastham	oiled bird by Bailey
Monk Parakeet:	12/8 Byfield (1)	Joyce
Screech Owl:	12/3 Lanesboro (1)	B.B.C., et al.
Snowy Owl:	one continuing at Plum Is. and another between East Boston airport and Long Is. during month	
Barred Owl:	12/2 Belmont	Butler
Long-eared Owl:	12/10 Mt. Auburn, Cambridge (1) 12/10 Belmont (1)	Stymeist Stymeist
Short-eared Owl:	12/27 Squantum (3)	Brown
Pileated Woodpecker:	12/10-20 Weston	Stymeist & Angush
Fish Crow:	12/29 Brookline (1) also a small number wintering at West Roxbury dump	
Winter Wren:	12/10 Middlesex Fells (4)	Stymeist
Hermit Thrush, Catbird, Brown Thrasher more scarce than in recent Decembers; Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Chickadees holding their own with 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets reported.		
Loggerhead Shrike:	12/15 Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary	Bailey
Warblers reported included Pine, Palm, and a very tardy Yellowthroat in Falmouth 12/10, B.B.C		
A few Redwinged Blackbirds, Cowbirds, and Grackles remained in protected areas		
Baltimore Oriole:	12/2 Falmouth	Moore
Dickeissel:	12/4-15 Chatham (killed flying against window)	Rieh
Small numbers in many areas were reported for Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, House Finch (150 at World's End, Hingham 12/19 - Brown); a total of 98 Pine Grosbeaks was noted, and 3 separate Pine Siskins showed that they are still scarce in our area.		
Red Crossbill:	12/10 Falmouth (30)	B.B.C.
Lark Sparrow:	12/3 Plymouth	Carmichaels

Very few Towhees were reported although one feeder in Bedford had 6. Several Field Sparrows were remaining in Braintree and several Snow Buntings were recorded although their numbers had dropped considerably.

As we mentioned before the Christmas Count period started December 16 and lasted through the end of the year. These censuses are great fun and provide some enjoyable hours of association and good birding within certain defined areas. A count area comprises a circle of 15 mile diameter with a certain center pinpointed and kept track of yearly. The results of the census are sent to the National Audubon Society and kept in file. A special edition of AMERICAN BIRDS magazine publishes the results countrywide. Many interesting trends may be noted, population reductions, invasions, rarities shared, cross-country movements charted and general wintering populations analyzed. These records are made available to various government agencies who are responsible for making legislation on game management, conservation, etc. So besides being a lot of fun, these counts serve a useful purpose and most birders take them quite seriously. If the reader is interesting in participating in the next census program then contact either Mrs. Emory whose address is contained in the November summary or any of the editors of this journal. We now present some of the highlights of the Eastern Massachusetts Christmas Counts.

Greater Boston, Dec. 16

The day began with remnants of a snow storm and ended with strong northwest winds but seabirds which had been blown close to shore remained through the afternoon off Revere Beach feeding actively. Unusual for being close to shore and being late in the year were Greater Shearwater (2), Pomarine Jaeger, 100 Kittiwakes, Dovekie. Peter Alden spotted a Harlequin Duck in Winthrop and Nancy Claflin found a very tardy and obviously hardy Common Gallinule. Various ponds contributed numbers of ducks including 25 Hooded Mergansers and 13 Common Mergansers. Other highlights included a Goshawk, a Black-headed Gull, Sereesh and Great Horned Owls, 2 Hermit Thrushes, a Northern Shrike, 6 Pine Grosbeaks, 10 Common Redpolls, 11 Siskins, 7 Fish Crows and 2 Oregon Junco's.

Buzzards Bay, Dec. 16

This count is situated in a "birdy" area and several species linger along the Bay before heading south so the workers on this census feel that well over 100 species might be recorded in favorable weather conditions. Highlighted are: 1 Double-crested Cormorant, 4 Wood Ducks, 8 Barrow's Goldeneyes, 1 Clapper Rail, 1 Black-headed Gull, 1 Western Kingbird, 1 Northern Shrike, 7 Pine Grosbeaks, 5 Red Crossbills, 5 Rufous-sided Towhees, 1 Grasshopper Sparrow (nearly incredible for winter), 27 Field Sparrows.

Quiney, Dec. 17

A very cold wind-chill factor hampered birders on this census but the birds cooperated and 98 species were recorded. 8 Ring-necked Ducks were good as were 131 Canvasbacks, a Barrow's Goldeneye, a King Eider, 14 Ruddy Ducks, 26 Common Mergansers, 115 Purple Sandpipers, 26 Black-headed Gulls, nearly 800 Bonaparte's Gulls, 25 Kittiwakes, a fine view of Barred Owl by Bob Fox and Kathleen Anderson, Shorteared Owl, a Hermit Thrush, a Northern Shrike, a Dickcissel in Beechwood, a Boreal Chickadee in Hingham, 4 Swamp Sparrows and 5 Lapland Longspurs.

Newburyport, Dec. 17

The cold wind had to be braved here also and as usual many of the birds found here in November and early December had pulled out for more southerly climes. Interesting sightings included: Red-necked Grebe, 2 Pied-billed Grebes, 66 Pintails, 5 Green-winged Teals, 4 Redheads, 1 King Eider, 3 Goshawks, 2 Virginia Rails, 1 Sora, 1 Woodcock, 2 Iceland Gulls, 2 Dickcissels, 56 Pine Grosbeaks, and a White-crowned Sparrow.

Cape Cod, Dec. 30

Traditionally the top count in the state belongs to Cape Cod and this year yielded 125 species. Many species are found here not included on other counts such as: 30 Gannets, 371 Brant, a Snow Goose, 75 American Widgeon, 24,944 Common Eiders, 3 Piping Plovers, 1 Parasitic Jaeger, 58 Razorbills, 2 Thick-billed Murres, 130 Dovekies, 1 Black Buller's, 1 Long-billed Marsh Wren, 86 Mockingbirds, 1 Orange-crowned Warbler, 4 Ipswich Sparrows, 9 Seaside Sparrows, 3 Yellowthroats and a Chipping Sparrow.