

## THE 1984 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS IN EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

by Robert H. Stymeist, Watertown

The Eighty-fifth Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by the National Audubon Society was held from December 15, 1984 to January 2, 1985. The count data for the 1983 CBC was published in American Birds, July-August 1984, and included 1246 count circles in the United States, 186 in Canada, and, added in that year, 19 in Central and South America, and 9 in the West Indies. This report includes capsule accounts of the CBCs conducted in Eastern Massachusetts in December 1984, and the accompanying map shows all the count circles in the state drawn according to their locations published in the July-August issue of American Birds.

A grand total of 190 species was recorded on the twenty-one eastern Massachusetts counts. Two additional races, the Ipswich Sparrow and the Oregon Junco, and one escape, the Red-crested Cardinal found at Arnold Arboretum in Boston, were also recorded. Another four species and one additional subspecies escaped the official tally for the Christmas Count Day but were noted during the count period (three days before and after). These were Green-backed Heron, Wild Turkey, Swainson's Thrush, Prairie Warbler, and a Bullock's Oriole.

Imagine 194 species in December in Massachusetts! No doubt, the very warm month had a great deal to do with the exceptional high counts reported. The temperature of 73° on December 29 broke all previous records. All water was open, and this contributed to higher counts in inland locations where, more often than not, ponds are sometimes frozen by mid-December. The wild food crop was also very good, and the birds that eat fruit or berries such as American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were on hand in record numbers.

The Cape Cod CBC, as usual, led all counts with 133 species recorded; the Greater Boston Count showed a surprising second-place finish with 129 species. The Millis CBC boasted the highest number of participants (326), but even this number of observers could not find as many Black-capped Chickadees as the Concord Count, whose annual total of that species exceeds all other totals on the continent.

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*Map on facing page:* Each Christmas Count Circle was located by the latitude and longitude (in degrees and minutes) of its center as given in the July-August 1984 issue of American Birds. Circles were drawn on a large, regional map which was reduced to the size shown here. Detailed topographic maps should be consulted to determine the precise boundaries of each circle.

Athol (1), Buzzards Bay (2), Cape Ann (3), Cape Cod (4), Central Berkshire (5), Concord (6), Greater Boston (7), Greenfield (8), Marshfield (9), Martha's Vineyard (10), Mid Cape Cod (11), Millis (12), Nantucket (13), New Bedford (14), Newburyport (15), Northampton (16), Northern Berkshire (17), Plymouth (18), Quincy (19), Springfield (20), Taunton-Middleboro (21), Tuckernuck Island (22), Uxbridge (23), Westminster (24), Worcester (25), and Newport County, R.I./Westport (26).

Athol: December 15, 1984; Robert Coyle, compiler.

47 species and 6528 individuals (both record highs).

Birds at feeders were decreased in number, but "non-feeder" birds were found in record numbers. There were new record high counts for seven species, and a Pied-billed Grebe at Quabbin was a first in the twenty-two year history of this CBC. Other highlights included a Northern Goshawk, 734 Dark-eyed Junco, 22 Common Redpoll, 95 Pine Siskin, and 883 Evening Grosbeak.

Buzzards Bay: December 15, 1984; Richard Harlow, compiler.

108 species and 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).

Berry-eating birds were seen in record numbers: 1940 American Robin and 30 Hermit Thrush. Other high counts included 76 Northern Flicker, 50 Carolina Wren, 6 Winter Wren, 29 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 22 Gray Catbird, and 625 White-throated Sparrow. Special reports included 335 Horned Grebe, 3 Barrow's Goldeneye, 177 Hooded Merganser, 20 Common Snipe, 2 Forster's Tern, a Thick-billed Murre, and a Black-and-white Warbler.

Cape Ann: December 16, 1984; John Nove, compiler.

100 species and 36,276 individuals.

An Arctic Loon at Folly Cove, Rockport, was the highlight among many other notable counts such as 24 Red-necked Grebe, 496 Great Cormorant, 2 Redhead (a first for the count), 44 Razorbill, 4 Dovekie, 11 Black Guillemot, a Barred Owl, 2 Pileated Woodpecker, and a single Water Pipit.

Cape Cod: December 16, 1984; Blair Nikula, compiler.

133 species and 100,014 individuals.

Nineteen species tied or broke their previous high counts. Among the many highlights were 6552 Northern Gannet, 132 Great Blue Heron, a Great Egret, 18,842 Common Eider, 6 Harlequin Duck, 5 Merlin, a Clapper Rail, 21 Virginia Rail, a Common Moorhen, 12 Greater Yellowlegs, 45 Red Knot, 16,643 Black-legged Kittiwake, 2 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 17 Dovekie, and 676 Razorbill. Passerine highlights included 149 Northern Flicker, 11 Marsh Wren, 24 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 3 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (a first for the count), 20 Hermit Thrush, 1600 American Robin, 36 Gray Catbird, 2605 Yellow-rumped Warbler, an Orange-crowned Warbler, 20 Palm Warbler, 18 Common Yellowthroat, 4 Yellow-breasted Chat, a LeConte's Sparrow (another first), 4 Sharp-tailed, 9 Seaside, and 124 Swamp sparrow, and a Western Tanager.

Concord: December 30, 1984; Richard Walton, compiler.

78 species and 39,978 individuals (new high).

The previous high counts for 12 species were exceeded, and other highlights were 31 Hooded and 187 Common merganser. Raptors included a Cooper's Hawk, a Northern Goshawk, a Merlin (new for this count), a Peregrine Falcon, and 25 Eastern Screech-Owl. The tallies for Blue Jay (2313) and Black-capped Chickadee (2975) are contenders for the national high counts - usually true for Concord. Other high counts included 4 Pileated Woodpecker, 69 Brown Creeper, 850 Red-winged Blackbird, 5 Rusty Blackbird, and 245 Purple Finch. Special birds included a House Wren (a first), a Carolina Wren, a Dickcissel and 3 Common Redpoll.

Greater Boston: December 16, 1984; Robert Stymeist, compiler.  
129 species, 1 race (Oregon Junco), and 1 escape  
(Red-crested Cardinal).

Twenty-two species broke their previous high counts, and four new species were added to the overall total. Highlights were Osprey, 3 Laughing and 6 Common Black-headed gull, 7 species of Owl, a Common Raven (Cambridge), a Falco species (also Cambridge), a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and an Eastern Bluebird (both new to the count), 2 Nashville and one Orange-crowned warbler. Sparrow highlights included 4 Chipping, 81 Savannah, a Grasshopper, a Lincoln's (new to the count), and 12 White-crowned.

Marshfield: December 30, 1984; Warren Harrington, compiler.  
100 species and 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).  
Highlights included 2118 Brant, 14,169 Common Eider, 3 King Eider, a Northern Goshawk, a Red-shouldered Hawk, 2 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (new to this count), a Black-and-white Warbler, 5 Fox Sparrow, and 1193 Red-winged Blackbird.

Martha's Vineyard: December 30, 1984; Susan Whiting, compiler.  
120 species, 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).  
Among the many highlights were a Snowy Egret, 12 Tundra Swan, 15,204 White-winged Scoter, a Bald Eagle, 5 Laughing, 2 Little, and 4 Common Black-headed gull, 5 Common Barn-Owl, 8 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, an Eastern Phoebe, a Western Kingbird, 2 Marsh Wren, 40 Palm Warbler, a Yellow-breasted Chat, and a Common Redpoll.

Mid-Cape Cod: December 22, 1984; Janet Aylward, compiler.  
104 species and 16,095 individuals.  
Eight new species were added to this three-year-old CBC including Northern Gannet, Double-crested Cormorant, Snowy Egret, Common Black-headed Gull, Pine Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Seaside and White-crowned sparrows. Other highlights included Laughing Gull, 10 Gray Catbird, and 4 Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Millis: December 15, 1984; Brian Cassie, compiler.  
80 species and 26,200 individuals.  
The highlight of this count, according to the compiler, was the splendid participation of the feeder-watchers. The total number of participants will probably set an all-time record for North America - 326, 55 in the field and 271 at feeders! Seven new species were added to the all-time CBC list, and 36 new high counts were established. Highlights included a Northern Goshawk, a Red-shouldered Hawk, 12 Great Horned Owl, a Red-headed Woodpecker, 1338 Tufted Titmouse, a Western Tanager, and 3 Red Crossbill.

Nantucket: December 30, 1984, Edith Andrews, compiler.  
124 species.  
Highlights included 863 Common Loon, a Western Grebe, a Greater Shearwater (new to the count), 8622 Northern Gannet, 157 Redhead, 1 Eurasian Wigeon, 58,270 Common Eider, 1 King Eider, 8,122 Oldsquaw, 7 Barrow's Goldeneye, 15 Virginia Rail, 2 Little Gull, 3 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 24,303 Black-legged Kittiwake, a Forster's Tern, 58 Razorbill, 2 Common Murre, 1 Eastern Phoebe, 9 Marsh Wren, a Water Pipit, 1 Nashville, 1692 Yellow-rumped, and 18 Palm warbler, and the national high count of Jackdaws - 2!

New Bedford: December 16, 1984; Gil Fernandez, compiler.  
87 species and 16,813 individuals.

This CBC was about 5 percent below average for species with at least 10 percent fewer individuals - this despite an rise in participation of 30 percent. Highlights were an American Bittern, 152 Mute Swan, 2 Merlin, 17 Carolina Wren, 11 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and 507 Cedar Waxwing.

Newburyport: December 22, 1985; Rick Heil, compiler.  
105 species and the second best count on record for the Newburyport area.

Highlights included a Western Grebe in Rowley (a first for the count), an American Bittern, 351 Green-winged Teal, 74 Northern Pintail, 5 Northern Shoveler, 2 adult Cooper's Hawk, an American Woodcock, 3 Marsh Wren, a Yellow-breasted Chat, 7 Seaside Sparrow, and 60 Purple Finch.

Plymouth: December 27, 1985; Trevor Lloyd-Evans, compiler.  
101 species, 1 race (Ipswich Sparrow), and 33,503 individuals.  
Highlights included a Eurasian Wigeon, 5 Redhead, 4 Barrow's Goldeneye, 86 Hooded Merganser, Red-headed Woodpecker, 5 Carolina Wren, a Marsh Wren, a Dickcissel, and 16 Ipswich Sparrow.

Quincy: December 15, 1984; Sibley Higginbotham, compiler.  
105 species.

Eight species had record high counts, and two new species were added - a White-rumped Sandpiper and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, to put the all-time list for Quincy's 38 years of CBCs at 174. Other highlights included 11 Double-crested Cormorant, 2 Snow Goose, 340 Purple Sandpiper, a Little Gull, a Common Black-headed Gull, a Common Barn-Owl, a Chipping Sparrow, 9 Fox Sparrow, and a single White-winged Crossbill.

Tuckernuck Island: December 31, 1984; Marcia Litchfield, compiler.  
50 species and 1 race (Ipswich Sparrow).

For the first time in the six year history of this count an airplane was used to get to Tuckernuck and to census a large raft of eiders offshore. Muskeget Island, also included within the count circle, was not covered. Among the highlights were a Eurasian Wigeon, 251 Razorbill, 3 Short-eared Owl, and 9 Ipswich Sparrow. A Gyrfalcon observed at close range locking talons with 2 Short-eared Owls and a Northern Harrier was then leisurely watched as it sat on a small dead pine tree for seven minutes (glorious by observer standards). The eider rafts off Chappaquiddick and between Tuckernuck and Muskeget were awesome. Other sidelights of this CBC included 26 Gray Seal, 340 Harbor Seal, and 17 White-tailed Deer.

Uxbridge: December 29, 1984; Richard Hildreth, compiler.  
64 species and 13,120 individuals (both record highs).  
This is the second year for this CBC which includes part of Rhode Island within the count circle. Among the highlights were a Cooper's Hawk, an Iceland Gull, both Barred and Long-eared owl, a Red-headed Woodpecker, an Eastern Phoebe, and a Common Redpoll.

Westminster: December 23, 1985; John Williams, compiler.  
50 species and 4720 individuals.  
A Red-shouldered Hawk, 7 Ruffed Grouse, 15 Brown Creeper, a Western Tanager, a Vesper Sparrow, 5 White-winged Crossbill, 45 Pine Siskin, and

381 Evening Grosbeak were among the highlights from this Worcester County count.

Westport/Newport County, R.I.: December 16, 1984; Dave Emerson, compiler.  
128 species and 87,666 individuals.

Highlights included an American Bittern, an American Woodcock, a Forster's Tern, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, 2 Chipping Sparrow, 2 Fox Sparrow, a Northern Oriole. A total of 106 Carolina Wren were tallied, 21 in Westport and 85 in Newport, Rhode Island. Also of special note were 5 Semipalmated Plover found in Newport, R.I.

Worcester: December 15, 1984; Fran McMenemy, compiler.  
64 species and 15,397 individuals.

Highlights included a Mute Swan, a Brant, a Glaucous Gull, 2 Pileated Woodpecker, a Fish Crow, a Winter Wren, and a White-crowned Sparrow. During the count period, but not seen the day of the count were Wild Turkey, Swainson's Thrush, and a Northern (Bullock's) Oriole, all three of which were not seen on any other eastern Massachusetts CBC.

Taunton-Middleborough data were not available for this compilation. The complete 1984 results will be published in the July-August 1985 issue of American Birds. Copies can be obtained from American Birds, 950 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. The 1985 CBC will be held December 18, 1985 through January 5, 1986.

ROBERT H. STYMEIST, an accountant by profession, has established a second career in birding. A staff member since its inception and former president of BIRD OBSERVER, he is currently the incoming president of the Brookline Bird Club (BBC), treasurer of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, and a member of the Bird Observer and "Rare Birds" Records committees. An accomplished North American birder, he has birded in Europe and the British Isles, in Tanzania, and in Central and South America. Bob has been fascinated by birds ever since the day, twenty-five years ago, that a venturesome catbird perched on the arm of his chair. Early May mornings he can be found, notebook in hand, censusing the migrants at Mount Auburn Cemetery. He teaches courses and leads birdwalks for the BBC, Habitat, and the Boston Center for Adult Education.

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