

2016 Saint John Christmas Bird Count Summary

The 2016 Saint John Christmas Bird count – one of over two dozen in New Brunswick and more than 2000 in North America – was held on December 17. The number of species observed on a single day is always of interest, but so is simply the number of birds that a few people going outdoors or watching from their windows can see. This year, the count was over 15,000 birds – more birds around us than one might think given the few hours of daylight and the cold temperatures of late December – and about 2500 birds more than the 10-year average for the Christmas Bird Count.

Two introduced species – Rock Pigeons and European Starlings – were quite a big part of the numbers at 600 and 3000 respectively, but one other introduced species – House Sparrow – has been declining and only 20 individuals were observed in just one count sector. Mallards and Black Ducks made up another 1000 birds and Herring Gulls and American Crows were over 3500 and 1500 respectively.

That leaves about 5000 other birds. A few semi-random comments on them, based on the attached spreadsheet, follows.

- Of the 90-odd species that have been seen at least once over the last ten count years, about half were seen in greater numbers than average this year. The other half were either lower in numbers or not seen at all.
- The ducks were well represented, with both Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes and Common Mergansers being more numerous than usual, perhaps due to the earlier count date and more open water. Scaup are almost always seen though and this year there were none.
- Raptors, and especially Bald Eagles, were well-represented although for the first time in a few years there were no Turkey Vultures reported. They were certain around, but perhaps not flying due to the weather, as they were reported both before and after the Count Day.
- All species of gull were down in numbers, some considerably, other than Herring Gulls which were higher by more than 450.
- 150 Blue Jays was 80-ish more than normal, but American Robins at almost 300 was almost 250 higher than normal.
- There were two good-sized flocks of waxwings, but they weren't the usual species. The 10-year average is to see 80 Bohemian Waxwings and one Cedar Waxwing every year, but this year there were 120 waxwings reported, not a single one of them as Bohemian.
- American Goldfinches, Purple Finches and Dark-eyed Juncos were well above average, but one well-known species was very well above average as noted by both field and feeder observers – the Red-breasted Nuthatch. It has been a banner year for them.
- So-called "winter finches" (crossbills, grosbeaks, siskins and redpolls) were not widely observed, but most species were present and several large flocks were noted cleaning out the conifer seeds in the western portion of the Count Circle.

- Three species were new to the list this year (or at least had not been seen in the last 10 years): Swamp Sparrow, Black Guillemot and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, all birds that are relatively well known in the area but not in December.
- During the Count Week, four species were added, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Short-eared Owl, Carolina Wren and, as previously mentioned, Turkey Vulture.
- During the Count Period, which runs from December 15 to January 5, a Boreal Chickadee was added.
- One species has attracted attention across North America. Three Shelducks, a large European species of duck with striking plumage, was discovered on Count Day at the Irving Nature Park. There is a possibility that these ducks are local escapees from a farm or zoo, but if they are confirmed to be off-track migrants, they may be North America's first confirmed record for the species. They have become local heroes with many wondering if they will stay the winter.
- As for the people stats, there were 36 field observers plus 10 feeder counters, with some feeder counters coordinating the count for the feeders of their neighbours as well. In total, 92 hours were spent in the field (when two or more people are counting together for an hour, it counts as one hour), with 650 km covered, 65 of that on foot. Both the number of hours and the number of kilometres were slightly lower than last year.

Rounding off the count statistics, our provincial bird, the Black-capped Chickadee, was seen in every sector with over 700 being counted. On the other hand, one of the species proposed to be our national bird, the Grey Jay, seen sporadically during the past ten years of the count, was not seen at all this year. Another species suggested as our national bird, the Common Loon, was observed.

Oh, and the number everyone wants to know. On Count Day, 71 species were observed, five more than the 10-year average. A total of 76 species were seen during the Count Period – including the Shelducks.

Finally, thanks to all who participated. Look for an email in November or so indicating the date for the 2017 CBC. And for all those familiar with doing the count with our predecessor, Richard Blacquiere, we will keep things consistent and say that the weather forecast for every potential count day in December 2017 looks fabulous for birding!

Ann & Donald MacPhail
January, 2017

2016 Saint John CBC Participants (not complete)

Field Teams

W1	Rick Peacock
W2	Don McAlpine
W2-morna	Keith Dewar
W3	Richard Blacquiere
W4	Charles Graves
W5	Kelly Honeyman/Jim Wilson
W6	Paul Clark, Eugene and Mary Anne Roy
W7	Frank Kelly
W8	Stephen Clayden
C1 exc RP	Joan Pearce. Janet Whitehead, Heather O'Toole
RP	Suzanne Bonnell, Holly Haines
C2	Joan Pearce. Janet Whitehead, Heather O'Toole
C3	Suzanne Bonnell, Holly Haines
C3-south	Ian Stead
E1	Donald and Ann MacPhail, Phyllis Hart
E2	Judy Whalen
E3	Mike Bamford
E4	Paul Mansz. Merv Cormier
E4a	David McCormack
E5	Jim Russell
K1	Richard Blacquiere
K2	Joanne Savage

Feeder People (not incl both field and feeder people)

Ida MacPherson (and several others on the Peninsula)
Ngaire Nelson
rick barlow
marion sherwood
mary richard
jeanne finn-allen
louise armstrong
heather black
denise johnston