

## Highlights of the 110<sup>th</sup> Vashon CBC

Wonderful weather, enthusiastic volunteers, and cooperative birds made the December 27, 2009 Vashon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) one of the most successful ever. Teams fanned out across the 15-mile-diameter circle encompassing all of Vashon-Maury Island, Three-Tree Point in West Seattle, most of Blake Island, and a big swath of Kitsap and Pierce counties. Coverage was excellent, and for the first time in count history a team led by John Arum counted birds at Blake Island (by kayak).

How great was it? Judged by the number of species seen (125), this was the highest count ever—since 2006 when we tallied 121 species. We also added two count-week species that we missed on count day: Peregrine Falcon and American Kestrel. For the first time since the initiation of the count in 1999, we found Evening Grosbeaks on count day (they were count-week birds in 2000) thanks to Scott Hall over in the Kitsap. Scott also added Surfbird, California Quail, Marsh Wren, Marbled Murrelet, Western Scrub-jay, and Trumpeter Swan, birds not found elsewhere in the circle, to the tally.

By another measure — number of individuals seen (22,490) — was down from last year's high (31,288). Several birders noticed that their overall counts were lower than in past years, but these results are well within the average of counts from previous years. American Wigeon was once again the most numerous species (4,655). Western Grebe numbers held steady this year (672) in comparison to the last few years, which is good news indeed.

Four teams rose in the early morning hours and ventured out onto the dark and mysterious world of owls. By imitating or playing recordings of their calls within favored habitats, several teams were able to coax responses from owls. Because owls are territorial, they react to this stimulus as if another owl were intruding upon their real estate. Island teams led by Sherry Bottoms and Ed Swan found Barred, Northern Saw-whet, and Great Horned owls. An off-island team led by Ken Brown also nabbed a Barn Owl, and for the first time in count history, a Short-eared Owl. This year's owl count will now be the record to beat in future years.

Among the year's rare and unusual species include a single Black-headed Grosbeak, a small covey of California Quail, and one Western Scrub-jay. Black-headed Grosbeaks are summer residents and usually pull out by early fall. This bird has been observed at a backyard feeder near Tahlequah since the fall, and presumably did not migrate because it is not strong enough (may be either too young, sick, or too old). California Quail have not been tallied in the circle since 2003. These birds were found in the Kitsap by Scott Hall. For the second year in a row, we also counted a Western Scrub-jay. These jays are continuing their march north through Washington and will probably become regular occurrences on our count in future years. No sign of the Eurasian Collared-Dove in the island vicinity yet, but you can bet it will be coming to our neighborhood soon.

Many thanks to my veteran team leaders who continue to show up year after year: **Ed Swan** for Quartermaster, **John and Ellie Friars** for Maury Island, **Richard Rogers and Ed Swan** for Vashon South, **Carole Elder** for Vashon North, **Gary Shugart** for Kitsap County, and **Diane Yorgeson-Quinn** for Pierce County. Approximately 70 additional folks assisted the team leaders in the field or counted birds at their feeders. We could not pull this count off without all of their efforts.