

Vashon Christmas Bird Count

The 107th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Vashon will long be remembered as a good one for raptors. We added three new raptor species to our CBC database, and, for the first time ever, all resident owls in our area were tallied on count day. Raptors, as top predators, naturally occur at lower densities relative to many other bird species, so it's all the more remarkable that we were able to count so many this year.

Between the owling expertise of Ed Swan, Joy Nelson, and Ken Brown, all resident owls—Barn, Barred, Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, and Western Screech—either responded to calls or were fortuitously seen or heard on count day/evening. Unlike previous years, the weather was favorable for owling. No rain! Wayne Jackson of Port Orchard was absolutely stunned to look up and see a Northern Harrier fly over his count area on the Kitsap. Ruth and Patrick Sullivan found an immature Northern Goshawk along Black Road, also in Kitsap County. Both birds, while rare in this area, are not unusual birds for the season or location.

This was also a banner CBC for the number of species seen—121 species—our highest count ever. Besides the three raptors above, other new birds for the count circle included Cackling Goose, Redhead, Gray Jay, and Brown-headed Cowbird (only seen during count week previously). The Sullivans counted two Gray Jays in DNR's Banner Forest, located across Colvos Passage near Fragaria, and Ken Brown found a single Cackling Goose in Kitsap County. Redheads were seen by Andrea Wuenschel and her team on Lake Burien, a portion of which is located at the edge of the count circle just east of Three Tree Point. Faye McAdams-Hand and Diane Yorgeson-Quinn also nabbed Redheads in the Pierce Count portion of the circle.

Loon numbers were higher than we've seen for the past three years, and the count for Western Grebes, while not as high as earlier CBC years, pushed over 1,000. Now, that's something to rejoice about. Rudy Duck numbers were also up, after a 2-year hiatus. We had to work real hard to count two Sanderling on count day, which are usually conspicuous on Vashon beaches this time of the year. Dan Willsie and his team saw our highest number of Brant's Cormorant since the initiation of the count out near the Red Nun buoy at the mouth of Quartermaster Harbor

Gamebirds showed up in the smallest numbers since the count began 8 years ago. Only two Ring-necked Pheasants were seen, and the continued absence of California Quail on the island further confirms the extinction of these birds, which are not able to survive the hunting finesse of our feral cats. We did, however, add a single Mountain Quail in Pierce County, a hit or miss species for many years.

Of all the birds we counted on December 31, probably the most amazing was the number of Anna's Hummingbirds. Our count of 78 birds confirms its establishment as a winter resident in our area. Confined historically to California, these birds have dramatically expanded their range as far north as British Columbia. Climate change may have a role

in their expansion, but also the variety of exotic flowers in suburban yards and the presence of feeders year-round have also contributed to their success.

I'm also happy to report that we had the highest number of volunteers on the count this year. The day dawned overcast and cold, but it didn't prevent 54 participants in the field and 11 feeder-watchers from tallying 121 species for the day's efforts. We traveled about 561 miles in our collective vehicles or on foot and spent a total of 134 hours counting birds.

Thanks again to all the volunteers who braved the cold weather to support our growing CBC database. I especially want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the team leaders who do the hard work of rounding up volunteers, collecting their fees, and finalizing count statistics: Gary Shugart (Kitsap), Diane Yorgeson-Quinn and Faye McAdams-Hand (Pierce County), Dan Willsie (Quartermaster), John & Ellie Friars (Maury Island), Carole Elder (Vashon North), and Ed Swan (Vashon South).