

Results of the Vashon Island Christmas Bird Count

By Sue Trevathan

Despite the very cold temperatures and lack of coverage in some areas, the Vashon CBC tallied 115 species this year, one of our highest totals since the initiation of the count 10 years ago. A total of 44 field observers and 23 feeder watchers contributed to the success of the count.

Robins were recorded at incredibly high numbers (9,813), particularly in the Maury Island portion of the circle. Counters there reported that the madrone trees were literally swarmed with robins and cedar waxwings, feeding on the prolific crop of madrone berries.

Other species recording high tallies for our count:

- American Wigeon (5,029)
- Ring-necked Duck (130)
- Harlequin Duck (40)
- Merlin (3)
- Spotted Sandpiper (8)
- Black Turnstone (56)
- Common Snipe (8)
- Rock Pigeon (282)
- Cedar Waxwing (317)

Low counts were recorded for the Western Grebe (459 birds, down from 4,781 in 2001) and Hermit Thrush (3).

New birds for the circle include the coincident sighting by Ed Swan's team and Kathy Kirkland and Michael Perrone of a Glaucous Gull on the abandoned pier next to the Tahlequah ferry landing. This beautiful, all-white gull is an exciting find and a new bird for the Vashon bird list. A Townsend's Solitaire was observed by John & Ellie Friars' team at KVI beach. Ed Swan's team also observed two yellow-shafted Northern Flickers in the Vashon south area. Yellow-shafted Flickers are migratory and become more common in Washington, especially along the outer coast, in winter. Because most of our Northern Flickers are red-shafted, this was an interesting find and may foretell the presence of these birds in future years.

Glaring misses include Townsend's Warbler, Virginia Rail, Great Horned Owl, and Marsh Wren. Perhaps the most sought-after bird was the Evening Grosbeak, which Carole Elder tallied as a count week bird back in 2000 and has not shown up on count day or week since then.

Our grand total of birds recorded in the count circle over the 10 years includes 145 species. The following bird species we have only recorded once in the past 10 years either on count day or count week:

- Clark's Grebe (Quartermaster Harbor)
- Western Sandpiper (Burley Lagoon)
- Northern Goshawk (Banner Forest in Kitsap)
- Ruffed Grouse (Banner Forest in Kitsap)
- Gray Jay (Banner Forest in Kitsap)
- Northern Shrike (Olalla area)
- Mountain Chickadee (CW) (Banner Forest in Kitsap)
- White-breasted Nuthatch (Alan Huggin's yard)
- Palm Warbler (CW) (near Olalla Airport)
- Harris Sparrow (CW) (Ed Swan's yard)

Perhaps the most exciting "find" of the day was the birth of a baby girl to CBC participant, Bianca Perla. Her baby was born at home on the night of the CBC. In addition to giving birth to a healthy baby girl, Bianca also heard a barred owl calling that night. I believe her baby now has her own totem bird!