

## Plymouth, MA: 42nd Christmas Bird Count: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, pre-dawn owling was tough with 95% cloud and a NW wind @ 15 mph. Luckily, the wind dropped all day to calm at dusk and temperatures inched down from 41° F to 38° F. Visibility was to the horizon, the ground was bare and all fresh and salt water was open. Given no precipitation, no snow cover and no ice, birds were hard to locate because there was little clustering at feeders and water birds were all widely dispersed. It seemed that many wintering coastal waterfowl had yet to arrive this far south.

Our tally of 107 species in 69 party hours (plus sharpie and Baltimore Oriole in count week) was well above average. Since 1974, the total number of individual birds has been trending down; our 8,410 was the second fewest all time. Declines are driven by diminishing wintering Canada Geese, American Black Duck, Common Eider and large gulls in the harbors; also we have lost the hordes of gulls and starlings at the open garbage dumps in “the good old days” before incineration and recycling!



Three new species for the count (this seldom happens after over 40 years) included a lingering Ash-throated Flycatcher, 4 Common Raven (finally) and a very late Orchard Oriole. I also highlighted a feeder Dickcissel, our 4<sup>th</sup> ever. High counts along the shoreline included 3 Semipalmated Plover, 2 Laughing Gulls and a Glaucous Gull; while 1 Peregrine Falcon is still notable, and we again blew away the Fish Crow record with 241 (210 in 2014) and our 214 crow spp. may have included many more. Notable lowest counts since our first year in 1974 included 1 Brant, 142 Am. Black Duck and only 2 Am. Tree Sparrows. A total of 4

Cooper’s Hawk but no Sharp-shinned is becoming a theme in New England, while 15 Carolina Wrens surely reflected the preceding harsh winter, the lowest count since 1988 (11).

Decreasing trends of large gulls (declining inshore fishing, closing dumps), starlings (dumps) and game birds except Wild Turkey, continue apace. American Tree Sparrows (2) are in long-term decline and Am. Kestrels are gone. However, cormorants (Great and Double-crested), Hooded Merganser (60) and Gadwall (81) are increasing steadily, as are permanent residents that are expanding their ranges from the south. The latter include Red-bellied Woodpecker (11), Tufted Titmouse (111) and Northern Cardinal (177). Northern Mockingbird (11) and House Finch (144) increased from the 1970’s through the 1990’s, but are now dropping back to perhaps (?) a more stable carrying capacity in SE New England. Wild Turkeys are doing just fine.



Many thanks to all the participants in the warmish outdoors; plus the feeder watchers (25 total participants), who contributed to this year’s count of 8,410 birds of 107 species. May your favorite coffee and hot chocolate shops always be open early and may the evening-tally stewpots never run dry. Hope we see you next year.

*Documentary photographs by Brad Winn (Ash-throated Flycatcher) and Mark Faherty (Orchard Oriole).*

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