

34th Plymouth, MA Christmas Bird Count: 26th December 2007

December 2007 set records for snowfall in Boston but we were fortunate to sandwich our count between the serial snowstorms and deep freezes. Temperatures for late night owling and dawn birding were 10-15 degrees below freezing with mostly clear skies and absolutely windless conditions. The rest of the day was similar with, at most, a 2 mph N breeze on the coast. The daytime high temperature was 42° F; thus while most smaller bodies of still, fresh water were frozen, larger ponds were partly open, running fresh streams and the sea were open. Even inland, snow cover from the last storm was patchy and seldom over an inch. Thus water birds of all types were well represented and concentrated on the larger ponds and at the coast. The observing conditions were close to perfect; great light and superb audibility for all those significant high-frequency chips. After three previous years of insect defoliation, 2007 saw low numbers of defoliators and seed and berry crops were well above average. When this combined with a failure of E Canadian seed crops, the irruptive seed and berry eaters were all over New England this Christmas period!

Our total of 109 species means that we have exceeded the 34-year average for 12 of the last 13 years. Coverage and party hours are stable, so maybe more species are surviving and lingering due to the warmer winters; or maybe we have better birders who know all the nooks and crannies of their areas. The 13,345 individual birds counted were somewhat below average numbers. Low temperatures on the count have remained steady (24° F) since 1974, while high temps. have increased from a mean of ca. 35° F in the 1970's to ca. 42° F since 2000.

A Hoary Redpoll among a flock of Common Redpolls at Nameloc Heights (N of Scusset Beach) was a new bird for the count (grand total 188 spp.) while Bohemian Waxwing and Pine Grosbeak were excellent finds. Highest (or = highest) counts for all 34 years were recorded for Lesser Scaup (255), Northern Harrier (6), Virginia Rail (7), Red-bellied Woodpecker (15), Downy Woodpecker (77) and Common Redpoll (116). The only long-term low count was European Starling (306); we really miss those great, festering open dumps!

Decreasing species over the years include large gulls, all game birds except turkeys, American Kestrel and American Tree Sparrow. Of the increasing species of the 1970-1990 period, two were back to the lows of the early years: Northern Mockingbird (25) and House Finch (176). Increasing trends in Plymouth include waterbirds like Canada Goose, Hooded Merganser, Common Loon and Great Cormorant; permanent residents such as Wild Turkey, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Northern Cardinal; also lingering migrants like Hermit Thrush, Am. Robin and all warblers (excluding Myrtle).

Many thanks again to all who contributed to the count of 13,435 birds of 109 species in our 15-mile diameter Plymouth circle. I hope we see you next Christmas.

Trevor Lloyd-Evans (compiler).