

## Plymouth, MA 36<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count: 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2009

More by good luck than judgment (as usual) we held our mid-week count after a weekend of vigorous snowstorms which wiped out many planned counts in the northeast. Predawn owling temperatures started at 16°F with light SW winds and mostly clear skies. Maximum winds did not exceed 10 mph, but on the other hand, temperatures never did reach freezing all day. All still fresh water was frozen solid except for the largest ponds, but running water and the sea were open or partly open. There was complete snow cover from the recent storm, 2 inches in clear spots, but over a foot in drifts. With no precipitation all day, light winds (mostly) and sunny skies, observation conditions were good and birds were concentrated in cleared areas, under feeders, in any open water and along the coasts. Berry and seed crops were at least average or better and there was essentially no presence of irruptive bird species from the north.

The tallied 108 species (plus 3 in count week) were the 8<sup>th</sup> highest in 36 years and we have now exceeded the 36-year average number of species for 12 of the last 15 years. On the other hand, the total number of individual birds has been trending steadily downwards; our 10,762 being an all-time low, despite above-average counting effort this year and good viewing conditions.



(Photograph by Claire Goldthwaite)

A carefully monitored White-winged Dove was present in count week (a first), and we had count week Dovekie and Black Guillemot. Other unusual species were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dickcissel ever and the 1<sup>st</sup> Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, raising the grand total to 189 species. Highest all-year counts included Eurasian Wigeon (2), Red-shouldered Hawk (4), Red-tailed Hawk (18), American Pipit (5) and a good-berry-year special of 1,076 American Robins. The long-term low counts were

American Black Duck (322), Herring Gull (394) and a single (!) American Coot.

Decreasing trends of large gulls (declining inshore fishing, closing dumps), starlings (dumps) and game birds except Wild Turkey continue apace. Hooded Mergansers are increasing steadily, as are permanent residents expanding their ranges from the south, such as Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren and Northern Cardinal. Northern Mockingbird (19) and House Finch (69) increased from the 1970's through the 1990's, but are now dropping back in numbers to perhaps (?) a more stable carrying capacity in SE New England. Wild Turkeys are doing just fine as they increase in farmland, woodlots and the suburbs.

Many thanks to all the participants (26) in the snowy outdoors and at feeder watches who contributed to this year's count of 10,762 birds of 108 species. May your favorite coffee and hot chocolate shops always be open and may the evening-tally vegetable and (non-wild) turkey stewpots never run dry. I hope we see you next Christmas.

Trevor Lloyd-Evans (compiler)