

Plymouth, MA: 37th Christmas Bird Count: 22nd December 2010

We held our mid-week count this year between two snowstorms with pre-dawn owling at a survivable 28°F and close to calm winds. During the day temperatures peaked at 36°F with NW winds 5-35 mph and partly cloudy skies becoming overcast, with light snow about dusk. All still fresh water was frozen except for the largest ponds, but running water and the sea were open or partly open. Snow cover was in the 2-6 inches range, while berry and seed crops were poor to rapidly vanishing. This was reflected in generally low landbird numbers.

The tallied 103 species (plus 1 in count week) were (just) above average and we have now exceeded the 37-year average number of species for 13 of the last 16 years. On the other hand, the total number of individual birds has been trending steadily downwards; our 12,933 (or 212 birds per party hour) continuing the low number of individuals seen for the last 5 years.



First winter plumage Iceland (Kumlien's) Gull
(photograph by Evan Dalton, Manomet Staff)

I did not highlight any species as “unusual” this year, a most unusual event in itself! Every species this year has occurred in at least three previous years since 1974. The “count week” Eastern Phoebe is rare for us in December, while the trio of Peregrine Falcon, Merlin and American Kestrel has happened for the last two

years. Iceland (Kumlien's), Glaucous and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were another neat trio. We assume the latter gull has been at and around Jenny Pond in Plymouth for the last 8 years. Highest all-year counts included Snow Goose (a family of 4), Ring-necked Duck (416), Harlequin Duck (37), Fish Crow (22) and Brown-headed Cowbird (9). Two species were highest equal (with one previous year): Bald Eagle 4 (also 4 in '08) and Red-shouldered Hawk 4 (also 4 in '09). The only long-term low count record was Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler at a barely detectable 12 birds.

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 (102) 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 (28) in the snowy outdoors and 3+ at feeder watches who contributed to this year's count of 12,933 birds of 103 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)