

Plymouth, MA: 39th Christmas Bird Count: 19th December 2012

Pre-dawn owling was unproductive with a 90% overcast sky, temperature a warm 39° F and WNW winds @ 10-15 mph. During the day, temperatures peaked at 45° F and NW winds moderated to 5-10 mph under 95% overcast. There was essentially no precipitation. No water was frozen. This fall and winter were one of the best for irruptive northern nuthatches, finches and grosbeaks. Small marine prey is again abundant this year, so seabirds were well-represented in all coastal areas.

The tallied 105 species (plus Pine Warbler in count week) were above average and we have now exceeded the 39-year average number of species for 9 of the last 10 years. On the other hand, the total number of individual birds has been trending steadily downwards; our 10,871 (or 175 birds per party hour) was the 2nd fewest ever, continuing the low number of individuals seen for the last 7 years. Declines are driven by diminishing wintering Canada Geese, Am. Black Duck, Common Eider and large gulls in the harbors.



Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) during prebasic molt into winter plumage – Jenny Pond, Plymouth.

(October photograph by Evan Dalton)

I highlighted a second-ever Hoary Redpoll (among a flock of Common Redpoll at the tip of Plymouth Beach) as “unusual” this year; also a Red Crossbill near Ellisville was the first since 1977. Last year’s Iceland Gull was back on the Plymouth boat launch as a 3rd winter bird (one of 3 Iceland Gulls this year) and the Jenny Pond Lesser Black-backed Gull is back in its habitual winter home for an amazing 11th winter.

The 7 highest all-year counts included waterbirds (183 Am. Wigeon, 195 Ruddy Duck); 9 Bald Eagle (they now breed locally, within the circle); 24 Red-bellied Woodpecker and finches (18 White-winged Crossbill, 175 Common Redpoll). The two long-term low counts were 27 Mourning Doves and only 7 Myrtle Warblers.

Decreasing trends of large gulls (declining inshore fishing, closing dumps), starlings (dumps) and game birds except Wild Turkey, continue apace. Hooded Merganser (220) and Gadwall (60) are increasing steadily, as are permanent residents that are expanding their ranges from the south. These latter include Red-bellied Woodpecker (24), Tufted Titmouse (118), Carolina Wren (61) and Northern Cardinal (82). Northern Mockingbird (20) and House Finch (77) 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 Turkey (60) are doing just fine as they increase in farmland, woodlots and the suburbs.

Many thanks to all the participants in the windy, warm outdoors; plus the feeder watchers (23 total participants), who contributed to this year’s count of 10,871 birds of 105 species. May your favorite coffee and hot chocolate shops always be open early and may the evening-tally stewpots never run dry. I hope we see you next Christmas.

Trevor Lloyd-Evans (compiler)