

COLD SNAP SLOWS DECEMBER 26th CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT,

BUT MANY NEW RECORD-HIGHS, PLENTY OF RARITIES

La Nina, the colder weather that NOAA had promised us back in June, paid us a visit in time for the 2016 CBC. After many consecutive years above 130 species of birds (and three times right at 140), **our CBC this year logged just 128 species**—our first time in the 120s since 2007. Some of these were birds missed count day were seen count week (CW), and others within the month (“CM”). Total individuals counted, 41,173, exceeded the 22-year average. And, like last year, we recorded a significant number of **record-high individual counts—for 18 species**, tying the record count on two more, and coming close on six others. On the other hand, only two species were **record low**—**Western Grebe** continued its slide, and **Thayer’s Gull** was tied for all-time low.

I. Misses. But it was *missing species* that were noteworthy. **Common Loon** and **Townsend’s Warbler** were missed for the first time ever in the 22-year old count circle, though the warbler appeared in several places count week. Frozen inland ponds cost us **Wood Duck** again this year. And **Gr. White-fronted Goose** was also missing, as was **Tundra Swan**, although the swan appeared count-week. And shorebirds had their weakest showing in years: **Least, Western and Spotted Sandpipers**, as well as **Long-billed Dowitchers**, were absent. We’ve missed each before, but not regularly in the last ten years. The cold snap apparently drove out **Sora**, admittedly at the very northern tip of its winter range. Offshore, the alcid showing was mediocre with both **Com. Murre** and **Rhinoceros Auklet** missing. In the woods, **Ruffed Grouse** was absent, and we could not track down a **Short-eared Owl** in open habitat this year. For songbirds, the notable misses were **Brown-headed Cowbird, Red Crossbill, and Evening Grosbeak.**

II. Effort. Yet **123 people** participated in this year’s CBC, just two shy of last year’s record. Feeder/private property counters continued to exhibit an increasingly important role, and I see many more out there that could join us. **This year 61 feeder/private-property counters put in 91.75 hours on count day, a record high count of observers and feeder-hours.** On the downside, our core kayak coverage inside Ebey and Steambeat sloughs was cancelled owing to wind, and I was unable to place a team within the inner Tulalip Reservation. We were well down for both party miles and hours from last year: 107 hours and 75 miles walked compared with 165 and 127 miles walked last year—a significant decrease. Perhaps owing to rainy weather after 2 p.m., driving hours were up (83) over last year (53), but driving miles were almost 200 less this year. For non-standard means of locomotion, we did regain Boeing’s **Tom Sultze** on his bike beat of Centennial Trail, and **Pattie Bardon** somehow braved the winds in her kayak to cover the Marysville waterfront inshore of Area 11, a first.

III. Coverage. AREA 1 (outer west part of Tulalip Reservation: Spee-bi-Dah, McKee’s Beach, Tulare Beach Rd, Kayak Pt., inland to lakes Goodwin and Shoecraft) was covered very well once again by **Art Wait’s** team (**Wilma Bayes, Virginia Clark, and Sherrill Miller**), and separately by **Becky Berry**, covering her beat off 140th (Fire Trail Road). This year feeder and private-property coverage were uncommonly strong: we had **Trish Whitworth** and the **Baileys** back with separate feeder stations near Lake Goodwin, and **Clint Hall** had another banner day at his incredible property off Tulare Beach Rd. Area 1 had a solo **W. Screech-Owl** this year near Wenberg State Park, a traditional site; this species just seems to get harder to find each year. **Trish Whitworth**, near the northwest corner of Lake Goodwin, spotted the CBC’s only two **Band-tailed Pigeons**. Area 1’s counters produced highest individual counts for a whopping 13 species, of which none were more impressive than 17 **Pied-billed Grebes** on the water, and the lion’s share of a record-high **Purple Finch** count, 42 birds. As in most years, Area 1 led on a range of coniferous-forest species, such as **Varied Thrush, Chestnut-backed Chickadee** and **Brown Creeper**. Overall species count was down by three from last year’s 62.



Am. Dipper, w. end of 188th in Area 2, photo courtesy of Tom Takano

AREA 2 (north of 172nd Street, west of I-5 up to Island Crossing, west to Frank Waters Rd) coverage was very similar to last year, with **Reg Reisenbacher, Pamela Myers, Kim Kendall** and **Tom Takano** giving us really solid field time. The feeder and private property coverage expanded also: newcomers **Barb McGillivray** (feeder) and **Kalana Kawaihae** (owling—two **Barn Owls**) joined us, and the **Adams family** covered their farm as in previous years. This year the combined coverage found 51 species, an increase of 5 over last year, and led for individual high counts of 3 species and one subspecies—**Adam Stevens** hit the jackpot with 12 **Slate-colored Juncos** among a horde of **Oregons**. The exciting rarity of the day, as reported by **Pam** on EBird, was an **Am. Dipper**, our first since the 2004 CBC. The cold spell probably helped here. **Pam’s** son **Tom** nailed a nice photo, too (at left)—nice work!!



Imm. **Golden Eagle** near Island Crossing, **Dave Poortinga**, December 27, 2016. Count Week bird (photo courtesy of Dave Poortinga).

Dave Poortinga in **AREA 3** was territory lead for the first time; longtime Everett-Marysville CBC veteran **Maureen Corlas** joined him. I'm thrilled to have Dave—you Ebirders have surely noted how good he is at finding birds. **Dave's** residence is right at the northern edge of the count circle near Island Crossing, a spot made famous by last year's CBC-first **Lesser Goldfinch**. This year Dave and Maureen combined for a big day indeed—54 species—three more than last year! More noteworthy, three solos were found—two **Am. Bittern** were at Portage Creek WMA, and a **Townsend's Solitaire** was nearby—the first since the 1997 CBC. If all that weren't enough, **Dave** also found several more count-week birds, the most exciting of which was an imm. **Golden Eagle** (at left).

Area 3 also again benefited from feeder and property coverage of **Billee Jo Winskowski** and the **Edwards family**, joined (in the western extreme of the territory) by newcomers **Bobbie Steele**, **Linda Brossard** and **Barbara Olesen**.



Long-eared Owl, Area 3, anonymous

Last but not least for **Area 3**—an anonymous observer photographed a **Long-eared Owl**, the area's third solo. As I am sworn to secrecy as a precondition of receiving the report, I cannot divulge the location of the bird, nor the source of the lead, whom I trust. Both parties felt that confidentiality was the right course, given bad outcomes with another **Long-eared** on Eide Rd. near Stanwood last winter. We all know that daytime owls can get "over-loved" by observers with cameras. I also recall with chagrin releasing the location of Port of Everett's **Burrowing Owl** a few winters back, which led to a similar bad result.

Jonathan Blubaugh was down in California this year, so **AREA 4** (*west of I-5, north of 140th, but south of 172nd/Lakewood Rd, Gissburg Lakes, Lake Loma, Lakewood HS*) was covered by the remaining veterans **Douglas Resnick** and **Terry Nightingale & Sue Miller-Nightingale**. **Dan** and **Jan Eide**, and **Jean Craig** added feeder reports. This year's 53 species was down from last year's record 62, but still above the recent years' averages. As usual, the field team led all parties for counts of **Cackling Goose**, with 59.

Area 5 (*south of 172nd in Arlington and north of 108th in Marysville, going all the way to I-5 and to the northeast edge of the circle in Sysco Heights*) was again covered with care by the **Wilds**. Area 5 led all territories in highest counts for 9 species; 45 **Pacific Wrens** was a good count here, welcome since the over-40 counts should be more frequent from inland wooded territories than they have been. More surprising was 78 **Am. Goldfinch**—unprecedentedly high on the CBC here and symbolic of a best-ever showing for the CBC as a whole. **Ida Maye Katustik** and the **Johnsons** added feeder/private property coverage. **Caty Norton** meanwhile again covered **AREA 5A** (*extreme northwest Marysville/Stimson, west of 51st and east of I-5, Marysville-Getchell HS, extreme south of Sysco Heights and selected other private properties*), joined by **Michele Martin**, while **Sammy Catiis** covered her feeder site. **Caty** led all CBC counters on **Red-winged Blackbird** and Area 5A had two more species than last year, at 41. **Tom Sultze** added bicycle coverage through Area 5, despite ice and snow in spots.

Area 6 (*Tulalip including Tulalip Bay and Hermosa Pt., inland to central sections of the Tulalip Reservation*) had changes in personnel this year. The big change was **Maxine Reid's** absence; thankfully, she helped acquaint core observers **Anne Marie-Wood** and **Steve Pink** with the nuances of access there and otherwise gave advice on territory coverage. The effort paid off: last year's count of 65 species was retained, and a solo **White-throated Sparrow** was found at a feeder. This team added several more count-week birds for their area, and led for counts of two shorebirds long associated with Area 6, **Black-bellied Plover** and **Black Turnstone**. Off Turk Rd., **Phyllis Spinning** and **Dave Constantine** covered their lively feeder and property as usual. Alas, I was unable to set inner Tulalip Reservation coverage here this year, but have a special plan for next CBC.

Few people have been more loyal to this CBC and their territory than veteran **Dan Olson**, who covered **Area 7** (*southeast Tulalip Reservation including Priest Pt.*), while **Mike Sheldon** and **Kayla Jones** had their own special area also. The **Hatleys** meanwhile maintained a vigil at their incredibly-busy bird feeders. These observers in Area 7 together detected 47

species, two more than last year; they also led for individual counts of 3 species, including a banner day on **Bushtit** (120). Driving through the area the day after the count, I added a count-week **Turkey Vulture** close to Priest Point. The **Hatleys** feeders have amazing visitation—among others, two **Orange-crowned Warblers** are regular, including one that regularly drinks from the hummingbird feeder (!); and a mysterious **hummingbird** photographed there on CBC day seems both larger and longer-billed than the many **Anna's** present, but is undetermined as far as identity.

The CBC lucked out to have **Graham Hutchinson, Jim Beneteau** and **Jim Brouwer** back at **AREA 7A** (*northeastern-most Tulalip Reservation; Ross Lake*). The **Hutchinson** party core coverage was further backed by **Linda Orrino's** great yard with feeders, as well as **Davenport's** feeders. All told the combined **7A** coverage turned up 45 bird species—ten more than last year, including the highest-ever single-party count for **Snow Goose** (1800) on the CBC.

Susie Schaefer put together another great team of birders for **AREA 8** (*Marysville City*) this year. 10 observers in 2 parties were joined by the **Zimmermans**, new to our CBC, on private property, for a total of 12 field observers. Add to that 15 feeder-watchers, and you have the most intensely-birded area in the count circle. So this coverage was able to eclipse even last year's super day (72 species), by two (74). And this included *best high-counts of all territories for eight species*, most notably of two much-discussed birds, **Anna's Hummingbird** (72) and **Eur. Collared-Dove** (21). These two once again this year set new record-highs in the overall CBC count. Susie's team counted 44 of the 49 **Com. Ravens** for the territory, beating the record for the entire CBC and being the largest part of an all-time CBC high of 92 birds. More exciting, the core team found one of the two **Great Egrets** that has been loyal to the Sunnyside Blvd/Jennings Park area since early December. *This egret was a long-awaited CBC first that has been seen by many birders since.* In addition, the team scored a second solo with three **Greater Yellowlegs**.

AREA 9 coverage (*northwest Lake Stevens, Centennial Trail, Corson Wildlife Area, east to 123rd Street NE, west to Highway 9, including Lake Cassidy*) included veterans **Mara Price** and **Al Eliot** (who also contributed feeder birds from his place in Marysville City for Area 8), while **Tom Sultze** covered the Centennial Trail section on his bike, and newcomers **Sierra Zweig** and **Mike Holman** also had a beat. Another very solid group of feeder-watchers included **Kevin Gusman & Linda Johnson**, the **Thurmans** (**Dana** and **Kathryn**), **Sue Babich** (with a very good group of birds), and **Kathryn Rasmussen** off 123rd. Overall species count was down (38, 6 below last year), but the territory still managed a solo—**Kathryn Rasmussen** found a single **Calif. Quail**. The territory was also the place to go for **Pileated Woodpecker**, with a territory-best 4 birds.

Mary Vosteen, who has done so much for us in recent years in **Area 10** (*south end of Sunnyside Boulevard, southwestern-most Lake Stevens—south of Soper Hill Rd and Hwy 92*), was joined this year by longtime CBC veteran **Marc** ("**Bewick's Wren**") **Breuninger**. **Donna Rice** also gave us a nice feeder report, and **Peggy Heineck** of **Heineck Farms** really helped us along Sunnyside Blvd. *This year's 55 species were the highest ever for Area 10*—also marking three straight really excellent years, each with above 50 species and rarities to boot. This year, **Peggy Heineck** found the best rarity—a **Barn Swallow** that had roosted in her barn for a couple weeks (and persisted to at least Dec. 29, the day I saw it), eating—believe it or not—**rat poison** that somehow wasn't lethal. Sure enough, when I examined the site with Peggy, you could see swallow droppings all around near the poison bins! Keep in mind here the old saying: "truth is stranger than fiction," and it really is so for birders—you just never know what you'll encounter. What would motivate a **Barn Swallow** to hang on with nightly temperatures in the teens and 20s?? **Mary** and **Marc** also detected three **Swamp Sparrows** near the Lake Stevens Sewer District flats, just as last year.

AREA 11 (*the low ground from the Everett Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) north to Biringer Farm, both east and west of I-5, Pacific Topsoils on Smith Island*) had another real low species count with 75, 10 below last year and 19 below the 2015 CBC! Major changes in habitat are a big part of this, and the cold day held down numbers of a number of common species

count. Still, Area 11 predictably lead high individual counts for a lot of regulars (21 species), and contributed three solos (four if you throw in Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk). Most of this was **Steve Giles'** usual mind-numbing counts of dabblers; I had a solo **Cinnamon Teal**. The other solo of note was a **Bohemian Waxwing** (at right) at Biringer Farm. (Not award-winning photography here folks, but note white markings in the wings, dark undertail coverts, and larger-than-Cedar size (photo to the right). This bird also vocalized.



This bird might well qualify as the "poster bird" of the CBC, since it is closely associated with the cold snap, being a northern species that seems to almost prefer really low winter temperatures. This was only the 2nd for our CBC, paralleling Sequim, where the CBC had huge numbers but only for the second time for their CBC.

For the second time an second year in a row, **Area 12 (Everett City)** had the highest total species count of all territories. **Rick** and **Tina Taylor** did their usual outstanding job, joined by **Phil Dickinson** (who also covered a beat in Area 10 near day's end). This team (plus four feeder-folks) detected 81 species—a big day for sure, but as with nearby Area 11, below last year's tally. All told, Area 12 led for individual counts of 9 species, tying for the lead on a number more, and landed four solos—**Semipalmated Plover (3)**, **Thayer's Gull**, **Hutton's Vireo** and two **Calif. Scrub-Jays**. Given the threat of loss of Area 14 boat coverage (wind warnings the night prior threatened to cancel the boat trip), the offshore coverage here was also especially important.

Jon and **Kathy Houghton** (on foot) once again did a stellar job with **Area 13 (Jetty Island)**. This year, 29 species were well below the last two years' totals, as in a number of other territories. But per tradition at Area 13, it was quality over quantity, with nearly all of the CBC's **Eur. Wigeons (2)** and **Canvasback (45)**, as well as the CBC's only four **Sanderlings** showing up! We were lucky to have the **Houghtons** out there at all, given the wind threat.

Area 14 (boat party, offshore waters; Hat Island—on foot)—special thanks and kudos go to veteran offshore lead **Duane Karna**, who announced his planned retirement for being boat skipper last year, yet graciously agreed to run his boat both last CBC and again this year, despite the wind storm threat and the fact that his boat was frozen and iced-over. **Douglas Cooper**, and **Bob** and **Laurie Schmidt**, were passenger-counters. Island residents provided valuable assistance and guidance and seem interested in continuing our access. CBC solo birds included singles of **Marbled Murrelet** and **Bonaparte's Gull**, and Area 14 led for counts of four other species—but not all of them marine this time either, given excellent forest habitat on the island itself. What would our CBC be without Duane's boat party? These many years it has become very clear that the boat is critical, even more so now that we have on-site Hat Island coverage, as well as on-foot Jetty Island coverage.

Last but not least **Area 15** coverage this year was comprised of **Allison Warner** and **Pam Pritzl (southernmost Camano Island)**. They detected 27 species, three more than last year—good to have you out there.

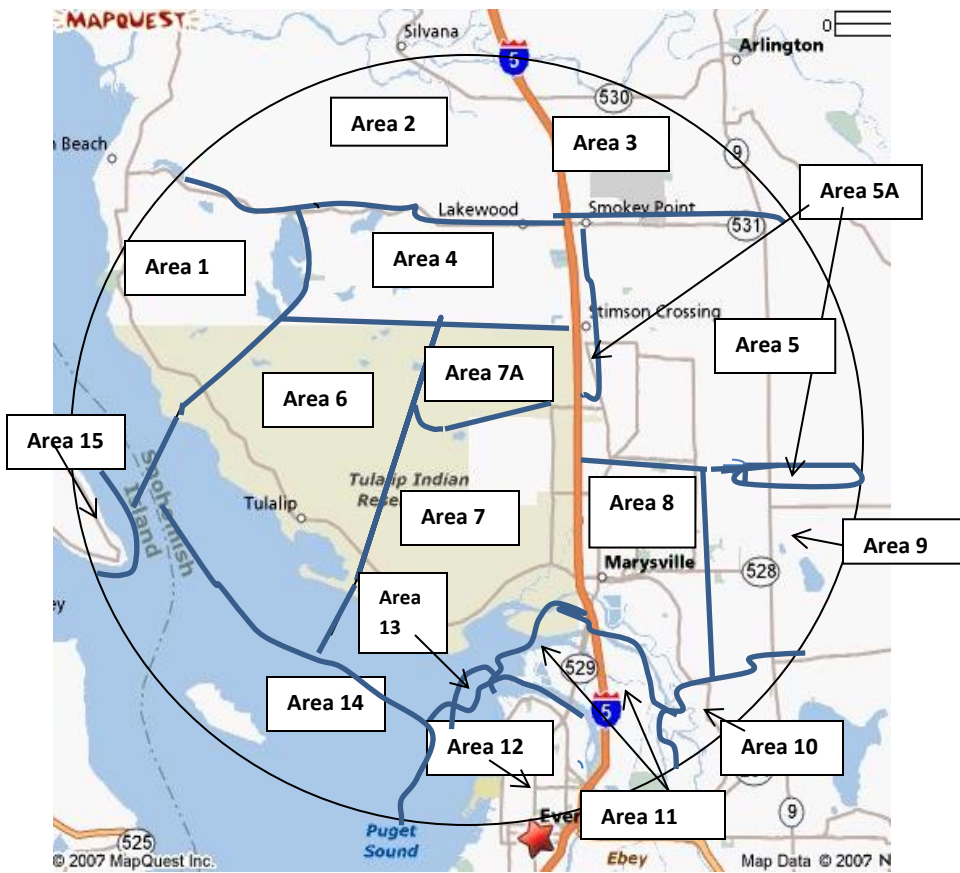
IV. Trends. Most of us commented at the potluck dinner that it seemed a down day overall with the cold snap effect and late-day rain and wind. The final tally here, however, shows a certain correction toward normalcy and even an opposite trend for counts in some cases. This is common: the initial tally at the potluck shows significant gaps, but as belated reports roll in, the picture comes more into focus. Even with weather less favorable than the last two years, high participation and the effect of cold concentrated some species—and forced others down out of the foothills or middle elevations. Feeders are often “busier” in the cold. The effect of participation vis-à-vis record-high counts also needs to be considered against the background of our current circle position being just 22 years old—not really a lot of data to compare against.

Ducks proved mostly to be present in average numbers, but **Snow** and **Canada Geese** showed up in record numbers. Where obvious, I deleted apparent double-counts of the **Snows**, reducing the initial count by over 1200 individuals. No question, many birds got counted more than once given high-flying flocks. On the other hand, **grebes** and **loons** continued a recent trend of low numbers, although **Pied-billed Grebe** had a strong showing—likely because the freeze had concentrated birds on larger lakes and some went over to salt water, too.

Raptors had a strong showing, with another record-high for **Bald Eagle** and a new high for **Cooper's Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk** was also high, and though **Rough-legged Hawk** shows just two, four intriguing *Buteo*, sp. on **Pattie Bardon's** beat sounded very much like this species, but we weren't sure.

Our standard 8 gull species were present in near-normal numbers, but **alcids** fit the pattern of divers and cormorants, putting in a mediocre showing. Both **Anna's Hummingbird** and **Eurasian Collared-Dove** continued their increases, both with new record-highs and fitting the regional trend. Night **owls**—thanks to a pretty decent night without wind and occasional stars—were well represented, with 5 species and 23 individuals, in 21 hours of owling—about an owl per hour. Not as strong as last year, but we had almost no moon...

Woodpeckers had perhaps the best overall CBC showing ever, with record-highs for three and a record-tying count for the fourth of five species. Most observers felt the songbirds as a whole were lower in numbers than usual, especially when compared with the last two clear-weather, high-observer-counting efforts. Still, none registered all-time lows and several bucked the cold snap by appearing in record numbers, including **Com. Raven** (inexplicably more than triple our previous best), **Com. Bushtit**, and **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. **Purple Finch** and **Am. Goldfinch** were also inexplicably high, given a year which most observers call a finch “down year.” In the uncommon category, **Hermit Thrush** and **Swamp Sparrow** were at very high numbers, at 5 each.



Everett-Marysville CBC circle. Macro-scale (boundaries not exact)



Bohemian Waxwing, along Jamestown Rd. in Sequim, Clallam County, WA, early December 2016.

**GET FIRED UP—THE NEXT
EVERETT-MARYSVILLE
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DATE
IS:**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2017

We continue to see growing involvement locally and increased interest in birds. The Christmas Bird Count has really become an annual community Christmastime ritual—and the *Everett Herald* gave us not one, but *two* articles before the event this year. PBS-NPR even showed up, to interview Diana Antunes and myself for a live show! Perhaps there has never been so many people feeding birds from home. **If you know someone who might be interested, and especially someone who has a feeder or property within the map circle at left—please let them know.** As far as participation, the feeder-watchers and folks on private lands continue to be our biggest opportunity for growth. Some folks start with feeders, and then expand to cover their neighborhoods—and from there the sky is the limit. Just don't forget to tell 'em:

“if you haven't been on the bird count, you haven't really lived!” (Just kidding—but as you all know, it is a blast).

Finally, a special thanks to **Pilchuck Audobon** and all of you who helped to put the Fireman's Hall get-together for us on CBC night, thinking here of dear **Susie** especially. For those of you who could not make it, you should check it out next December. The comraderie of this evening event is also a great tradition of the count day, and delicious food, fresh wine and sweets are taste great at day's end.

I truly hope all of you had a great time out there on the CBC, and hope you can all make it back for the next one.

--Scott Atkinson, Compiler
Everett-Marysville CBC