

2019 Edmonds / South Snohomish County Christmas Bird Count

December 14, 2019



The Edmonds / South Snohomish County Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held December 14, 2019. The CBC is conducted in a 15-mile diameter circle centered just west of Martha Lake in Lynnwood (Latitude/Longitude: 47.85238/-122.24885). It is located mainly in south Snohomish County, but also includes a 2.5-mile section of north King County and a small area on the SE corner of Whidbey Island. This circle covers South Everett, Mukilteo, Mill Creek, Lynnwood, Edmonds, Mountlake Terrace, Lake Forest Park, Brier, Kenmore, Maltby, Bothell, and a portion of Woodinville, Snohomish, and Shoreline. This was the 36th consecutive year that the Pilchuck Audubon Society has sponsored this CBC circle since 1984.

119 species were recorded on count day versus a ten-year average of 124. This was the lowest number of species since 2010. No additional species were recorded during count week. A total of 34,369 individual birds were observed versus a ten-year average of 42,059. This was the lowest number of birds since 2011. There were 94 field participants in 38 field parties and a record 107 home feeder counters at 81 locations. This total participant count of 201 people places this CBC circle in the top 25 out of over 2,600 circles in terms of community participation

A full report of species seen, counts, and effort data for the 2019 Edmonds CBC is available on the [Pilchuck Audubon Society website](#), along with historical counts for comparison and a [description of the areas](#).

The count day was overcast with intermittent drizzle in the morning and rain in the afternoon. Temperatures ranged from 39f to 43f. There was no snow and all the small ponds and marshes were ice free. The marine waters boat team was able to get out and survey all the areas under good weather and wave conditions. With below average rainfall and above average temperatures the lakes, ponds, and wetlands had lower than normal water levels.

Highlights

The only notable species was a pair of Surfbird's that have been on the Edmonds breakwater since October. A Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk was found in the Snohomish River valley.

High Counts

There were 8 new record high counts:

- Brant – 169 vs. 48 in 2009
- Bufflehead – 614 vs. 592 in 2013
- Pelagic Cormorant – 69 vs. 56 in 2018
- Surfbird – 2 vs. 1 in 2018
- Northern Flicker – 262 vs. 256 in 2017
- Bushtit – 721 vs. 464 in 2015
- Bewick's Wren – 140 vs. 128 in 2015
- Spotted Towhee – 449 vs. 434 in 2013

Misses

One species was missed this year that should have been detected:

- Bonaparte's Gull – found in 89% of the years

Low Counts

One species set a record low count:

- America Coot – 20 vs. 51 in 2018

Feeder Counts

There has been increased emphasis on recruiting feeder counters for the last six years. As suburbs are the primary habitat in our circle, the feeder counters are critical in our mission to survey the birds in the circle. This year a record 107 people counted birds at feeders at 81 locations. The feeder counters detected 3,889 birds belonging to 51 species. This accounted for 11% of the birds detected on the count. The feeder counters found 100% of the California Quail, 73% of the Band-tailed Pigeons, 52% of the Anna Hummingbirds, 50% of the Barred Owls, 51% of the Chestnut-backed Chickadees, 65% of the Bushtits, 67% of the Red-breasted Nuthatches, 67% of the White-throated Sparrows, 50% of the Orange-crowned Warblers, and 58% of the Townsend's Warblers. Overall, the feeder counters had a significant positive impact on the success of the count.

Boat Party

Each year, Duane Karna leads a boat party that cruises the marine waters in the count circle. This year the weather and water conditions were good making for a pleasant day on the water and providing excellent viewing conditions. The boat party detected 44 species and 1,868 total birds. The boat team found the only Sanderling, California Gull, and Iceland (Thayer's) Gull.

Crow Counting

There is an impressive number of American Crows that pass through the count circle each morning and evening as they move to and from their roost site on the UW Bothell campus. This natural spectacle is best described as a "river of crows" as they follow drainages to the roost. For the sixth consecutive year we used a crow counting protocol developed by Dr. Douglas W. Wacker, of the UW Bothell. Dr. Wacker and his four teams of students and community scientists detected 11,924 crows as they flew towards the roost site.

Waterfowl Trends

With warmer and drier weather than normal, waterfowl numbers were much lower than last year – 6,699 vs. 9,231 in 2018 vs. 25,231 in 2017. American Wigeon were down to 449 vs. a 10-year average of 3,171. Mallard numbers were down to 1,646 vs. a 10-year average of 6,208. Snow Goose was found only sporadically and in single digits until 2009. Since then they have been found annually in the thousands. This year the number of Snow Geese was down to 707 from 1,990 last year and from 5,250 in 2017. Much of the Snow Gosse habitat in the circle has been converted from sod and row crops to berries over the last three years. Trumpeter Swan (482) numbers were also down this year but not as dramatically as Snow Goose numbers. Diving ducks fared better than the dabbling ducks with Harlequin Duck (28), Bufflehead (614), Common Merganser 9238), and Red-breasted Merganser all one standard deviation above the mean. Ruddy Duck (2) was greater than one standard deviation below the mean.

Grebe, Loon, and Cormorant Trends

It is difficult to see trends with loons and grebes as they tend to have big swings in abundance from year to year. However, Horned Grebe (210) was greater than one standard deviation above average. Brandt's Cormorant (24) and a record 69 Pelagic Cormorant were greater than one standard deviation above the mean. While Double-crested Cormorant (218) was slightly below the mean.

Raptor and Owl Trends

Bald Eagle (44) was greater than one standard deviation above the mean. A Harlan's Red-Tailed Hawk was found in the Snohomish River Valley for just the third time in 36 years. Both Coopers Hawk (11), and

Sharp-shinned Hawk (6) were greater than one standard deviation above the mean. Great Horned Owl (6) and Barred Owl (6) numbers were greater than one standard deviation above the mean.

Shorebird, Alcid, and Gull Trends

Two Surfbirds were found on the Edmonds breakwater where they have been seen consistently since October. This is just the second year in which they have been found in this CBC. Two Spotted Sandpipers were again detected on Possession Point, Whidbey Island. Pigeon Guillemot (8) exceeded one standard deviation above the average. Gull numbers were up from last year; but, only Glaucous-winged x Western hybrid (458), exceeded one standard deviation above the mean.

Passerine Trends

Northern Flicker (262), Bushtit (721), Bewick's Wren (140), and Spotted Towhee (449) all set record high counts. The explosive increase of Anna's Hummingbirds (235), appears to have plateaued. Anna's Hummingbird was not recorded in the circle before 1998. The large number of feeder counters contributed to higher numbers of common suburban birds being reported. However, even when normalized by party hour, following common suburban species were over one standard deviation above the mean: Eurasian Collared Dove (21), Anna's Hummingbird (235), Downy Woodpecker (67), Hairy Woodpecker (29), Northern Flicker (262), Stellar's Jay (210), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (450), Red-breasted Nuthatch (117), Brown Creeper (49), Bewick's Wren (140), Fox Sparrow (138), and Spotted Towhee (449). Only two species were low this year when normalized by party hour – American Robin (564) and House Sparrow (53).

Support the CBC

The Christmas Bird Count relies 100% on donations to manage the historic database, and to fund the technology to make historic data available to researchers. Please consider donating to ensure the future of this very important community science program:

Online donation form:

<https://action.audubon.org/onlineactions/WPECgr6TXk64lvphaQSG-Q2>

Thank you to our team leaders, the field participants, boat party, crow counters, and the feeder counters. Special thanks to Linda Phillips for hosting our post-count tally and her excellent homemade bread and hot soups. Next year's Edmonds / South Snohomish County CBC will be held on **Saturday, December 19, 2020**.

Sincerely,

Rick

Rick Taylor
Compiler, Edmonds / South Snohomish County CBC
Pilchuck Audubon Society