

PHILADELPHIA MID-WINTER BIRD CENSUS REPORT

JANUARY 12, 2013



Win Shafer, Chris Walters and Bob Bierregaard roughing it at the Army Corps area

Photo by Art McMorris

27th Annual
 PHILADELPHIA MID-WINTER BIRD CENSUS
 January 12, 2013

Snow Goose	65	Merlin	6
Cackling Goose	1	Peregrine Falcon	6
Canada Goose	8272	Eastern Phoebe	2
Mute Swan	6	Northern Shrike	1
Wood Duck	11	Blue Jay	145
Gadwall	65	American Crow	167
American Wigeon	20	Fish Crow	3
American Black Duck	251	Horned Lark	1
Mallard	1085	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	121
Northern Shoveler	261	Cave Swallow	3
Northern Pintail	59	Carolina Chickadee	441
Green-winged Teal	42	Black-capped Chickadee	4
Canvasback	21	Tufted Titmouse	293
Ring-necked Duck	12	Red-breasted Nuthatch	23
Greater Scaup	7	White-breasted Nuthatch	188
Lesser Scaup	45	Brown Creeper	34
Bufflehead	64	Winter Wren	50
Hooded Merganser	16	Carolina Wren	231
Common Merganser	93	Golden-crowned Kinglet	48
Ruddy Duck	260	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	27
Wild Turkey	21	Eastern Bluebird	42
Red-throated Loon	1	Hermit Thrush	6
Common Loon	1	American Robin	756
Pied-billed Grebe	11	Gray Catbird	2
Double-crested Cormorant	116	Northern Mockingbird	106
Great Cormorant	47	European Starling	4585
Great Blue Heron	35	American Pipit	94
Great Egret	1	Orange-crowned Warbler	3
Green Heron	1	Common Yellowthroat	1
Black Vulture	1	Palm Warbler	3
Turkey Vulture	6	Yellow-rumped Warbler	25
Bald Eagle	7	Eastern Towhee	9
Northern Harrier	2	American Tree Sparrow	25
Sharp-shinned Hawk	19	Chipping Sparrow	19
Cooper's Hawk	19	Field Sparrow	59
Accipiter sp.	1	Vesper Sparrow	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	5	Savannah Sparrow	13
Red-tailed Hawk	62	Fox Sparrow	24
American Coot	58	Song Sparrow	675
Killdeer	1	Swamp Sparrow	56
Ring-billed x Black-headed Gull	1	White-throated Sparrow	1820
Ring-billed Gull	3196	White-crowned Sparrow	20
Herring Gull	528	Dark-eyed Junco	1351
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	Northern Cardinal	528
Great Black-backed Gull	229	Red-winged Blackbird	547
Rock Pigeon	1039	Rusty Blackbird	28
Mourning Dove	787	Common Grackle	3
Eastern Screech-Owl	40	Brown-headed Cowbird	9
Great Horned Owl	6	Purple Finch	13
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	House Finch	467
Belted Kingfisher	13	White-winged Crossbill	10
Red-bellied Woodpecker	117	Common Redpoll	31
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	21	Pine Siskin	33
Downy Woodpecker	251	American Goldfinch	290
Hairy Woodpecker	73	House Sparrow	963
Northern Flicker	45		
Pileated Woodpecker	9	Total Species	111
American Kestrel	11	Total Individuals	31,851

OBSERVERS**AREAS COVERED**

* back yard – bird feeder count

Matt Sharp, Fran Sharp	Benjamin Rush State Park, west Southampton Rd., Delaware River (Glen Foerd to Betsy Ross Bridge)
Frank Windfelder, Todd Fellenbaum, Ann Reeves	Pennypack Creek (Pennypack on the Delaware, Verree Rd. to Krewstown Rd.), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant, west Southampton Rd. Pleasant Hill Park
Nick Zahn, Vince DeAntoniis, Butch Lishman	Delaware River and shoreline (Glen Foerd, Pleasant Hill Park, Pennypack on the Delaware, Frankford Arsenal, Bridge St., Frankford Creek), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant
Tom Bailey	Delaware River (viewed from Burlington Co., New Jersey)
Linda Widdop	Pennypack Creek (Pine Rd. to Verree Rd.)
Peter Kurtz	Pennypack Creek (Verree Rd. to Krewstown Rd.)
Roland Williams	Pennypack Creek (Bustleton Ave. to Holme Ave.)
Brian Schultz	Pennypack Creek (Holme Ave. to Sandiford Run), Delaware River and shoreline (Glen Foerd, Pleasant Hill Park)
Cindy Ferguson, Norm Jones	Pennypack Creek (Rhawn St. to Frankford Ave.)
Audrey Walmsley	Northeast Philadelphia (7800 block of Brocklehurst St. to Rt. 1)*
Cindy Ahern, Scott Ahern	Northeast Philadelphia Airport, Burholme Park, Friends Hospital, Oakland Cemetery, shopping malls at Adams Ave. and Roosevelt Blvd.
Keith Russell, Jeanne Schock, Shawn Towey	Delaware River and shoreline (Packer Marine Terminal to Washington Ave., Pulaski Park to Frankford Creek), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant, Northeast Philadelphia Airport, Sunoco ponds along Penrose Ave., TRC Trash Transfer Station, Wissahickon Creek (various locations)
Richard Horwitz, George Armistead, Susan Behr, Debbie Carr, Allan Cristol, Nathaniel Kahn, Doug Wechsler	Philadelphia Naval Business Center, F. D. Roosevelt Park, Delaware River and shoreline (Pier 70 Blvd. to Washington Ave., Pulaski Park to Frankford Creek), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant
Chris Walters, Rob Bierregaard, Art McMorris, Edwin Shafer	Fort Mifflin, Army Corps of Engineers compound, Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant, Holstein Ave. and 76 th Ave., Schuylkill River from Platt Bridge to Delaware River
Doris McGovern, Kate Atkins, Debbie Beer, Tony Croasdale, Marty Dellwo, Rob Fergus, Tom Magarian	John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, Eastwick, Mario Lanza Blvd., former Clearview Landfill
Jan Gordon, Gregg Gorton	Bartram's Garden, Woodland Cemetery, Cobbs Creek (Whitby Ave., Callowhill St.)
Erica Brendel, John Goschke	West Park (various locations including Schuylkill River)
Stephen Kerr	East Park (East Park Reservoir and vicinity, Schuylkill River)
Allison Ostertag	East Park and associated neighborhoods (Poplar St. to Vine St.)
Winston Moody, Wendy Moody, Phil Hinline	East Falls (Queen Ln. Reservoir, Schuylkill River at the Falls Bridge) Wissahickon Creek (Timber Ln. to Apalogen Rd. and vicinity)

OBSERVERS (concluded)	AREAS COVERED (concluded)	* back yard – bird feeder count
Michael Darcy	Roxborough (Roxborough Reservoir, Port Royal Ave., Schuylkill River and shoreline south to Port Royal Ave.)	
Judy Stepenaskie	Manayunk (6700 block of Nixon St. and vicinity)*	
Scott McConnell	Roxborough (Spring Ln., Shawmont School area, Roxborough tower farm area), Germantown (various locations)	
Steve DuPont, Elizabeth Porter	Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education	
Ken Januski, Jerene Schroeder	Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, Manayunk Canal (Green Ln. Bridge to Shawmont Ave.), Wissahickon Creek (west bank – Gorgas Ln. to Forbidden Dr.)	
Jane Bodine	Roxborough (300 block of Lyceum Ave.)*	
Paul Kalka	Wissahickon Creek (west bank - Wises Mill Rd. to Hermit Ln.)	
David Belford, Jeff Belford	Wissahickon Creek (west bank - Bell's Mill Rd. to Cathedral Rd.)	
Edie Parnum, Joe Hudson, Donna Wilhelm	Wissahickon Creek (west bank - Bell's Mill Rd. to Northwestern Ave.)	
Kim Wood	Wissahickon Creek (west bank - Wissahickon Environmental Center)*	
Jim Best, Rich Conroy, Andy Fayer, Marlene Morano	Morris Arboretum, Wissahickon Creek (Forbidden Dr. - Valley Green to Wises Mill Rd.)	
Al Bilheimer, Nancy Bilheimer	Wissahickon Creek (east bank – Springfield Ave. to Chestnut Hill Ave.)	
Cliff Hence, Nancy Hence	Cresheim Creek (Stenton Ave. to Wissahickon Creek)	
Sarah Besadny, Jim Meiers	Wissahickon Creek (east bank – Carpenter's Woods, Livezy Ln., Scotforth Rd., Monastery Stables)	
Stephen Page, Linda Page	Mount Airy (600 block of west Johnson St.), Wissahickon Creek (east bank – Walnut Ln. and west Johnson St.)	
Debra Delessandro, Carole Brown	Wissahickon Creek (Walnut Ln. and Henry Ave. to Lincoln Dr. and Wissahickon Ave.)	
William Reaume	Awbury Arboretum	

CONDITIONS

Temperature: low 43°F at 8:53 pm, high 53°F at 2:33 pm.

Sky: Completely cloudy from midnight through late morning. Clouds also accompanied by (sometimes dense) fog until 7:00 am (just before sunrise) in coastal plain but fog persisted through afternoon in some low-lying sections of the piedmont. Gradual clearing began in most areas around 11:00 am. Partly sunny (many clouds but sun and large patches of cloudless sky visible) from 1:00 pm through sunset. Mostly cloudy after sunset.

Precipitation: Occasional drizzle during the predawn hours.

Ground: No Snow or ice.

Water: All water open.

Wind: Little to no wind (officially 0-6 mph) throughout the 24-hour period.

2013 CENSUS SUMMARY

The 27th annual Philadelphia Mid-Winter Bird Census [PMWBC] was held on Saturday January 12, 2013, a pleasant day that featured above average temperatures and virtually no wind - but one that was also dominated by severely overcast skies except for a few hours during the afternoon when skies became partly sunny. This year 78 participants in 33 parties, and 4 yard/feeder observers counted 111 species – the largest species total recorded to date. And this year's total of 31,851 individuals was the highest since 2002 and the 6th highest total for individuals overall. To help put this year's results in perspective - of the 70+ Christmas Bird Counts held in Pennsylvania this winter only three recorded 100 or more species, and only the Southern Lancaster Count (which recorded 115 species on December 16) recorded more species than the PMWBC. This result helps demonstrate that Philadelphia has one of the most diverse winter bird populations of any county within the state, a fact that is not well known, even among some birders.

Each year the results from the census are partly determined by the weather. This winter the weather preceding the census was milder than average, at least during December (5.6 degrees above average). A brief freeze did occur (Jan 2-3) but temperatures quickly rebounded and there was also virtually no snowfall throughout the period. When such mild conditions occur (absence of prolonged freezes or heavy snowfalls) a larger number of species and individuals are usually able to survive the winter than during colder years. All previous censuses on which 100 or more species were recorded (109 in 1998, 108 in 2000, and 107 in 2012) also followed Decembers with above average temperatures (2.7 degrees above average in Dec 1997, 4.1 degrees above average in Dec 1999, 5.8 degrees above average in Dec 2011). But weather conditions on the day of the census can also affect the results. For example, this year the number of vultures reported was extremely low and not representative of their current winter abundance. Since vultures are less likely to fly when skies are overcast the severely overcast conditions this year may explain why so few vultures were observed overall.

Of the 111 species recorded this year four were species new to the census – Cave Swallow, Green Heron, Red-throated Loon and Vesper Sparrow. These new species raise the cumulative (1987-2013) species total for the census to 155.

The rarest of the new species - the Cave Swallow - was observed at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant [NEWPCP] (Windfelder team) - the location where this species has been observed most frequently in Philadelphia since its occurrence here was first confirmed in 2008. The three individuals recorded this year had been present at the plant since November, where they'd been associating with wintering Northern Rough-winged Swallows. This marks the first time however, that the species has been recorded in Philadelphia after mid-December. These birds may not have survived the winter though, as none have been observed at the plant since February 2. This winter's January and February records may also represent the latest dates on which the species has ever been recorded during the winter north of Texas.

On December 3rd Ken Januski observed a Green Heron along the Manyunk Canal. Although the heron had only been observed on and off after that date it was found again along the canal by Ken and Jerene Schroeder on census day. This is only the second time that the species has been recorded in Philadelphia during January. The first January record occurred in 2012 when an individual remained at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge [JHNWR] until January 2.

The Red-throated Loon was observed on the upper Delaware River by Tom Bailey from the shoreline of the Delaware in Burlington County, New Jersey. Red-throated Loons are always challenging to find in Philadelphia and this record represents not only a first for the census, but also one of only a handful of times that the species has been recorded in Philadelphia during January.

The Vesper Sparrow – another challenging species to find in Philadelphia – was discovered at the Philadelphia Naval Business Center [PNBC] by George Armistead, providing what is probably the first winter record of this species for Philadelphia in many decades.

In addition to the Vesper Sparrow, George Armistead also spotted an unusual gull along the Delaware River near Reed Street that initially reminded him of a Mediterranean Gull. But upon further study he concluded that it was more likely a hybrid Ring-billed x Black-headed Gull. Photos of the gull, along with photos of the Cave Swallows and Green Heron have been included at the end of this report.

Another rare species recorded this year was the Northern Shrike (2nd record). This bird, which has been wintering at the JHNWR and is presumably the same individual that wintered at the refuge last year, was observed by Doris McGovern's team. Last winter's Northern Shrike occurrence represented the first Philadelphia record since 1966.

In addition to the shrike a number of other northern 'irruptive' species have been present in our region this winter making this one of the finest winters for irruptive species in many many years. Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches (record high count this year), and Purple Finches (record high count this year) - which have all tended to occur more often than not in recent years, were all recorded. But this year, in addition to the above species Pine Siskins (11th record and 1st since 2009), White-winged Crossbills (3rd record and 1st since 2002) and Common Redpolls (5th record and 1st since 2004), which all tend to occur infrequently, were also recorded. Overall, a larger number of northern irruptive species were recorded this year than during any previous census.

Other highlights included a Cackling Goose (4th record) on the Delaware River just north of Fort Mifflin (Walters party), a Common Loon (11th record) on the Delaware River at Pleasant Hill Park (Windfelder party), a Great Egret (8th record and first since 2007) at the Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant (Walters party), a Northern Saw-whet Owl (6th record and 1st since 2011) at the JHNWR that has been present throughout the winter (McGovern party), a Horned Lark (9th record and 1st since 2011) at Benjamin Rush State Park (Sharp party), 94 American Pipits (5th record and record high count, also recorded 2012) at the Northeast Philadelphia Airport [NPA] (90 - Ahern party, Russell party) and F. D. Roosevelt Park (4 - Horwitz party), 3 Orange-crowned Warblers (6th record, record high count ties 3 recorded in 2012) at Pennypack on the Delaware [POD] (1 - Windfelder party) and the PNBC (2 - Horwitz party), and a singing Common Yellowthroat (10th record, also recorded 2012) in the Sandy Run section of the Pennypack Creek (Schultz).

The following species were found in Philadelphia shortly before or after the census, but not recorded during the census.

Long-tailed Duck 2 – Delaware River at POD, January 16 – William Keim

Common Goldeneye 11 – Delaware River at POD, January 19 – George Armistead

Horned Grebe – JHNWR, January 20 – Anna Mindel, Andy Keister

American Woodcock (injured) – 19th and Cherry Streets, January 7 – reported by Rich Horwitz

Barred Owl – Apalogen Rd., early January – John Des Jardins

Short-eared Owl – PNBC, January 14 – Frank Windfelder

Marsh Wren – JHNWR, January 21 – Alan Kneidel

For the 9th consecutive winter Northern Rough-winged Swallows were found at the NEWPCP and the 120 individuals counted this year (one additional bird was also seen along the Delaware River near Reed St.) is one of the higher totals recorded for this species. Of interest is whether any of these birds actually survive the entire winter here in Philadelphia. While 100 or more birds usually attempt to overwinter here, by March there are usually no more than a few dozen. This year only 20 Rough-wings were counted at the plant on March 16 and none of the Cave Swallows that had joined them in November were still observed. So it would appear that most of the swallows that attempt to overwinter here may not actually survive the entire winter.

This year new record high counts were established for an amazing 24 species – almost a quarter of all species recorded. These include Canada Goose 8272, American Wigeon 20, Wild Turkey 21, Double-crested Cormorant 116, Bald Eagle 7, Cooper's Hawk 19, Red-shouldered Hawk 5 (also 5 in 2012), Downy Woodpecker 251, Hairy Woodpecker 73, Pileated Woodpecker 9, Merlin 6, Peregrine Falcon 6, Red-breasted Nuthatch 23, White-breasted Nuthatch 188, Winter Wren 50, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 27, American Pipit 94, Orange-crowned Warbler 3 (also 3 in 2012), Chipping Sparrow 19, Savannah Sparrow 13, Fox Sparrow 24, Swamp Sparrow 56, Northern Cardinal 528, and Purple Finch 13. While these numbers are encouraging, as a group they probably reflect this year's warmer weather conditions more than they reflect population increases. Certain species however, have consistently been recorded in larger numbers over the last decade compared to the previous decade suggesting that they have increased significantly in number as local wintering species. These include Mute Swan, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Hooded Merganser, Wild Turkey, Double-crested Cormorant, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow and Rusty Blackbird.

Conversely, species that have been consistently recorded in smaller numbers over the last decade compared to the previous decade include Canvasback, Ring-necked Pheasant (annual 1987-2002, 2004-2006, unrecorded since), Black-crowned Night Heron (annual 1987-1992, 1997-2002, unrecorded since), Northern Harrier, Killdeer, American Woodcock, Great Horned Owl, American Kestrel, American Crow, Fish Crow, Cedar Waxwing (annual 1987-2004, only recorded in even years since), Snow Bunting (recorded 50% of the time 1987-2001, unrecorded since), American Tree Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, Pine Siskin (recorded over 50% of the time 1987-2002, only recorded twice since).

The following species were only reported by a single party this year; Cackling Goose, Great Egret, Killdeer (Walters party); Wild Turkey, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Northern Shrike, Common Grackle (McGovern party); Red-throated Loon (Bailey); Common Loon, Black Vulture (Windfelder party); Green Heron (Januski party); Ring-billed x Black-headed Gull, Vesper Sparrow (Horwitz party); Horned Lark (Sharp party); Common Yellowthroat (Schultz); and White-winged Crossbill (Best party). Species observed by more than one party but only at a single location include - Cave Swallow (NEWPCP), American Pipit (NPA), and Palm Warbler (NEWPCP).

As always I would like to thank everyone who participated in this year's census for your hard work and dedication. And for the first time your photos from the census are being included in this report. Please enjoy them. I hope you will be able to join us again next year when the census has been scheduled for Saturday January 11, 2014.

Keith Russell - Census Coordinator
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*Ring-billed x Black-headed Gull (foreground) along the Delaware River near Reed St.
Photo by George Armistead*



*Cave Swallows (3 birds on lower right) at the Northeast Water Pollution
Control Plant. Photo (taken January 5) by George Armistead*



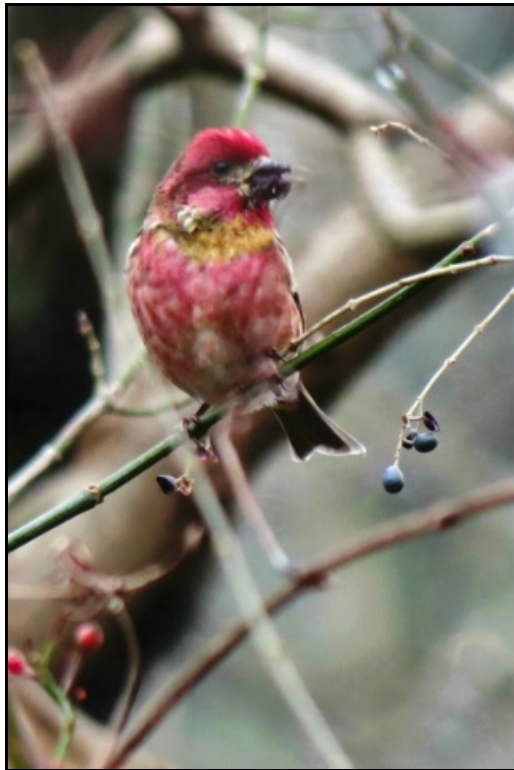
*Green Heron along the Manayunk Canal.
Photo by Ken Januskie*



*Jean Schock and Sean Towey owling in the Wissahickon.
Photo by Matthew Grady*



Common Redpolls at the Philadelphia Naval Business Center. Photo by George Armistead



Purple Finch in the Pennypack eating privet? berries. Photo by Cindy Fertgusen



*Great Horned Owl at Friends Hospital.
Photo by Cindy Ahern*



Mallards and American Black Duck along the Tacony Creek. Photo by Cindy Ahern



*Eastern Screech-Owl in the lower Wissahickon.
Photo by Wendy Moody*



*Common Redpolls in Roxborough
Photo by Scott McConnell (taken with a cell phone!).*



*American Pipits at the Northeast Philadelphia Airport.
Photo by Cindy Ahern*



*Orange-crowned Warbler at the
Philadelphia Naval Business Center.
Photo by George Armistead*



American Robin (partially albino) in East Falls. Photo by Wendy Moody



*Red-tailed Hawk at Burholm Park.
Photo by Cindy Ahern*



*Sharp-shinned Hawk at Friends Hospital.
Photo by Cindy Ahern*



*Phil Hinline, Winston Moody and Wendy Moody in East Falls.
Photo by Frankie Jueds*



*Merlin at Oakland Cemetery.
Photo by Cindy Ahern*