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2013 Christmas Bird Counts

by Don Paseka

Fifteen counts were held during the 2013-2014 season. Following a cold snap in early December, the weather was seasonable and mostly dry, but with very limited open water in most circles. An example of the consequences of this can be seen in the Branched Oak-Seward count tally. Although this count has a history of being very productive for water-related birds in most years, only 3 species were found this year: Canada Goose (16), Mallard (2) and Belted Kingfisher (1). The total species count in all the counts was 135, four less than the past two years and historically ranking sixth highest, while the total of 282,693 individuals ranks as the eighth highest. In all, 12 species tied or set new high counts. While 14 species were found in every circle, 25 were seen in only one circle, and of those 12 were single birds.

Most of the large Anseriformes had an excellent year. The 701 Ross's Geese, all at Lake McConaughy, smashed the previous high count of 33 from 1998. The 97,928 Canada Geese were also a new high count total for the state, as were the 7,689 Cackling Geese, which topped their previous high of 6946 set in 2010. For the fifth straight year Trumpeter Swans set a new high count, with 155 seen this year. After they first appeared as a count week bird in 1991, Trumpeters were seen twice more in the 1990s and have been counted every year since 2000. The single Tundra Swan found at North Platte was only the fourth Christmas Count sighting in the past 50 years, and the first since 1999, when 11 were found on the Omaha count.

Several diurnal raptors species had a good year. The 184 Rough-legged Hawks were a new high count, besting the total of 109 found in 2010. The 15 Golden Eagles beat the old high of 11 set in 1971. Bald Eagles were found in every circle, and the total of 368 is only slightly less than last year's high count (375) for that species, and the total of 28 Cooper's Hawks is second only to the 36 birds found in 2007.

Perhaps as a result of the numerous trees killed by the 2011 Missouri River flooding, woodpecker numbers continue on the upswing. With counts of 484 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 150 Hairy Woodpeckers, and 9 Pileated Woodpeckers, those three species bested high counts set only last year (459, 131 and 7, respectively). This year's 208 Red-headed Woodpeckers were second only to the 232 found in 1971, and the 622 Downy Woodpeckers also rank as the second highest count behind the 657 found in 2011.

Although Black-billed Magpies have been found every year, this year's count of 32 is the second lowest. The lowest count was in 1967 when only 16 birds were found; highest was 303 in 2001.

In the odds and ends department, 84 Pygmy Nuthatches, which were largely absent in the 1980s and 1990s, were found in three circles this season and have appeared every year since 2002; high count is 131 in 2005. This year's 3 Northern Mockingbirds tied for high count with those found in 1965, 2008 and 2010. The 4 American Pipits at Lake McConaughy were the first recorded on a Nebraska count since 1972 when 128 were found. The sighting of 36 Bohemian Waxwings at Harrison was only the sixth time this species has been found on any CBC in the state since 1980.

Several of the sparrows and finches had a good year. The 12 Lincoln's Sparrows found in four circles beat the old high count of 7 from 1998. The 59 White-throated Sparrows beat last year's high count of 51 for that species. The sighting of 3 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches in the Scottsbluff circle was only the fifth time that this species has been counted: 10 were found in 2010 along with singles in 1978, 1989, and 2008. House Finches set a new high count of 1803, bettering the 1250 found in 2005. This was only the seventh year in which Cassin's Finches (5 at Scottsbluff) were found; high count is 14 in 2002.

It should be noted when comparing this year's high and low counts to highs and lows from past years, that counts are influenced by a number of factors. As mentioned above, weather in the weeks preceding the count period and on the day of a count influence numbers of individuals and species. The number of counts held is also a factor. This year there were 15 counts, and count numbers in the teens have been the norm since 2001. Prior to that, there were often fewer counts run. In 1990, for example, there were only 6 counts held. Fewer counts generally mean fewer observers and, more importantly, fewer observer hours. Observer hours and party hours data from past counts may be found on the National Audubon website (<http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>).

The sizes of count areas, which were not always the standard 15-mile diameter circles that we use today, have also changed. For example, the state had been divided, in the 1950s, into 5 areas for the purpose of reporting nesting records. In 1963, the Christmas Bird Count results were reported from those areas. The Panhandle counties comprised Area 1, but only one count (Dawes Co., 4 observers, 21 species) was done in that area. In contrast, 7 counts (61 species total) were done in Area 5E, composed of the 15 most southeastern counties. (*The Nebraska Bird Review* Vol. 32 No. 2, pages 33-36).

Different counts also mean different habitats. Prior to 1991, the only gulls routinely found on Nebraska CBCs were Ring-billed and Herring, but the inclusion of Lake McConaughy in a count circle changed that. In 2003, 11 gull species were found at Lake McConaughy (*The Nebraska Bird Review* Vol. 72 No. 1, pages 24-35) and other water-dependent species now routinely appear on the state CBC tally. On the down side, urban count circles such as Omaha and Lincoln are more populated, paved and built-upon than they were in the past, reducing the bird-friendly habitat and skewing the numbers towards Rock Pigeons and European Starlings.

2013 CBC Site Data

	Date	Species	Individuals	Observers	Total Party Hours ^d	Low Temp.	High Temp.	Sky	Precipitation
Ames	17 Dec	58	15,449	11	31	25	45	clear	none
Beaver Valley	26 Dec	32	3,037	5	9	23	41	cloudy	none
Branched Oak-Seward	15 Dec	58	13,412	38	59	14	34	clear/pt. cloudy	none
Calamus-Loup	19 Dec	55	13,820	7	23	17	29	cloudy	light snow
Crawford	21 Dec	33	1,780	8	N/A	14	24	N/A	N/A
DeSoto-Boyer	15 Dec	72	33,199	26	79	17	28	cloudy	none
Grand Island	14 Dec	46	7,470	22	31	13	33	cloudy/pt. cloudy	none
Harrison	22 Dec	37	1,382	6	N/A	18	26	cloudy	snow
Lake McConaughy	28 Dec	101	66,918	33	64	15	55	clear/pt cloudy	none
Lincoln	14 Dec	64	19,424	40	78	10	25	cloudy	none
Norfolk	14 Dec	58	11,593	14	32	12	23	pt. clear/ pt.cloudy	none
North Platte	28 Dec	69	33,706	10	10	19	55	clear	none
Omaha	21 Dec	70	19,382	33	75	20	23	cloudy	none
Ponca S.P.	14 Dec	59	4,563	20	44	8	18	cloudy	none
Scottsbluff	14 Dec	67	37,558	15	27	31	43	pt cloudy	none

135 282,693^a 288^a 17^b 33^b

a- total (sum of column values)

b- average

c-number of people who participated in CBCs. Note: many observers participated in more than one CBC.

d-the sum of hours spent driving and walking during daylight, excluding feeder watching and owling

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Ames	Beaver Valley	BOL-Seward	Calamus-Loup	Crawford	DeSoto-Boyer	Grand Island	Harrison
Gr White-fronted Goose	2					2		
Snow Goose	1			3		18	1	
Ross's Goose								
Cackling Goose	32			101		1		
Canada Goose	6064		16	3673		5222	3992	4
Trumpeter Swan				60		14		
Tundra Swan								
Wood Duck	cw					4	15	
Gadwall								
American Wigeon								
Mallard	2132	2015	2	1740		20453	717	5
Northern Shoveler	cw					1	25	
Northern Pintail								
Green-winged Teal	3			4			12	
Canvasback								
Redhead								
Ring-necked Duck	4							
Greater Scaup								
Lesser Scaup	2					6		
Long-tailed Duck								
Bufflehead						5		
Common Goldeneye	5			82		26	16	
Barrow's Goldeneye								
Hooded Merganser	cw							
Common Merganser	26			407		16		
Red-breasted Merganser								
Ruddy Duck								
Duck sp.								
Northern Bobwhite	cw	11	20					
Ring-necked Pheasant		8	27	4	18	3		
Sharp-tailed Grouse					2			11
Greater Prairie-Chicken			2				22	

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Lake McConaughy	Lincoln	Norfolk	North Platte	Omaha	Ponca SP	Scottsbluff	TOTAL
Gr White-fronted Goose	24		1	20	21			70
Snow Goose	12620	1		6	7	150	1	12808
Ross's Goose	701							701
Cackling Goose	3700	32	32	3652	54		85	7689
Canada Goose	14600	11996	5532	7547	10688	168	28426	97928
Trumpeter Swan	53			2	26			155
Tundra Swan				1				1
Wood Duck							4	23
Gadwall	113	6		63	2		15	199
American Wigeon	27			23			50	100
Mallard	23700	1165	716	5736	515	320	5700	64916
Northern Shoveler	3	1		6			5	41
Northern Pintail	22		1	33	1			57
Green-winged Teal	104	8		99	50		4	284
Canvasback	36			1				37
Redhead	39		1	11			8	59
Ring-necked Duck	147			87			1	239
Greater Scaup	20		2					22
Lesser Scaup	56		3				9	76
Long-tailed Duck	2							2
Bufflehead	180			1				186
Common Goldeneye	261	35	9	45	50	4	98	631
Barrow's Goldeneye							1	1
Hooded Merganser	3			2	1			6
Common Merganser	4300			11	76	8	1	4845
Red-breasted Merganser	11							11
Ruddy Duck	1						1	2
Duck sp.					175			175
Northern Bobwhite	2	4	25					62
Ring-necked Pheasant	4		4	1	2	7	13	91
Sharp-tailed Grouse								13
Greater Prairie-Chicken	11					9		44

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Lake McConaughy	Lincoln	Norfolk	North Platte	Omaha	Ponca SP	Scottsbluff	TOTAL
Wild Turkey	76	36	38	63	105	253	25	1736
Common Loon	1							1
Pied-billed Grebe	1	1						2
Horned Grebe	cw							
Red-necked Grebe	1							1
Western Grebe	34							34
Clark's Grebe	1							1
Great Blue Heron	5	11		2			3	30
Bald Eagle	112	9	3	6	57	15	24	368
adult								14
immature								15
unspecified age	112	9	3	6	57	15	24	339
Northern Harrier	13	4	4	5	3	7	6	67
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	5		1	3	1	2	21
Cooper's Hawk	2	3	2	1	4		2	28
Accipiter sp.		2						2
Red-tailed Hawk	32	36	38	33	94	20	10	501
Ferruginous Hawk				1			2	3
Rough-legged Hawk	18	1	10	27	2	58	12	184
Buteo sp.		6					1	9
Golden Eagle	1						2	15
Virginia Rail	2							2
American Coot	1504	81	1				55	1642
Killdeer	13	2		2			2	19
Wilson's Snipe	6		1	15				23
Franklin's Gull								1
Mew Gull	cw							
Ring-billed Gull	584			3				608
California Gull	4							4
Herring Gull	187					2		189
Thayer's Gull	2							2
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1							1

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Ames	Beaver Valley	BOL-Seward	Calamus-Loup	Crawford	DeSoto-Boyer	Grand Island	Harrison
Glaucous Gull								
Rock Pigeon	123	47	95	12	54	229	492	24
Eurasian Collared-Dove	54	10	145	5	42	73	158	10
Mourning Dove	18		14			5	1	
Eastern Screech-Owl	2			1		3	5	3
Great Horned Owl	5	2	13	5		5		2
Snowy Owl								
Barred Owl	3		2			3		
Long-eared Owl			1					
Short-eared Owl	1							
Belted Kingfisher	8		1	2			3	
Red-headed Woodpecker		2	7			38		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	32	5	69	3		119	9	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1		3			4		
Downy Woodpecker	33	12	70	10	4	144	29	1
Hairy Woodpecker	6		13	8	2	29	3	4
Northern Flicker	25	6	74	8	9	71	9	1
Red-shafted					2			
Yellow-shafted			58			71		
Red-shafted x Yellow-shafted					1			
Unspecified	25	6	16	8	6		9	1
Pileated Woodpecker						5		
American Kestrel		1	2		3	11	7	
Merlin				1		1		2
Prairie Falcon		1						
Falcon sp.			1					1
Say's Phoebe								
Loggerhead Shrike		1						
Northern Shrike	3		8	4		6		
Pinyon Jay					4			1
Blue Jay	37	3	169	7	12	182	41	4
Black-billed Magpie					5			1

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Lake McConaughy	Lincoln	Norfolk	North Platte	Omaha	Ponca SP	Scottsbluff	TOTAL
American Crow	1	51	42	51	123	67	3	5864
Horned Lark	183	8	56	45	2	454	78	2035
Black-capped Chickadee	16	101	25	5	271	56	19	941
Tufted Titmouse		1			41			63
Red-breasted Nuthatch	5	20	1	3	1		4	46
White-breasted Nuthatch	8	87	32	8	175	51		678
Pygmy Nuthatch							4	48
Brown Creeper	3	14	1	7	9	1	1	47
Winter Wren						1		2
Marsh Wren	1			2			2	5
Carolina Wren		1	1		20			31
Golden-crowned Kinglet	3	10	3	5	1			31
Eastern Bluebird	3	88		5	62	23		495
Townsend's Solitaire	112			8			19	183
Hermit Thrush								3
American Robin	363	232	158	132	100	265	183	4572
Northern Mockingbird	2				1			3
Brown Thrasher		1						1
European Starling	918	1557	2733	12510	2915	381	580	31014
American Pipit	4							4
Bohemian Waxwing								36
Cedar Waxwing	11	27	1		189	72		924
Lapland Longspur	55				100	52		275
Snow Bunting	cw					1	22	34
Yellow-rumped Warbler	17							39
Spotted Towhee		1			1			8
Eastern Towhee					1			3
American Tree Sparrow	111	354	185	81	310	357	56	3416
Fox Sparrow						1		15
Song Sparrow	26	4	1	4	23		9	119
Lincoln's Sparrow					1			12
Swamp Sparrow					1			1

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Ames	Beaver Valley	BOI-Seward	Calamus-Loup	Crawford	DeSoto-Boyer	Grand Island	Harrison
White-throated Sparrow	cw		6			21		
Harris's Sparrow	10		65	23		83	11	
White-crowned Sparrow			3	2		37		
Sparrow sp.						13	105	
Dark-eyed Junco	199		735	256	98	1272	28	51
Slate-colored			387		2			
Oregon			2		3	1		
Pink-sided								
White-winged					3			
unspecified subspecies	199		346	256	90	1271	28	51
Northern Cardinal	33	3	191	12		176	35	
Red-winged Blackbird	11	197	5731	1096	1	152	20	
Western Meadowlark							24	
Meadowlark sp.	16		68			120		
Yellow-headed Blackbird				3				
Rusty Blackbird			33					
Brewer's Blackbird								
Common Grackle	1	7				1	7	
Great-tailed Grackle							6	
Brown-headed Cowbird				1				
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch								
Purple Finch			2			10		
Cassin's Finch								
House Finch	21		159	57	80	34	70	42
Red Crossbill								42
Common Redpoll								
Pine Siskin	1			1	2	1		
American Goldfinch	90	23	565	209	80	170	91	30
House Sparrow	194	35	482	40	199	298	403	25
TOTAL SPECIES	58	32	58	55	33	72	46	37
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	15,449	3,037	13,412	13,820	1,780	33,199	7,470	1,382

2013 Christmas Bird Count

	Lake McConaughy	Lincoln	Norfolk	North Platte	Omaha	Ponca SP	Scottsbluff	TOTAL
White-throated Sparrow		15			15	2		59
Harris's Sparrow	1	20	11	1	93	50		368
White-crowned Sparrow	21	3	1	1	14	17	29	128
Sparrow sp.								118
Dark-eyed Junco	316	511	369	157	656	343	135	5126
Slate-colored	205	215		153			80	1042
Oregon	16	2		3			12	39
Pink-sided	23			1			5	29
White-winged	6						1	10
unspecified subspecies	66	294	369		656	343	37	4006
Northern Cardinal	19	132	40	12	185	23	1	862
Red-winged Blackbird	163	2	26	1878	322	440	26	10065
Western Meadowlark	1	32	24	16		14		111
Meadowlark sp.	18	31			78		4	335
Yellow-headed Blackbird								3
Rusty Blackbird	1		1			62		97
Brewer's Blackbird	1							1
Common Grackle			2			2		20
Great-tailed Grackle				150				156
Brown-headed Cowbird	5		6					12
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch							3	3
Purple Finch	4				13	1		30
Cassin's Finch							5	5
House Finch	440	375	48	110	108	101	158	1803
Red Crossbill							5	47
Common Redpoll		6				1		7
Pine Siskin	29					5	16	55
American Goldfinch	190	211	49	97	340	286	231	2662
House Sparrow	74	494	678	175	328	176	135	3736
TOTAL SPECIES	101	64	58	69	70	59	67	135
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	66,918	19,424	11,593	33,706	19,382	4,563	37,558	282,693

2013 CBC Participants

Ames Elliott Bedows, Larry Einemann, Jan Johnson, Richard Johnson, Clem Klaphake, Don Paseka (compiler), Janis Paseka, Gary Roberts, Ken Shuster, Ruth Stearns, Jerry Toll (11)

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Calamus-Loup Kathi Gerten, Robert Gerten, Robin Harding, David Heidt (compiler), John Murphy, Lanny Randolph, Duane Wolff (7)

Crawford Ben Brogie, Mark Brogie, Kathy DeLara, Wayne Mollhoff, Dave Stage, Nick Varvel, Bruce Walgren (compiler), Donna Walgren (8)

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Harrison Ben Brogie, Mark Brogie, Wayne Mollhoff, Dave Stage, Bruce Walgren (compiler), Donna Walgren (6)

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Scottsbluff Elliott Bedows, Kathy DeLara, Phyllis Drawbaugh, Ann Duey, Paul Dunbar, Amy Fitz, Claylene Fitz, Lonnie Frimann, Charlotte Herrell, Alice Kenitz (compiler), Brad McKinney, Connie McKinney, Ed Newbury, Ruben Siegfried, Gwen Smith (15)