

2023 Seattle Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, December 17

Michele Black, Great Backyard Bird Count

2023 Christmas Bird Count Report

Species tallied (count day + count week)	127 species
Count Day	124 species
Count Week	3 additional species
Individual Birds:	50,650 [48,209 in-field, 2441 at home]
Observers:	331 [250 in field + 81 at home]

Overview

The 2023 Seattle CBC was held on December 17, 2023. The weather was clear and sunny, continuing the trend of our warm December. Many observers reported a fun and birdy day of observing birds around the count circle. Our species total of 127 was right about at the 10-year average, coming in lower than six of the last ten years and higher than four of them. Our overall total, 50,560, was a little higher than usual, with our third highest number of birds recorded of the past decade of counts. With 331 observers including 81 at feeders and 250 in the field, we beat last year's record for the highest number of participants joining in in our 100+ years of Seattle CBCs.

Highlights

This year, we added two new species to our count: The long-staying Black-and-white Warbler at Green Lake seen on count day by the Green Lake team, and a Northern Waterthrush inside the count circle in north Seattle during count week. Other highlights included Ancient Murrelet [6], Black Oystercatcher [2], American Bittern [1], Swamp Sparrow [1] and a swallow sp. [1].

Notable misses

Three species were only picked up as count week birds: Tundra Swan, Great Egret and Northern Waterthrush. Additional notable misses included: Snow Goose, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Marbled Murrelet, Herring Gull, Western Screech-Owl, Evening Grosbeak and Western Meadowlark.

Record high counts

For the modern period (1972-present), high counts were recorded for seven species. We set or tied record highs for: Ring-necked Duck [909], Black Oystercatcher [2], Hairy Woodpecker [11], Swamp Sparrow [1], White-throated Sparrow [12], Northern Waterthrush [count week] and Black-and-white Warbler [1].

Trends

It's always tough to be selective with the results to report, but here's how a few groups fared. [numbers in brackets indicate the total number seen and the percentage as a ratio of the 10-year average on the count (excluding 2020). Species with a record-high count are noted with an *]. For example, a note of "[100, 50%]" would indicate that 100 individuals were seen, and that this is just 50% of the norm for the past 10 years (the average # seen from 2012-2022 has been 200).

Ducks and Geese

Goose numbers were a bit lower than usual, while swan numbers were up a bit. A few examples: Greater White-fronted Goose [4 found, 50% of the 10-year average], Brant [73, 74%], Cackling Goose [107, 54%], Canada Goose [1187, 109%], and Trumpeter Swans [18, 113%].

Dabbling **ducks**, in general came in below their 10-year average once again this year including Wood Duck [23, 38%], Northern Shoveler [68, 39%], Eurasian Wigeon [6, 61%], and American Wigeon [1815, 74%]. One exception to this trend were the high numbers recorded for Mallard [1818, 135%]. The story for diving ducks was a bit more mixed. A few came in higher than average, including Canvasback [200, 135%], Ring-necked Duck [909*, 173%], White-winged Scoter [8, 186%] and Common Merganser [461, 122%]. Below average numbers were recorded for species including Redhead [2, 27%], Greater Scaup [22, 11%], Lesser Scaup [57, 21%], Surf Scoter [490, 67%], Barrow's Goldeneye [103, 42%], and Ruddy Duck [2, 21%].

Grebes, Pigeons, Hummingbirds, and Coots

Western Grebes [654, 131%] were found in their highest number in a decade, while Pied-billed [137, 65%] and Red-necked Grebes [68, 68%] were low this year. We didn't find any Eurasian Collared-Doves or Mourning Doves this year. Rock Pigeon [1274, 68%], and Band-tailed Pigeon [12, 24%] were low as well. Anna's Hummingbird [705, 138%] were out in force in the good weather. American Coot [10,686, 173%] came in high, with over 20% of our total number of birds seen on the count.

Shorebirds, Alcids, Gulls, and Loons

Repeating last year's treat, two Black Oystercatchers were present in the Kitsap corner of the circle, only the 3rd record for our CBC. Black Turnstone [75, 135%] numbers were high, while Surfbird [25, 40%] numbers were low. Sanderling [5, 6%] largely eluded us, and only a single Wilson's Snipe [1, 7%] appeared for the count. Common Murre [49, 117%] and Pigeon Guillemot [48, 95%] showed up in normal numbers, while the six Ancient Murrelets [6, 450%] represented the second highest total in over 30 years. Gulls largely came in at expected levels including Short-billed Gull [1104, 110%], Ring-billed Gull [181, 104%] and California Gull [98, 263%]. Loons were found in quite low numbers across the board, with only 18 total when many years recently we've found over 50: Red-throated Loon [8, 34%], Pacific Loon [1, 6%], Common Loon [7, 77%].

Raptors and Owls

Raptor numbers were pretty close to what we normally find, but overall a little lower than average: Bald Eagle [96, 97%], Sharp-shinned Hawk [7, 97%], Coopers Hawk [28, 118%], Red-tailed Hawk [28,72%], Merlin [8, 74%], and Peregrine Falcon [6, 84%]. Owls were found in pretty decent numbers this year. Barn Owl [4, 125%] and Northern Saw-whet Owl [4, 160%] were a bit above average, and Great Horned [2, 94%] and Barred Owl [6, 63%] were a little below the norm.

Woodpeckers were present and found in solid numbers: Red-breasted Sapsucker [3, 33%] were a bit low, but others were higher, including Downy Woodpecker [96, 125%], Hairy Woodpecker [11*, 167%], Northern Flicker [366, 107%], and Pileated Woodpecker [18, 110%].

Corvid numbers are always a bit difficult to report with much confidence in their accuracy because of the potential for many (especially Crows and Ravens) to move from sector to sector during the day.

All told, we came up with estimates of numbers mostly a little above our average: Stellers Jay [211, 108%], California Scrub Jay [22, 161%], American Crow [5978, 95%], Common Raven [18, 195%].

Chickadees, Wrens, and Kinglets: Our totals for some of the 'little' species were pretty solid. Some came in a little below average, including Marsh Wren [7, 79%], Bewick's Wren [253, 91%], and Golden-crowned Kinglet [673, 72%]. Others did a little better than normal: Chestnut-backed Chickadee [535, 137%], Red-breasted Nuthatch [243, 149%], Brown Creeper [135, 139%] and Ruby-crowned Kinglet [441, 129%]. Small ones right at their average but nevertheless impressive to me in their sheer numbers included Black-capped Chickadee [1634, 97%], Bushtit [1011, 104%] and Pacific Wren [207, 106%].

Finches: After looking like it was beginning as a good 'finch winter' this year, by our CBC the local finch numbers had diminished into lower-than-normal totals: House Finch [797, 108%] were a little high, an exception to the trend. Otherwise though, finch were represented by: Purple Finch [2, 9%], Red Crossbill [2, 2%], Pine Siskin [909, 71%], American Goldfinch [400, 82%] and no Evening Grosbeak or Common Redpolls.

Sparrows: It was largely a good count for sparrows including a nice record of Swamp Sparrow, only the 2nd time found on our CBC. Two Savannah Sparrows on count day were another nice sparrow surprise – something we've only found five times in the last 20 years on our CBC. White-throated Sparrow [12, 310%] also tied our record high count for that species. Others sparrow counts were largely closer to their normal numbers: Spotted Towhee [362, 107%], Fox Sparrow [75, 57%], Song Sparrow [875, 99%], White-crowned Sparrow [115, 148%], Golden-crowned Sparrow [285, 120%] and Dark-eyed Junco [1681, 93%].

Finally, **Warblers:** Our first CBC record for Black-and-white Warbler (from Green Lake), and of Northern Waterthrush (on the northern edge of the circle) were highlights of the count. In addition, we tallied three Orange-crowned Warblers [3, 55%], 376 Yellow-rumped Warblers [376, 147%], and twenty Townsend's Warblers [20, 127%].

At-Home Count

Count Day: 42 species

Individual Birds: 2441 birds

Observers: 81

Count Locations: 58



Once again this year, our at-home counters contributed about 5% of the total birds on the count and filled in many of the gaps in our coverage by watching backyards throughout the count circle. 81 observers found over 2400 birds over the course of the day.

The top eleven species found at feeders by number were: Bushtit (341), Dark-eyed Junco (318), American Crow (224), Black-capped Chickadee (207), European Starling (176), American Robin (136), House Finch (132), Anna's Hummingbird (97), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (78), American Goldfinch (67), and Song Sparrow (66). This list largely mirrors the same top species found last year in the at-home CBC.

Report prepared by Matt Bartels, Seattle CBC compiler

All Species Recorded During 2023 Seattle CBC

Greater White-fronted Goose (4)	Dunlin (38)	Hutton's Vireo (11)
Brant (73)	Wilson's Snipe (1)	Steller's Jay (211)
Cackling Goose (107)	Spotted Sandpiper (3)	California Scrub-Jay (22)
Canada Goose (1187)	Common Murre (49)	American Crow (5978)
Trumpeter Swan (18)	Pigeon Guillemot (48)	Common Raven (18)
Tundra Swan (CW)	Ancient Murrelet (6)	Black-capped Chickadee (1634)
Wood Duck (23)	Rhinoceros Auklet (65)	Chestnut-backed Chickadee (535)
Northern Shoveler (68)	Bonaparte's Gull (37)	[swallow sp. (1)]
Gadwall (566)	Short-billed Gull (1104)	Bushtit (1011)
Eurasian Wigeon (6)	Ring-billed Gull (181)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet (441)
American Wigeon (1815)	Western Gull (2)	Golden-crowned Kinglet (673)
Mallard (1818)	[Western x Glaucous-winged Gull (333)]	Cedar Waxwing (103)
Northern Pintail (39)	California Gull (98)	Red-breasted Nuthatch (243)
Green-winged Teal (91)	Iceland Gull (1)	Brown Creeper (135)
Canvasback (200)	Glaucous-winged Gull (1589)	Pacific Wren (207)
Redhead (2)	[gull sp. (511)]	Marsh Wren (7)
Ring-necked Duck (909)	Red-throated Loon (8)	Bewick's Wren (253)
Greater Scaup (22)	Pacific Loon (1)	European Starling (1360)
Lesser Scaup (57)	Common Loon (7)	Hermit Thrush (10)
[scaup sp. (1)]	[loon sp. (2)]	American Robin (1995)
[Aythya sp. (40)]	Brandt's Cormorant (135)	Varied Thrush (105)
Harlequin Duck (31)	Pelagic Cormorant (74)	House Sparrow (191)
Surf Scoter (490)	Double-crested Cormorant (797)	House Finch (797)
White-winged Scoter (8)	[cormorant sp. (2)]	Purple Finch (2)
Black Scoter (8)	American Bittern (1)	Red Crossbill (2)
Long-tailed Duck (3)	Great Blue Heron (37)	Pine Siskin (909)

Bufflehead (506)	Great Egret (CW)	American Goldfinch (400)
Common Goldeneye (371)	Sharp-shinned Hawk (7)	Fox Sparrow (75)
Barrow's Goldeneye (103)	Cooper's Hawk (28)	Dark-eyed Junco (1681)
[goldeneye sp. (8)]	Bald Eagle (96)	[Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored) (1)]
Hooded Merganser (103)	[Bald Eagle adult (74)]	[Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon) (811)]
Common Merganser (461)	[Bald Eagle immature (14)]	[Dark-eyed Junco (undifferentiated) (869)]
Red-breasted Merganser (362)	[Bald Eagle unspecified (8)]	White-crowned Sparrow (115)
Ruddy Duck (2)	Red-tailed Hawk (28)	Golden-crowned Sparrow (285)
[duck sp. (53)]	Barn Owl (4)	White-throated Sparrow (12)
Pied-billed Grebe (137)	Great Horned Owl (2)	Savannah Sparrow (2)
Horned Grebe (302)	Barred Owl (6)	Song Sparrow (875)
Red-necked Grebe (68)	Northern Saw-whet Owl (4)	Lincoln's Sparrow (7)
Eared Grebe (5)	Belted Kingfisher (43)	Swamp Sparrow (1)
Western Grebe (654)	Red-breasted Sapsucker (3)	Spotted Towhee (362)
Rock Pigeon (1274)	Downy Woodpecker (96)	Red-winged Blackbird (189)
Band-tailed Pigeon (12)	Hairy Woodpecker (11)	Northern Waterthrush (CW)
Anna's Hummingbird (705)	Northern Flicker (366)	Black-and-white Warbler (1)
Virginia Rail (3)	[N. Flicker (red) (144)]	Orange-crowned Warbler (3)
American Coot (10686)	[N. Flicker (yellow) (7)]	Yellow-rumped Warbler (376)
Black Oystercatcher (2)	[N. Flicker (red x yellow) (4)]	[Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) (49)]
Killdeer (22)	[N. Flicker (not differentiated) (211)]	[Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) (6)]
Black Turnstone (75)	Pileated Woodpecker (18)	[Yellow-rumped (unspecified) (321)]
Surfbird (25)	Merlin (8)	Townsend's Warbler (20)
Sanderling (5)	Peregrine Falcon (6)	[passerine, sp. (6)]