

December 22, 2011

Hi Birders,

36 Field Counters covered more than 490 miles by auto, on ATV's, on cross-country skis, and by foot, and in the process racked up more than 80 hours of field counting time in the 32nd Matanuska Valley Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on Sunday, December 18, 2011. An additional 58 plus hours of counting time was contributed by 17 Feeder Counters counting at their home feeders. Participants try to count every bird within the Matanuska Valley's 15 mile diameter Count Circle that is centered on the intersection of Four-Corners and Old Trunk Road on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway.

Primarily due to the extreme weather conditions this year, counts for almost all species were much lower than in previous Counts. Depending on which part of the Matanuska Valley CBC's Count Circle field counters were in, temperatures ranged from 30-40 degrees with steady winds from 10-25 MPH and gusts to 40 MPH, and with heavy wet snow and driving rain for much of the day.

There wasn't much open water in the Count Circle and waterfowl were concentrated at a small cove on the north side of Wasilla Lake, at the outflow coming from the Palmer Sewage Treatment facility into the Matanuska River, and at a few area creeks that had patches of open running water.

Only 24 species were seen on Count Day, well down from our Count's high of 35 species seen in 1999. In addition to species seen on Count Day, an additional six species were seen during Count Week (the three days on either side of Count Day). Two of those species are new to our Count, a Boreal Owl seen in the Butte and a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch that has been at a feeder in the Butte on and off for several days. Other species seen during Count Week were Spruce Grouse, Gray Jay, and Northern Shrike.

Despite the terrible weather, a new high count was established for Snow Bunting with 300 seen on the Palmer Hay Flats feeding on exposed seed heads. Although our count for Common Raven was quite a bit lower than usual, there were still a good number of ravens at the Palmer Landfill. However, Bald Eagles, usually present in high numbers at the Landfill, were just about absent, with only one present.

A single Townsend's Solitaire was seen during Count Week in a Mountain Ash tree in Rosemary Vigdahl's yard in the Butte (perhaps the same bird that was seen and photographed last year at the same location.

Our Black-capped Chickadee count of 594 was well down from our high of 966 seen in 2010, and seven of those 594 chickadees had deformed beaks. We strongly encourage our Feeder Counters who observe deformed beak birds at their feeders to report those birds to the Alaska Science Center (ASC) at http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak_deformity/. Since the late 1990's, ASC has been conducting a research project to attempt to determine the causes for the high percentage of beak deformities amongst Alaska's Black-capped Chickadees.

Thanks to all who braved the inclement weather and helped in this Count, and a special thanks to Peggy and KC White, who graciously hosted our Count wrap-up/potluck/tall story meeting at their home after our Count.

**Happy Holidays to everyone,
Bob Winckler, Compiler, Matanuska Valley CBC**

**MAT-SU BIRDERS
2011 MATANUSKA VALLEY
AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
FINAL TALLY**

Mallard	715	
Barrow's Goldeneye	2	
Common Merganser	2	
Spruce Grouse	CW	
Bald Eagle	Adult - 12	
	Imm - 3	
	Total	15
Northern Goshawk	2	
Gyrfalcon (gray-morph adult)	CW	- Looking for Mallards normally feeding at a home feeder location near Cottonwood Lake)
Rock Pigeon	45	
Boreal Owl	CW	- Seen in the Butte. New species!
Downy Woodpecker	11	
Hairy Woodpecker	17	
Northern Shrike	CW	
Gray Jay	CW	
Black-billed Magpie	119	
Common Raven	561	
Black-capped Chickadee	594	Including 7 w/deformed beaks
Boreal Chickadee	2	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	28	
Brown Creeper	1	
American Dipper	4	
Townsend's Solitaire	1	
American Robin	1	
European Starling	175	
Bohemian Waxwing	83	
Snow Bunting	300	
White-crowned Sparrow	5	
Dark-eyed Junco	12	
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	CW	- At a feeder in the Butte. New species!
Pine Grosbeak	267	
Common Redpoll	649	
SPECIES SEEN COUNT DAY	24	
BIRDS SEEN ON COUNT DAY	3611	