

22nd Annual
 PHILADELPHIA MID-WINTER BIRD CENSUS
 January 12, 2008

Canada Goose	4859	Northern Flicker	40
Mute Swan	3	Pileated Woodpecker	8
Wood Duck	2	Eastern Phoebe	1
Gadwall	14	Blue Jay	115
American Wigeon	8	American Crow	139
American Black Duck	327	Fish Crow	17
Mallard	1257	Crow sp.	1
Malard x Black Duck	2	Horned Lark	3
Northern Shoveler	278	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	82
Northern Pintail	611	Carolina Chickadee	439
Green-winged Teal	97	Black-capped Chickadee	8
Canvasback	72	Chickadee sp.	14
Ring-necked Duck	33	Tufted Titmouse	246
Lesser Scaup	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	93
Bufflehead	16	Red-breasted Nuthatch	6
Hooded Merganser	26	Brown Creeper	21
Common Merganser	158	Carolina Wren	189
Ruddy Duck	25	House Wren	1
Pied-billed Grebe	5	Winter Wren	22
Double-crested Cormorant	79	Golden-crowned Kinglet	30
Great Cormorant	21	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	26
Cormorant sp.	5	Eastern Bluebird	10
Great Blue Heron	33	American Robin	1094
Black Vulture	32	Gray Catbird	3
Turkey Vulture	75	Northern Mockingbird	99
Bald Eagle	2	European Starling	5893
Sharp-shinned Hawk	14	Cedar Waxwing	6
Cooper's Hawk	14	Yellow-rumped Warbler	3
Accipiter sp.	1	Eastern Towhee	9
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	American Tree Sparrow	13
Red-tailed Hawk	65	Field Sparrow	20
Rough-legged Hawk (light morph)	1	Savannah Sparrow	5
American Kestrel	5	Fox Sparrow	6
Merlin	2	Song Sparrow	478
Peregrine Falcon	1	Swamp Sparrow	20
American Coot	42	White-throated Sparrow	1182
Killdeer	10	White-crowned Sparrow	14
Ring-billed Gull	4395	Dark-eyed Junco	354
Herring Gull	326	Northern Cardinal	391
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Red-winged Blackbird	609
Great Black-backed Gull	159	Rusty Blackbird	36
Rock Pigeon	962	Common Grackle	101
Mourning Dove	603	Brown-headed Cowbird	25
Eastern Screech-Owl	38	Purple Finch	3
Great Horned Owl	11	House Finch	576
Belted Kingfisher	10	American Goldfinch	168
Red-bellied Woodpecker	104	House Sparrow	1008
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	7		
Downy Woodpecker	149	Total Species	92
Hairy Woodpecker	33	Total Individuals	28,625

OBSERVERS (46 observers, 26 parties) AREAS COVERED

Matt Sharp	Benjamin Rush State Park
Frank Windfelder	Delaware River (Poquessing Creek to Rhawn St), other locations in Northeast Philadelphia including the 9200 block of Convent Ave., Wooden Bridge Run and Father Judge HS along the Pennypack Creek
Peter Kurtz	Pennypack Creek (Verree Rd. to Krewstown Rd., Fox Chase Farm, Wooden Bridge Run)
Roland Williams	Pennypack Creek (Frankford Ave. to Rhawn St.)
Cindy Ahern	Northeast Philadelphia (Island Green Country Club, Jamison Ave., Burholme Park, Olney Plaza, Friends Hospital)
Richard Horwitz, Debbie Carr, Doug Wechsler	Delaware River (Philadelphia Naval Business Center to Frankford Creek) F. D. Roosevelt Park
Chris Walters, Art McMorris, Edwin Shafer	Fort Mifflin, Army Corps of Engineers compound and vicinity including northeastern edge of Philadelphia International Airport
Doris McGovern, Martin Dellwo	John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, Eastwick and vicinity
Brian Byrnes	John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge
John Miller	John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant, Fort Mifflin, Philadelphia International Airport and vicinity
Jan Gordon, Mark Darby, Gregg Gorton	Bartram's Garden, Woodland Cemetery, Cobbs Creek (various locations)
Erica Brendel, John Goschke	West Park (various locations including Philadelphia Zoo)
Steve Kerr	East Park (East Park Reservoir and Schuylkill River falls)
Winston and Wendy Moody	East Falls (various locations including Queen Ln. Reservoir and vicinity, the west bank of the Wissahickon Creek in vicinity of Timber Ln. and the Schuylkill River at the Falls Bridge)
Michael Darcy	Roxborough (various locations in western Roxborough including Manyunk)
Steve Dupont	Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education
Chuck Hetzel, Leigh Ashbrook, Gretel DeRuiter	Roxborough (Spring Ln. and vicinity), Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education
Stephen Lawrence, Gary Seagraves	Wissahickon Creek (Carpenter's Woods and adjacent areas to Livezy Ln.)
Cliff and Nancy HENCE	Cresheim Creek (from Stenton Ave. to the Wissahickon Creek), 100 block of East Roumfort Rd. in Mount Airy
Al and Nancy Bilheimer	Wissahickon Creek (east bank and adjacent areas from Springfield Ave. to Chestnut Hill Ave.)
Celeste Hardester	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Walnut Ln. to Wise's Mill Rd.)
David Belford	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Bell's Mill Rd. to Cathedral Rd.)
Barbara Elliot, Michael Rosengarten, Donna Wilhelm	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Bell's Mill Rd. to Northwestern Ave.)

OBSERVERS (concluded)

Jim Best, Rich Conroy, Andy Fayer,
Sarah Lochran

Bill Reaume

Keith Russell, Shawn Towey

AREAS COVERED

Morris Arboretum, Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Roxborough Ave. to Kitchen's Ln.)

Awbury Arboretum

Wissahickon Creek (Timber Ln., Rittenhouse Town, and various locations along the east bank from Upsal St. to Cornelia Pl.), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant and vicinity, Northeast Philadelphia Airport and vicinity.

CONDITIONS

Temperature: low 40°F at 7:37 am, high 49°F at 1:35 pm.

Sky: partly cloudy becoming mostly cloudy by late afternoon.

Ground: Clear.

Water: All waters open.

Wind: None during the morning with occasional light winds (10-12 mph) during the afternoon.

2008 CENSUS SUMMARY

The 22nd annual Philadelphia Mid-Winter Bird Census was held on Saturday January 12, 2008 - a partly sunny day with little to no wind and slightly above average temperatures. While conditions for birding were generally better than average on census day, the number of species (92) and individuals (28,625) recorded were only average and slightly above average, respectively. Unfortunately, no outstanding rarities were discovered this year, but several uncommon species were found and many species were recorded at or near record high numbers. The latter trend was particularly noted among waterfowl, cormorants, vultures, hawks, woodpeckers, and blackbirds. Also contributing to this year's species total were several northern invasive species that were missed last year and Philadelphia's unique wintering flock of Northern Rough-winged Swallows which is considered to constitute the largest population of wintering Rough-wings north of Mexico.

While this year's census produced no real rarities besides the Northern Rough-winged Swallow, several species that are uncommon and/or difficult to detect were recorded. These included a House Wren (4th record and 2nd year in a row) found at an island along the Schuylkill just north of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Kerr), a light morph Rough-legged Hawk (7th record and 1st since 2006) observed just north of the Philadelphia International Airport (Walters, McMorris, Shafer), 3 Horned Larks (7th record and 1st since 2000) observed at the Philadelphia International Airport (Walters, McMorris, Shafer), two Woods Ducks (10th record and 1st since 2003) found at the abandoned Roxborough Reservoir (Darcy), and a Phoebe (10th record and 3rd in a row) observed at the John Heinz NWR (Byrnes). And for the 4th year in a row Northern Rough-winged Swallows were found wintering at the city's Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant at Delaware Avenue and Wheatshaf Lane. According to American Birds magazine this flock constitutes the largest population of Rough-winged Swallows that has been found wintering anywhere north of Mexico in recent years. Eighty birds were counted at the plant this year while 2 individuals (assumed to have strayed temporarily from the main flock) were spotted at the John Heinz NWR (McGovern Dellwo). It is clear that the birds survive by eating a species of midge that emerges from the plant's waters throughout the winter. But it remains unclear why this appears to be the only sewage treatment plant in the northern U.S. where emerging midges and wintering swallows have been observed.

Although this year's species total was only average, the number of species that were recorded in much larger than normal numbers was up. Record high numbers were recorded for American Wigeon (8), Northern Pintail (611), Green-winged Teal (97), Hooded Merganser (26), Double-crested Cormorant (79), Black Vulture (32), Turkey Vulture (75), Cooper's Hawk (14), Red-shouldered Hawk (3), Pileated Woodpecker (8), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (26), and unusually high numbers were recorded for Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Eastern Screech-Owl, Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy woodpeckers (all resident woodpeckers), Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird and Common Grackle. The fact that temperatures were generally above average throughout December and early January with no prolonged freezes probably contributed to the increase in waterbird, and possibly raptor numbers. But reasons for these upward trends are obviously complex and must ultimately involve a variety of factors, as witnessed by the fact that some waterbird and raptor species, specifically Pied-billed Grebe, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, and American Kestrels, were recorded in very low numbers, while Redhead, Common Goldeneye and Northern Harrier were missed. The latter species, which had been recorded annually through 2004, has now been missed twice in the last 4 years and it appears to be in serious decline as a wintering species in Philadelphia.

Other expected species that were missed or recorded in unusually low numbers this year included Ring-necked Pheasant (annual through 2002 but missed in 3 of the last 6 years and possibly on the verge of local extinction), Hermit Thrush (only missed in 4 of 22 years and now missed for the 2nd year in a row) and Cedar Waxwing (annual and often recorded in double digits through 2004 but in very low numbers since). Additional 'common' species that have been consistently recorded in lower numbers over the last 5 years include Great Cormorant and Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed gulls. Species missed on census day that are known to have been present in Philadelphia during the 'census month' (2 weeks before and after the census) include Snow Goose, Redhead, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, American Bittern, Northern Harrier, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Barred Owl, Hermit Thrush, Palm Warbler and undoubtedly others.

On a positive note, this year's totals for Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, American Crow and Fish Crow were among the highest recorded since the populations of all 4 species crashed (crows) or sharply declined (owls) in Philadelphia in 2003, presumably because of West Nile Virus. In addition, several northern invasive species that were largely absent last January were recorded again this year including Red-breasted Nuthatch (6 this year, 0 last year), Black-capped Chickadee (8 this year, 1 last year) and Purple Finch (3 this year, 0 last year and only recorded twice since 2000).

Finally, I thought it would be interesting to examine which species are being reported by the most parties to get some sense about which species are actually the most common and widespread in Philadelphia during the winter. This year 3 species were reported by all 26 parties. These included Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee and Northern Cardinal. They were followed by American Crow, American Robin, and White-throated Sparrow on 25 lists; Mourning Dove, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Song Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco on 24 lists; Canada Goose, Red-tailed Hawk and American Goldfinch on 23 lists; Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Red-bellied Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling and House Sparrow on 22 lists; and Blue Jay on 21 lists. It is somewhat surprising that the seemingly ubiquitous European Starling and Ring-billed Gull were not reported by all 26 parties, but perhaps they were simply overlooked by some parties. Nevertheless, the above list does appear to represent the species that one would expect to have been reported by 80% of the parties, although those at the very top of the list may have been a surprise. Also interesting was the fact that the Turkey Vulture was reported by 19 parties (76%) this year. This species' widespread distribution pattern in Philadelphia this winter must certainly rival its distribution patterns in more rural areas during the winter.

Conversely, species that were only reported by a single party this year include Mute Swan (Horwitz, Carr, Wechsler), Wood Duck (Darcy), American Wigeon (McGovern, Dellwo), Canvasback (Kerr), Bald Eagle (Horwitz, Carr, Wechsler), Rough-legged Hawk (Walters, McMorris, Shafer), Peregrine Falcon (Horwitz, Carr, Wechsler), Killdeer (Windfelder), Lesser Black-backed Gull (Windfelder), Eastern Phoebe (Byrnes), Horned Lark (Walters, McMorris, Shafer), House Wren (Kerr), Eastern Bluebird (Hetzl. Ashbrook, DeRuiter) and Purple Finch (Russell, Towey).

My apologies to everyone for taking a much longer than expected time to compile the census report this year. Hopefully the report will be completed in a more timely manner next year. And as always I'd like to thank everyone who participated in this year's census. I hope you will all be able to join us again next year when the census will be held on Saturday, January 10.

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