

23rd Annual
 PHILADELPHIA MID-WINTER BIRD CENSUS
 January 10, 2009

Canada Goose	5823	Hairy Woodpecker	38
Mute Swan	10	Northern Flicker	40
Gadwall	145	Pileated Woodpecker	8
American Wigeon	12	Eastern Phoebe	3
American Black Duck	291	Blue Jay	95
Mallard	1260	American Crow	68
Northern Shoveler	125	Fish Crow	7
Northern Pintail	6	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	75
Green-winged Teal	15	Carolina Chickadee	338
Canvasback	76	Chickadee sp.	2
Ring-necked Duck	6	Tufted Titmouse	241
Greater Scaup	3	White-breasted Nuthatch	100
Lesser Scaup	2	Brown Creeper	11
White-winged Scoter	1	Carolina Wren	164
Long-tailed Duck	1	Winter Wren	23
Bufflehead	37	Golden-crowned Kinglet	20
Hooded Merganser	30	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	13
Common Merganser	311	Eastern Bluebird	7
Ruddy Duck	94	Hermit Thrush	1
Wild Turkey	8	American Robin	906
Pied-billed Grebe	2	Gray Catbird	1
Double-crested Cormorant	100	Northern Mockingbird	94
Great Cormorant	23	European Starling	3249
Great Blue Heron	32	Yellow-rumped Warbler	5
Black Vulture	8	Ovenbird	1
Turkey Vulture	10	Palm Warbler (Yellow 2, West. 3)	5
Bald Eagle	6	Common Yellowthroat	6
Northern Harrier	2	Eastern Towhee	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	12	American Tree Sparrow	12
Cooper's Hawk	10	Chipping Sparrow	2
Accipiter sp.	1	Field Sparrow	21
Red-tailed Hawk	62	Fox Sparrow	6
Rough-legged Hawk (light morph)	1	Song Sparrow	460
American Kestrel	10	Lincoln's Sparrow	1
Merlin	1	Swamp Sparrow	23
Peregrine Falcon	3	White-throated Sparrow	1174
American Coot	100	White-crowned Sparrow	9
Killdeer	4	Dark-eyed Junco	608
Wilson's Snipe	1	Northern Cardinal	392
Ring-billed Gull	4736	Red-winged Blackbird	307
Herring Gull	1680	Rusty Blackbird	20
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Common Grackle	71
Great Black-backed Gull	472	Purple Finch	1
Rock Pigeon	913	House Finch	118
Mourning Dove	428	Pine Siskin	9
Eastern Screech-Owl	55	American Goldfinch	299
Great Horned Owl	6	House Sparrow	1407
Belted Kingfisher	8		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	105		
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	20	Total Species	96
Downy Woodpecker	155	Total Individuals	27,686

OBSERVERS (55 observers, 26 parties) AREAS COVERED

Frank Windfelder, Todd Fellenbaum	Delaware River (Poquessing Creek to Rhawn St.), Wooden Bridge Run along the Pennypack Creek, Northeast Philadelphia Airport, Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant
Peter Kurtz	Pennypack Creek (Verree Rd. to Pine Rd.)
Brian Schultz	Pennypack Creek (Roosevelt Blvd. to Frankford Ave.)
Roland Williams	Pennypack Creek (Verree Rd. to Roosevelt Blvd.)
Cindy Ahern	Northeast Philadelphia (Island Green Country Club, Jamison Ave., Burholme Park, Friends Hospital)
Richard Horwitz, Steve DuPont, Liam Hart, Tess Hart, Walter Hart	Delaware River (Philadelphia Naval Business Center to Frankford Creek), Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant, F. D. Roosevelt Park
Chris Walters, Art McMorris, Edwin Shafer	Fort Mifflin, Army Corps of Engineers compound and vicinity, Penrose Ave. west of Schuylkill River
Doris McGovern, Emma Chou Martin Dellwo, Alice Severeid	John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, Eastwick
Debbie Beer	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, Denis Brennan, Lamar Cortis Gregg Gorton	Bartram's Garden, Woodland Cemetery, Cobbs Creek (Morris Park, Whitby Ave., 63 rd and Race Sts. to Lansdowne Ave. to Callowhill St.)
Erica Brendel, John Goschke	West Park (various locations including Philadelphia Zoo)
Steve Kerr	East Park (East Park Reservoir, Clifft Meadow, 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 including Manayunk, Schuylkill River)
Ken Januski, Jerene Schroeder	Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, Manayunk Ave.
Chuck Hetzel, Leigh Ashbrook,	Roxborough (Spring Ln. area from Ridge Ave. to Schuylkill River)
Cliff and Nancy Hence	Cresheim Creek (Stenton Ave. to the Wissahickon Creek)
Al and Nancy Bilheimer	Wissahickon Creek (east bank from Springfield Ave. to Chestnut Hill Ave., Valley Green and adjacent portions of Chestnut Hill)
Celeste Hardester	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Walnut Ln. to Wise's Mill Rd.)
David Belford, Jeff Belford	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Bell's Mill Rd. to Cathedral Rd.)
Edie Parnum, Michael Rosengarten, Joe Hudson	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Bell's Mill Rd. to Northwestern Ave.)
Jim Best, Rich Conroy, Andrew Albright Andy Fayer, Bob Gutowski	Wissahickon Creek (west bank from Roxborough Ave. to Walnut Ln.)

OBSERVERS (concluded)

William Reaume

Matt Sharp

Keith Russell, Paul Driver
Jeanne Schock, Shawn Towey**AREAS COVERED**

Awbury Arboretum

Cresheim Creek (McCallum St. Bridge), Wissahickon Creek (Hermit Ln.)
East Park (Cliff Meadow), Delaware River (Ben Franklin Bridge to Betsy
Ross Bridge)Wissahickon Creek (various locations along east and west banks)
Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant and vicinity, Northeast
Philadelphia Airport, Southampton Rd. west of Roosevelt Blvd.

CONDITIONS

Temperature: low 27°F, high 35°F.

Sky: completely overcast becoming somewhat brighter only during late morning and early afternoon.

Precipitation: A very light coating of snow fell between 5 and 7 AM.

Ground: Clear with a light coating of snow on roadways that dissipated by mid-day.

Water: All still waters 70-100% frozen. All rivers and fast flowing streams open.

Wind: None during the morning but very light and variable winds during the afternoon.

2009 CENSUS SUMMARY

The 23rd annual Philadelphia Mid-Winter Bird Census was held on Saturday January 10, 2009. This year 55 participants in 26 parties tallied 96 species and 27,282 individuals, which are both above the long term averages of 92 species and 27,000 individuals. Interestingly, if the census were a Christmas Bird Count the 96 species totaled would be the second highest species total among all counts held in Pennsylvania this winter. Conditions for birding on census day were generally good with seasonable temperatures, little to no wind, and no measurable snow or ice. But overcast skies throughout the day probably reduced the activity of some species (especially soaring birds like vultures). Persistent sub-freezing temperatures during the weeks prior to the census also reduced the amount of open water, which probably limited the numbers of some water birds like Pied-billed Grebes and Northern Pintail, while boosting the numbers of one species, Common Mergansers, which always increase in number on our rivers when freezes force them off of most lakes and ponds. Overall, most observers remarked that many areas were unusually quiet and that many common birds were only found in small numbers. Nevertheless, record high numbers were tallied for a remarkable 11 species ranging from ducks to owls to warblers, and several species that are rarely recorded were found along with one previously unrecorded species, which raised the 23-year cumulative species total to 147.

In contrast to last year's census, which produced no real rarities, several rarities were found this year. These included a White-winged Scoter on the upper Delaware River (Windfelder and Fellenbaum; previously recorded only in 2007), a Long-tailed Duck at the Queen Lane Reservoir (Moody and Moody; previously recorded only in 1991), and an Ovenbird at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant (Towey; previously recorded only in 2005). In addition, a Lincoln's Sparrow was found by Ken Januski at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education providing the first record of this species for the census, and what is probably the first winter record for Philadelphia County.

Other unusual species found this year included a light morph Rough-legged Hawk at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant (Horwitz and Dupont; 8th record and 3rd in the last 4 years), 7 Wild Turkeys in the Pennypack and 1 in the Army Corps area (Schultz; Walters, McMorris and Shafer; remarkably only the 3rd record of this resident species), and a Wilson's Snipe at the mouth of the Pennypack Creek (Windfelder and Fellenbaum; 7th record but first since 2002). Pine

Siskins (Belford and Belford; Hetzel and Ashbrook; Sharp), which appeared this winter in the largest numbers seen in many years, were recorded for the first time since 2002. Previously, the longest gap during which this species had not been recorded on the census was between 1991 and 1994. Like the Pine Siskin, the once annual Purple Finch has become an increasingly scarce January bird with only 3 census records since 2000. The lone Purple Finch found along Southampton Road (Russell, Driver) accounted for the only other irruptive northern finch recorded this year besides Pine Siskin. Unfortunately, White-winged Crossbills, which also invaded Pennsylvania in unusually large numbers this winter, appear to have not been recorded in Philadelphia until late January.

For the 5th year in a row the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant (NEWPCP) hosted a flock of wintering Northern Rough-winged Swallows (the only wintering flock known to occur north of southern Texas). But this year an Eastern Phoebe and 5 Palm Warblers were also observed feeding with the swallows on the midges that emerge from the plant's waters throughout the winter, while 4 Common Yellowthroats were counted in reeds and weeds in various locations around the plant. While the Orange-crowned Warbler discovered at the plant by Todd Fellenbaum on January 4 could not be relocated on census day, an Ovenbird first spotted by Shawn Towey was an unexpected surprise.

Another unexpected highlight from this year's census was the fact that record high numbers were recorded for a remarkable 11 species including 145 Gadwall, 12 American Wigeon and 100 American Coot (found at the Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant and Roosevelt Park; Miller, Horwitz and Dupont), 30 Hooded Mergansers (7 parties), 100 Double-crested Cormorants (numbers recorded have increased each year since 2005), 6 Bald Eagles (4 adults were counted this year at 2 of Philadelphia's 3 nests along with a separate adult and an immature), 55 Eastern Screech-Owls (9 parties including Belford and Belford who alone tallied 24), 8 Pileated Woodpeckers (found by a record 6 parties; this year's total ties last year's record number), 3 Eastern Phoebes (found by 3 parties at the NEWPCP and John Heinz NWR), 23 Winter Wrens (10 parties), and 6 Common Yellowthroats (found at the NEWPCP and John Heinz NWR).

As always some species were only reported by a single party. This year's list included Northern Pintail, Ring-necked Duck [Roosevelt Park] and Rough-legged Hawk [NEWPCP] (Horwitz et al.); Green-winged Teal, Hermit Thrush and Gray Catbird [John Heinz NWR] (McGovern et al.); Canvasback [East Park Reservoir] (Kerr); Greater Scaup [Delaware River at Fort Mifflin] (Miller); White-winged Scoter, Merlin, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe and Lesser Black-backed Gull [northern Delaware River] (Windfelder and Fellenbaum); Long-tailed Duck [Queen Lane Reservoir] (Moody and Moody); Lesser Scaup [Delaware River at Pulaski Park] Ovenbird, Palm Warbler [NEWPCP], and Purple Finch [west Southampton Rd.] (Russell, Driver, Schock, Towey), and Lincoln's Sparrow [Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education] (Januski). Species missed on census day that were seen during "count week" (January 7-13) include Redhead (January 13 at Roosevelt Park; Windfelder), Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull (January 7 along the northern Delaware River; Windfelder) and Long-eared Owl (January 8 at the John Heinz NWR; McGovern). 'Expected' species that were missed this year included Snow Goose, Common Goldeneye, Red-shouldered Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Cedar Waxwing, Savannah Sparrow and Brown-headed Cowbird.

While results from the census always contain evidence of interesting population trends one of the most interesting of recent years has involved Philadelphia's crows and West Nile Virus (WNV). After both species crashed in Philadelphia by 95% the day after the President's Day blizzard of 2003 both rose steadily in number from 2004 through 2007, but both subsequently declined in 2008 and again this year with 2009's census total for American Crow being the lowest ever. What do these trends indicate? Crows, as well as jays, are known to be highly susceptible to WNV and recent declines are probably related to this disease, which peaked in the east around 2003. As one might expect if this were true, census totals for Blue Jays also declined in 2004 and reached their lowest level ever in 2005. But some authorities believe that many other North American birds have also undergone declines due to WNV, including many songbirds. So the general impression among census participants that many common birds have now become harder to find may indeed be true if WNV has been causing mortality in a broad array of species. And the fact that Philadelphia's crow numbers have remained very low since 2003 suggests that the effects of this disease may not have abated yet in Philadelphia.

Finally, I thought it would be interesting to once again list the species that were reported by the most parties. This year's most reported species include last year's 3 winners, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee and Northern Cardinal, plus American Robin, while the next most recorded group of species included Mourning Dove, Carolina Wren, White-throated Sparrow, American Goldfinch and House Sparrow. Are these the top 9 names you would expect to find on a list of the most widespread bird species inhabiting Philadelphia during the winter?

As always I'd like to thank everyone who participated in the census this year for another excellent effort. And I hope you will all be able to join us again next year when the census has been scheduled for Saturday, January 9.

Keith Russell - Census Coordinator
6222 McCallum Street
Philadelphia, PA 19144