

117th West Virginia Christmas Bird Count State Report

(2016-2017)

By L. E. Helgerman WV CBC State Editor

West Virginia has 20 circles with center points within the state. With fifty percent of our counts running continuously for over 40 years, WV continues its long history with Audubon's Christmas Bird Count.

There are at least three CBC circles centered outside our state that cover large swatches of WV. This report only includes data from those circles with center points located within West Virginia.

Eleven of our counts were run in the first week of the CBC season, five were completed between Dec. 23rd – 31st and four were conducted in January.

Seasonal Weather Report:

Temperature Lows: Nine counts started below freezing, with Lewisburg dipping to 10. Five counts began at 40+ degrees. Wheeling was the only count to start and stay below freezing at 21-27 degrees.

Temperature Highs: Eleven counts reached 50 degrees or higher, with Charleston peaking at 68.

Five counts had snow on the ground with Wheeling's 4" the most reported. Four counts had light snow falling. Ten counts reported light rain and two counts had heavy rain at some point.

Effort Report:

Five counts had more than 26 participants, the Hampshire count had the highest with 35 field birders.

Four counts had over 60 party hours: Inwood 67, Wheeling 89.75, Canaan 98, and Hampshire 99.25. Nine other counts reported between 40 - 60 party hours on count day.

Canaan lead the way with 509 party miles, followed by Inwood's 418.25, third highest was Elkins with 360.50. Seven other counts had between 300-353 miles reported.

Sixteen counts had feeder watchers. The Pendleton count had the highest number with 15 watching, followed by Parkersburg with 8 and Morgantown with 5 feeder watchers.

Four counts reported over four hours of owling. Morgantown lead the way with 7 hrs., Huntington had 4.5 hrs., and Ona and Canaan both at 4 hours. All four of these counts had over 37 miles covered, but Ona's 56 miles was the most covered.

WV state effort totals: By car: 4,943.60 miles - 558.75 hours, By foot: 333.80 miles - 393.50 hours, By bicycle: 8 miles - 3 hours, By boat: 20 miles - 3 hours.

Bird Reports:

One hundred nineteen species were found in WV on count days, with an additional four species added as count week (CW) birds, totaling 123 species for the 117th CBC season. The following is a synopsis of the species reported.

Geese/Swans: Canada Geese were the third most abundant species this count season, but four other geese species were reported: 1 Cackling (Morgantown), 1 Ross's (Ona), 2 Snow (Parkersburg/Ona), and a CW Greater White-fronted Goose (Elkins). A total of 90 Tundra Swans (70 from Wheeling) were reported from three circles, only two Mute Swans were reported on count days (Morgantown).

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Ducks: Twenty species of ducks were found on count days plus 2 others from count weeks. Mallards were the 8th most abundant species found in the state, but other duck numbers were significant this season. Mergansers were well represented, a total of 351 Hooded from fifteen counts, and 186 Common from ten counts. Other ducks on the list, of over 100 found, were: American Black Duck 141, Bufflehead 136, Gadwall 123 and Ruddy Duck 108. Other rarer finds included: 5 Goldeneye (four located on the Parkersburg count and one from Morgantown), a single Blue-winged Teal and a Northern Pintail (located in Parkersburg) and the 4 Surf Scoters discovered on the Raleigh count. Also, a Long-tailed Duck was reported as a CW bird on the Morgantown count. All were very nice finds.

Game Birds: Most counts saw Wild Turkeys for a total of 650. Four counts picked up Ruffed Grouse on count days, (Canaan 4, Elkins 3, Franklin/Pendleton 2, Pocahontas 2) totaling eleven birds.

Loons/Grebes: 3 Common Loons were discovered, one on the Huntington count and two from Raleigh. 93 Horned Grebes on 7 counts outnumbered the 81 Pied-billed Grebes found on 10 counts.

Cormorant/Heron/Ibis: 70 Double-crested Cormorants (34 from Ona) were reported this season from only five circles. The Great Blue Heron state tally of 110 birds came from 17 counts. A lone Ibis species was a very rare CW Parkersburg find.

Vultures: We tallied 1,134 Turkey Vultures from 17 circles while 985 Black Vultures were also found on 14 counts, keeping both vultures on the top twenty species list in the state this count season.

Eagles/Hawks: Eagle numbers continue to impress with six counts having Golden Eagles totaling 7 birds. 78 Bald Eagles were tallied from thirteen circles, with a record 23 BAEA found in Hampshire alone. Red-tailed Hawks lead the states "hawk list" with 308, followed by the 115 Red-shouldered Hawks; both on most counts. 25 Northern Harriers were found in the state from nine CBC's. A lone Rough-legged Hawk, located in Canaan, was the only RLHA recorded this count season.

Sandhill Crane: The only Sandhill Cranes located were the seven found on the Raleigh count.

Shorebirds: Along with 38 Killdeer, 5 Wilson Snipe were tallied from five counts. Rarer, a single Greater Yellowlegs and a Spotted Sandpiper were great finds for Morgantown.

Gulls: 434 Ring-billed Gulls were documented from eight counts with 247 of those found on the Parkersburg CBC. Four Herring Gulls were also reported, three in Wheeling and one from Ona.

Owls: The most abundant owl species reported were 40 Screech Owls, followed by 18 Barred and 10 Great Horned. Other nice finds included, Morgantown and Canaan each finding a Saw-whet Owl, and the three Barn Owls that were recorded on the Moorefield count.

Woodpeckers: The top three woodpeckers found in the state were, 701 Downy, 554 Red-bellied and 240 Pileated. Fourteen counts tallied a total of 52 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. Red-headed Woodpeckers were in four circles totaling 20 birds.

Falcons: 139 American Kestrels were reported from 17 counts. An impressive total of 10 Peregrine Falcons were counted from five circles. Four Merlins were also found, two in Morgantown, one in Charleston and one on the Parkersburg's count.

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Flycatchers: A total of 29 Eastern Phoebes were tallied this season, discovered on fifteen of the counts.

Crows/Ravens: The massive crow roost from Wheeling always gives us a high count and this year was no exception, 69,333 American Crows (45K from Wheeling) were recorded statewide. 290 Ravens were tallied from 15 circles. A rarer find, two Fish Crows were located on the Charles Town Count.

Thrushes/Mimids: Nineteen counts found a combined 1,141 Eastern Bluebirds, the 16th most prevalent bird on the count. Ten circles tallied 20 Hermit Thrushes (6 found in Ona). Only 634 American Robins were counted. Most circles saw Northern Mockingbirds, with 366 found. Rarer finds included two Brown Thrashers, one in Huntington and one in Charleston, and a Gray Catbird found in Morgantown.

Warblers: The Yellow-rumped Warblers found in 12 circles totaled 132 birds. A lone Common Yellowthroat was a nice find for Ona.

Sparrows: Ten species of sparrows were found. Dark-eyed Juncos, at 4,594 birds, were the 4th most seen bird on the count. Rounding off the top three sparrows found, 1,329 Song Sparrows and 1,262 White-throated Sparrows. Always a nice find, Fox Sparrows were on eleven counts totaling 25 birds.

Blackbirds: Eight counts reported Red-wing Blackbirds totaling 1,464 birds, the 13th most abundant state species. Four circles tallied a total of 46 Eastern Meadowlarks. Rarer, Rusty Blackbirds were found in Wheeling and Hampshire with three birds each.

Finches: The 12th most reported species, American Goldfinch, totaled 1,546 birds. Seven counts tallied 13 Purple Finches, three counts found 6 Pine Siskins and 11 Red Crossbills were located on the Pipestem count. The only Evening Grosbeak in the state came from Canaan.

Other noteworthy birds: Horned Larks found on five counts totaled 112 birds. Eleven counts saw Ruby-crowned Kinglets, totaling 24 birds. The Loggerhead Shrike on the Pocahontas count was a nice find.

Top 20 species found in West Virginia during the 117th CBC season.

1 American Crow – 69,333	11 Carolina Chickadee – 1,802
2 European Starling – 15,900	12 American Goldfinch – 1,546
3 Canada Goose – 9,443	13 Red-winged Blackbird – 1,464
4 Dark-eyed Junco – 4,594	14 Song Sparrow – 1,329
5 Rock Pigeon – 4,346	15 White-throated Sparrow – 1,262
6 Mourning Dove – 3,498	16 Eastern Bluebird – 1,141
7 Northern Cardinal – 2,773	17 Turkey Vulture – 1,134
8 Mallard – 2,512	18 White-breasted Nuthatch – 1,074
9 Tufted Titmouse – 2,229	19 Carolina Wren – 1,020
10 House Sparrow – 1,969	20 Black Vulture - 985

Like in many other states, some of our circles (mostly in less populated areas) need more participants. Audubon would like at least 10 participants on each count, as a compiler I know even this is stretching it. I would like to see at least 10 teams (parties) minimum in each CBC circle.

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I know we have many great birders in WV, and there are lots of new birders that have never been on a CBC, so please consider joining the fun in the upcoming season! Once you find out how easy and how much fun it is, you will be looking for more counts to participate in. How many counts can you do?

For more information on West Virginia's Christmas Bird Counts and complete seasonal CBC data, go to the Brooks Bird Club website <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/christmas-bird-count.html> Here you can see all our circles, find compilers, and get contact information.

This is my first year as the West Virginia State Editor and I would like to thank all the WV state compilers for their dedication and all their hard work. Without these compilers and their participants our state would not have been so well represented in this 117th winter bird survey.