

# 118<sup>th</sup> West Virginia Christmas Bird Count State Report

(2017-2018)

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 a few 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.

Nine of our counts were run by the first weekend of the CBC season, eight were completed between Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, and three were conducted in January. Nine of our counts were held on weekdays.

## **Seasonal Weather Report:**

Temperature Lows: Seventeen counts started below freezing, three of those below zero. Six counts never exceeded the freezing point. Canaan had the biggest temperature change -21 to 29 degrees a fifty-degree swing. The two warm counts, Charleston and Oak Hill, started the day at 38 degrees.

Temperature Highs: Six counts reached 50 degrees or higher, with Pendleton peaking at 58.

Nine counts had snow on the ground with Canaan's 9" and Elkin's 6" the most reported. Two counts had light snow falling. Lewisburg and Wheeling reported light and heavy snow falls during the count. Three counts reported light rain at some point.

## **Effort Report:**

Participation: The Hampshire count had the highest participation with 38 field birders. Three counts had over 34 in the field and five counts had more than 22 participants.

Hours: Four counts had over 57 party hours: Inwood 57.5, Morgantown 60, Charles Town 64.75, and Hampshire 83.25. Nine other counts reported between 40 - 56 party hours on count day(s).

Miles: Lewisburg lead the way with 410 party miles, followed by Charles Town 332.5, third highest was Hampshire with 323. Seven other counts had between 250 - 309 miles reported.

Feeder Watching: Fourteen counts had participants watching their feeders/yards. The Pendleton count had the highest participation with 14 feeder watchers, followed by Elkins (7) and Parkersburg (6).

Nocturnal Birding: Twelve counts had owling teams. Five counts reported over four hours of owling. Morgantown lead the way with 11.75 hrs., Huntington and Inwood both had 5 hours. Five counts covered over 30 miles owling. Huntington, with 53 miles, covered the most ground.

**WV State Effort Totals:** By car: 4,734.25 miles in 544.5 hours. By foot: 306 miles in 351 hours. By skis: 2.5 miles in 4.25 hours. By boat: 17 miles in 4 hours.

## **Bird Reports:**

One hundred twenty-one species were found in WV on count day(s), with an additional three species included as count week (cw) birds, for a total of **124** species for the 118<sup>th</sup> CBC season. The following is a synopsis of the species reported.

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**Geese/Swans:** Canada Geese (8,868) were the fourth most abundant species this count season being found on 18 counts. Three other geese species were also reported: Greater White-fronted Goose (1-Elkins/cw-Inwood), Snow Goose (3-Huntington/2-Morgantown) and a cw Cackling Goose (Morgantown). A total of 55 Tundra Swans were reported from three circles (50-Wheeling/3-Morgantown/2-Ona).

**Ducks:** Nineteen species of ducks were found on count day(s). Mallards (3,529) were the seventh most abundant species found in the state. Other significant ducks found this season include: American Black Duck (244) and Bufflehead (177) with Morgantown finding high numbers of both (79/105). All three mergansers were found, both Hooded Merganser (307) and Common Merganser (387) were found on thirteen counts. A (cw) Red-breasted Merganser was reported from Charles Town. Gadwall (85) were on eight counts with Charles Town submitting a high count of thirty-nine. Wood Ducks (23) were still lingering on six counts. Other rarer finds included: American Wigeon (3-Morgantown/1-Ona), Canvasback (3-Parkersburg) and Common Goldeneye (2-Charles Town/2-Huntington).

**Game Birds:** Twelve counts found Wild Turkey for a total of 305 birds, Morgantown had the highest number 79. Only four Ruffed Grouse were located on count day(s), (1-Lewisburg/1-Pipestem Area/1-Pendleton County/1-Raleigh County).

**Loons/Grebes:** Three Common Loons were discovered (1-Huntington/1-Morgantown/1-Parkersburg). Pied-billed Grebe (104) were located on thirteen counts and the only Horned Grebes (4) found in the state were from the Morgantown count.

**Cormorant/Heron:** Double-crested Cormorants (8 +1cw) were reported this season from five circles. Great Blue Heron (133 +1cw) were found on 18 counts.

**Vultures:** Black Vultures (875) were found on 14 counts. We tallied (1,133) Turkey Vultures from all but one count, making it the ninetieth most abundant species.

**Eagles/Hawks:** Eagle numbers continue to impress with five counts having (7+1cw) Golden Eagles (1-Canaan/1-Hampshire/1-Lewisburg/4-Moorefield/cw-Pendleton). Bald Eagles (155) were tallied from fifteen circles, with an amazing 66 BAEA counted in Moorefield. Red-tailed Hawk (339) was WV's most prevalent buteo, followed by the Red-shouldered Hawk (130), both on most counts. Accipiter's were located on fourteen counts (31-Sharp-shinned & 42-Coopers Hawks). Northern Harriers (33) were seen on nine CBC's. A rare (cw) Northern Goshawk was reported on the Inwood count.

**Sandhill Crane:** The only Sandhill Cranes (45) were reported from the Wheeling count, a first for that count.

**Shorebirds:** Along with Killdeer (61), a high number of Wilson Snipe (20) were tallied from five counts. Rarer, a single Dunlin (Morgantown) and a lone American Woodcock (Hampshire) were nice finds.

**Gulls:** Ring-billed Gulls (482 + 2-cw) were documented on eleven counts with 409 of those found on the Parkersburg CBC. Herring Gulls (4+1cw) were also reported (1-Huntington/2-Ona/1-Pipestem/cw-Wheeling). Three Bonaparte's Gulls were seen (2-Morgantown/1-Parkersburg).

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**Owls:** The most abundant owl species reported was Screech Owl (60), followed by Barred (20) and Great Horned Owl (16). Other nice finds included: Saw-whet Owl (1-Canaan/2-Morgantown/1-Pendleton), Short-eared Owl (1-Canaan/1-Moorefield/1-Morgantown) and Barn Owl (1-Moorefield/1-Pocahontas). Rarer still, Parkersburg's Snowy Owl and the Long-eared Owl found on the Moorefield count, on a road, killed by a vehicle (specimen was collected).

**Woodpeckers:** The top three woodpeckers found in the state were, Red-bellied (758), Downy (754) and Northern Flicker (391). Sixteen counts tallied Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (162). Six counts reported Red-headed Woodpecker (33), with the highest number of twelve being reported from Pendleton County. Hampshire County recorded the highest number of woodpeckers in general this season.

**Falcons:** American Kestrels (115 +1<sub>cw</sub>) were reported from eighteen counts. Peregrine Falcons (10) were counted in six circles (1-Charles Town/2-Charleston/1-Morgantown/1-Ona/2-Parkersburg/1-Wheeling). The rarer Merlin (3 +2<sub>cw</sub>), found on five counts, included single birds found in Charles Town, Inwood and Morgantown plus two (cw) birds recorded from Pipestem and Parkersburg.

**Flycatchers:** Eastern Phoebes (44) were tallied this season from fourteen counts.

**Vireos:** A single White-eyed Vireo was found in the Morgantown circle and two Blue-headed Vireos were located on the Pendleton County count, both rare finds on a WV CBC.

**Crows/Ravens:** The large crow roosts from Charleston, Raleigh County and Wheeling always gives us a high count and this year was no exception. American Crow (75,851) was the top species found. Becoming more prevalent the Common Raven (352) was tallied from 17 circles. The rarer Fish Crow (4) was only located on the Charles Town CBC.

**Thrushes/Mimids:** Nineteen counts had Eastern Bluebirds (1,317), the 16<sup>th</sup> most prevalent bird on the count. Sixteen circles tallied Hermit Thrushes (86), with Huntington having a high count of 13. American Robins (12,170) came in the third most seen species in the state. Nineteen counts found Northern Mockingbirds (459). Rarer finds included Gray Catbird (1-Inwood/1-Morgantown/1-Oak Hill) and a lone Brown Thrasher found on the Oak Hill Count.

**Warblers:** Yellow-rumped Warblers (465 +1<sub>cw</sub>) were recorded in seventeen circles. Palm Warblers (16) were located on four counts (1-Charles Town/5-Charleston/9-Ona/1-Parkersburg).

**Sparrows:** Eleven species of sparrows were found this season and three of those species made the top twenty list. Dark-eyed Juncos (4,019) the sixth, White-throated Sparrow (1,478) the fourteen and Song Sparrow (1,364) the fifteen most reported species. Fox Sparrows (23 +1<sub>cw</sub>) were on nine counts. Rarer, Savannah Sparrows were found on three counts (1-Charles Town/3-Parkersburg/cw-Pendleton).

**Blackbirds:** Fourteen counts reported Red-winged Blackbird (913). Eastern Meadowlarks (62 +1<sub>cw</sub>) and Rusty Blackbirds (87+1<sub>cw</sub>) were both located in eight circles. Common Grackles (47) were on six counts.

**Finches:** The thirtieth most reported species was the American Goldfinch (1,603). Pine Siskins (118) were reported on eight counts. Six counts tallied Purple Finch (32) and only two counts documented Red Crossbills (49), one in Pendleton County and forty-eight counted in Pocahontas County.

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**Other noteworthy birds:** Eleven counts saw Ruby-crowned Kinglets (46). Red-breasted Nuthatches (30) were found in six circles. American Pipits (116) were discovered on five counts (1-Charleston/42-Huntington/45-Inwood/2-Moorefield/76-Morgantown). Horned Larks (57) were on three counts (29-Charles Town/17-Moorefield/11-Morgantown). Rarer, a Northern Shrike was found on the Canaan count.

## Top 20 species found in West Virginia during the 118<sup>th</sup> CBC season.

- |                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 American Crow – 75,851     | 11 Northern Cardinal – 2,059      |
| 2 European Starling – 21,953 | 12 Tufted Titmouse – 1,629        |
| 3 American Robin – 12,170    | 13 American Goldfinch – 1,603     |
| 4 Canada Goose – 8,864       | 14 White-throated Sparrow – 1,478 |
| 5 Rock Pigeon – 4,065        | 15 Song Sparrow – 1,364           |
| 6 Dark-eyed Junco – 4,019    | 16 Eastern Bluebird – 1,317       |
| 7 Mallard – 3,529            | 17 Carolina Chickadee – 1,247     |
| 8 Mourning Dove – 2,453      | 18 Cedar Waxwing – 1,182          |
| 9 Blue Jay – 2,210           | 19 Turkey Vulture – 1,133         |
| 10 House Sparrow – 2,154     | 20 Carolina Wren – 1,099          |

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

I know we have many excellent birders in WV, and 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 participant 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 second 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 118<sup>th</sup> winter bird survey.