

# The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

## 120<sup>th</sup> National Audubon Christmas Bird Count West Virginia Report

Let's look back at last season's Christmas Bird Count here in West Virginia during the 120<sup>th</sup> count season.

**One hundred twenty-two species** were accounted for in West Virginia this season. All twenty currently active WV Christmas Bird Count's conducted surveys during the 120<sup>th</sup> CBC season, which was, December 14<sup>th</sup> 2019 – January 5<sup>th</sup> 2020. Eight of our counts were held on the first weekend of the CBC season December 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>, ten were completed between December 18<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, and two counts were conducted in January. Three of the counts were held on weekdays. In addition to our twenty long running Christmas Bird Counts, a new trial CBC was conducted on 12/21/19 in Mason County. Though that data is not reflected in this report, it needs to be noted that the count was very productive and successful. Details of the new Point Pleasant (Mason County) count will follow this report. It's also important to note that there are a few CBC's that border WV and collect data from our state. That data is not reflected in this report, only counts with CBC center points in West Virginia are in this report.

### **Seasonal Weather Report:**

**Temperature Lows:** Only seven counts began below freezing. Pendleton County reported the coldest morning temperature with 12 degrees. Elkins and Wheeling never made it above 27 degrees. Oak Hill had the warmest low at 56 degrees. Athens Princeton Area, Inwood and Parkersburg started their counts in the forties. The Elkins December 18<sup>th</sup> count averaged the coldest in WV this season with a 23-degree low and 26-degrees high for the day.

**Temperature Highs:** Eight counts reached 50 degrees or higher, five of those counts went into the sixties with Hampshire peaking at 67 degrees. Oak Hill's December 29<sup>th</sup> count was the warmest recorded in WV this season with a 56-degree low and a 65-degree high!

**Weather Notes:** Four counts reported light snow falling at some point during their counts. Canaan was the only count to report snow on the ground, with at least 2 inches. Nine counts reported light rain at times during their counts. No West Virginia CBC reported any severe weather this season.

### **Effort Report:**

**Participation:** The Hampshire County count had the highest participation with 28 field birders. Seven other counts noted over 21 in the field. Six counts reported 10 or less counters.

**Diurnal Hours in the Field:** Seven counts had over 60 party hours in the field on count day. The top three were, Hampshire County 89.25, Inwood 71.25 and Wheeling with 70.25 hours. Seven counts reported between 40 – 50 hours. Six counts had under 33 hours in the field.

**Miles Tallied:** Eleven counts tallied over 300 miles on count day, Wheeling reported 456.75, the most. Inwood (424) and Lewisburg (393), were the other counts that chocked up high mileage. Six other counts reported between 198 – 293 miles covered in their circles.

**Feeder Watchers:** Fifteen counts had participants watching bird feeders/yards. Most counts had under five feeder watchers, however Pendleton County reported 14 participating! Editors Note: A good feeder watcher can, and usually do, add species to a count.

## The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

**Nocturnal Birding:** Eleven WV counts formed owling teams. Six counts reported over four hours in the field during the evening hours. Inwood tallied the most nocturnal time, a very impressive 14 hours, followed by Parkersburg with 9, and Morgantown's 7 hours of nocturnal birding.

### WV State Effort Totals:

**Car:** 5,471 miles in 555 hours - **Foot:** 363.75 miles in 433.25 hours - **Motorized Boat:** 17 miles in 3 hours.

### Bird Reports:

The avian groups in this report are not listed in the order that reflects the 120<sup>th</sup> National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count seasonal checklist, they have been rearranged to reflect the current American Ornithological Society (AOS) checklist. Most species within these groups are in order of abundance.

**Note:** Each Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is held on a "Count Day", a day that was chosen by the CBC compiler that's within the CBC season. It's a 24-hour period, midnight to midnight. There is also a time frame called "Count Week" (cw) this is the period three days before and after "Count Day". Any bird that was missed on count day can be added to a CBC if it's found during that count week period. It's added as a single cw bird and is not added to the count day list.

**Only Count Day data is listed below unless otherwise noted.**

**Geese/Swans:** **Canada Geese** (6,787) were the fourth most abundant species this season, found on seventeen counts. Rarer, were the two **Greater White-fronted Geese**, Inwood; the **Snow Goose** on the Morgantown count; and a **Cackling Goose** found on the Parkersburg count. **Tundra Swan's** (33) were noted in four circles; Wheeling (21) Morgantown (10), Elkins (2), and as a Canaan cw bird.

**Seventeen species of ducks were reported this CBC season**

**Dabblers:** **Mallards** (2,320) were the most numerous duck species and the eleventh most abundant state species, found on 19 counts, Morgantown (256) had the highest tally. **Black Ducks** (141) were seen on thirteen counts, and **Gadwall** (61) were tallied in eight circles, with Charles Town reporting high counts for both species 32 – 22. **Wood Ducks** (26) were tallied on eight counts. Rarer ducks found this season included the four **Green-winged Teal**, Athens Princeton Area (2), Pendleton County (1), and Moorefield (1); Three **Northern Pintail**, Moorefield (2), Pendleton County (1); And the two **American Wigeon** found on the Pendleton County count.

**Diving Ducks:** All Three Mergansers were found this season. **Hooded Mergansers** (241) were counted on seventeen counts, and was the most abundant diver, with the Pipestem Area (44), reporting the highest. **Common Merganser** (212), were reported on half of the WV counts. Again, Pipestem lead the state, tallying an amazing 77 birds. Only three **Red-breasted Mergansers** were found, Charles Town (2) Morgantown (1) (Huntington cw). Nine counts reported **Bufflehead** (119), and **Ring-necked Ducks** (39) were seen on seven counts.

Rarer diving ducks found included, the twelve **Redheads** on the Charles Town count, the eleven **Lesser Scaup**, Morgantown (6), Charleston (5), and the three **Ruddy Ducks**, Morgantown (2), Parkersburg (1). Rarer yet was the lone **Long-tailed Duck**, on the Pipestem Area CBC, and the one **Common Goldeneye** on the Wheeling count.

## The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

**Gamebirds:** Sixteen counts reported **Wild Turkey** (310), Eleven counts reported under 20 birds, five of those were single digits, Morgantown (80), reported the highest statewide. **Ruffed Grouse** (7) continues to be rare on the WV CBC, with Pocahontas County reporting six, McDowell County finding one, and Canaan reporting a cw bird.

**Grebes:** Eleven counts noted **Pied-billed Grebes** (35), most counts had under 3 birds while Morgantown tallied 14, the most statewide. Morgantown was also the only count to find **Horned Grebes** (2).

**Rails:** Two counts reported **American Coot** (31), Charles Town (30), and Pipestem Area with one. Not seen on a WV CBC since the 115<sup>th</sup> count, a **Virginia Rail** was reported this season on the Moorefield count.

**Shorebirds:** Eight counts found **Killdeer** (18). Rarer, were the four **Wilson Snipe**, Huntington (2), Moorefield (1), Hampshire County (1), and the lone **American Woodcock** reported again this season from the Hampshire County CBC.

**Gulls:** Five counts reported **Ring-billed Gull** (478), with Wheeling (450) reporting most. The only other gull reported was one lone **Herring Gull**, spotted on the Huntington count.

**Loon:** Three Counts posted **Common Loons** (6) this season, Pipestem (3), Morgantown (2), and Raleigh (1).

**Cormorant:** Four counts located **Double-crested Cormorants** (37) on count days, Charleston (26) had the highest recorded.

**Hérons:** Most counts tallied **Great Blue Herons** (128), Huntington (21), and Charles Town (18), surpassed all others.

**Vultures:** **Black Vulture** (816) were not on as many counts as last year and did not make the top twenty species list this season, though still found in fourteen circles. Pendleton (159), Lewisburg (143) and Inwood (135), with the high counts. **Turkey Vultures** (1,362) also down from last year were still found on 17 counts, Lewisburg (258) had the most by far.

**Eagles/Hawks:** Four counts reported the eight **Golden Eagles** submitted this season, Pendleton County (4), Canaan (2), Moorefield (1), and Pipestem Area (1). All WV CBC Golden Eagle sightings require a Rare Bird Report (RBR) to be submitted, this help verify these rare and important sightings.

**Northern Harriers** (12 +1cw) were tallied on eight counts. **Sharp-shinned Hawks** (14) were reported on eight counts. Sixteen counts tallied **Cooper's Hawks** (40), most counts having under three birds, the exception was Inwood (11).

The **Bald Eagle** (158) numbers continue to be impressive here in WV on the CBC. Fourteen counts reported BAEAs on count days, high numbers came in from, Pendleton County (42), Hampshire County (29), Charles Town (26), and both Moorefield and Pipestem Area CBC's reporting 14 birds.

Buteos reported this season included; **Red-shouldered Hawk** (132), found on eighteen counts, with Charles Town (26), and Inwood (24) reporting highest numbers. Found on all WV CBC's were **Red-tailed Hawks** (291), the high counts came from, Huntington (38), and Pendleton Counties (35). Six counts reported more than 23 redtails. Much rarer this season, was the one **Rough-legged Hawk** on the Canaan count, Pocahontas County also reported it as a cw bird.

## The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

**Owls:** The **Eastern Screech Owl** (77) is the most common owl reported, with almost 50% of the WV counts reporting them, Inwood (18) and Moorefield (15) tallying high numbers this season. Eight counts added **Great Horned Owl** (26) to their lists, the eleven Inwood tallied, by far, the most reported. **Barred Owl** (18) were tallied on nine counts. The rarer owls found this season included the three **Barn Owls** found on the Moorefield count, the two **Saw-whet Owls** on the Morgantown CBC, and **Long-eared Owls**, one on the Inwood count, and one heard during cw (Canaan).

**Kingfisher:** Eighteen counts tallied **Belted Kingfishers** (100).

**Woodpeckers:** Seven species of woodpecker were found this season. Common on most, if not all, WV CBCs, in order of abundance, **Downy Woodpecker** (859), **Red-bellied Woodpecker** (881), **Northern Flicker** (421), **Pileated Woodpecker** (365), **Hairy Woodpecker** (188), and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (145). Nine counts tallied **Red-headed Woodpecker** (54). Hampshire County, similar to last season, reported high counts of woodpeckers, this season having high counts in five of the seven species found.

**Falcons:** The **American Kestrel** (149), regularly seen on most counts, was reported in higher numbers on the Moorefield (21), Ona (19), and Pendleton County (19) counts. Most counts that have breeding **Peregrine Falcons** reported them this season, with nine birds observed. Seven counts also reported **Merlins** (8) on count days, Morgantown found two.

**Flycatchers:** **Eastern Phoebe** (32), the only flycatcher typically found on a WV CBC, was added on sixteen counts. While most counts find one or two, Pendleton County tallied five.

**Vireos:** A vireo is always a rare find on a WV CBC, this year we had two sightings of **White-eyed Vireo**. One WEVI was found on the Morgantown count, which happened to have reported one last season, and another one on the Pocahontas County count. **Note:** Historically, prior to this season, WEVI has only been reported six times in the past on a WV CBC, the first occasion being on the 108<sup>th</sup> CBC.

**Jays/Crows/Ravens:** **Blue Jays** (2,977), found on all counts, showed a 50% increase from last season, a few counts with impressive numbers were, Ona (414), Parkersburg (362), and Huntington (334).

On all counts, **American Crow** (30,741) was the second most abundant state species. Large crow roosts reflect the substantial number of crows reported each count season. Large crow roosts were reported from, Charleston (12K), Wheeling (8.5K) and Raleigh County (8K), these large roosts are estimated. Eighteen counts added **Raven** (349) to their species lists, Pendleton Counties (68) and Hampshire Counties (67) the highest reported. Rarer on a WV CBC, Charles Town reported the only **Fish Crow**. Note: Most of the historical CBC records of Fish Crow in WV come from the Charles Town count.

**Thrushes:** Two thrush species made the top species list in WV this season, coming in eighth place **Eastern Bluebird** (1,336), with Hampshire County reporting the highest number 196. The second most abundant species in the state was **American Robin** (8,373). Over seven thousand more robins were reported this season verses last season. Impressive numbers of robins were tallied from Wheeling (2,700), Inwood (2,289), and Huntington (1,299). **Hermit Thrush** (114) was found on all counts this season with high counts coming in from Huntington (18), Pipestem Area (14), and Moorefield (11). An unusual find this season was a **Wood Thrush**, found and photographed on the Charleston count.

**Mimids:** **Mockingbirds** (578) found statewide with high counts from, Inwood (85), Parkersburg (68), and Charles Town (62). Rarer, were the two count day **Catbirds**, Lewisburg and Morgantown, (Pocahontas

## The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

County cw). Also, rare this season were the two count day **Brown Thrashers**, again, Lewisburg and Morgantown, (Huntington cw).

**European Starling:** The top species in the state this season, **European Starling** (40,205), was found throughout the state. In some cases, in large murmurations like Charles Town's 14,539 and Wheeling with 11,000 birds. Five other counts reported starlings in the one to three thousand range.

**Cedar Waxwings:** Fourteen counts tallied **Cedar Waxwings** (609), Charles Town (92), the most reported.

**Finches:** The **American Goldfinch** (1,273), the twentieth most reported species with Pocahontas County (187) having the high count. Rare this season, were the winter finches, which included; **Pine Siskins** (30) found on seven counts; **Purple Finches** (23), tallied from Lewisburg (18), Elkins (3), and Morgantown (2), and the Pocahontas County count reporting the only **Red Crossbills** and **Common Redpolls**, six each.

**Sparrows:** Thirteen species of sparrows were found this season. **Dark-eyed Junco** (3,245), the seventh most abundant statewide species, with Pendleton County (610), reporting the most juncos. Both the **Song Sparrow** (1,965), and **White-throated Sparrow** (1,858), made the top species list. The Moorefield count reported the highest numbers in both species (398 - 302).

**Eastern Towhee** (368) was found on most counts, Huntington (84), reporting the most. Thirteen counts tallied **White-crowned Sparrows** (238), Moorefield (69) once again, had an impressive high count. Always a nice find, Fox Sparrows (28) were posted on eleven counts.

Seasonally rare sparrows, but typically found in low numbers on a WV CBC were the three **Savannah Sparrows** located on the Moorefield (2), and Pendleton County (1) counts and the **Vesper Sparrow** reported on the Moorefield CBC. **A first for the WV CBC** was the **LeConte's Sparrow** found and photographed on the Moorefield CBC! Moorefield had a banner sparrow CBC season!

**Blackbirds:** Eleven counts tallied **Common Grackle** (4,567), but none like Ona with an estimated flock of four thousand. Half of the counts posted **Red-winged Blackbird** (768), Moorefield (184) and Ona (180) with high counts. **Rusty Blackbirds** (72) were on four CBC's, Ona (63), with the majority. Of the nineteen **Meadowlarks** noted this season, Lewisburg posted 12 of them.

**Warblers:** The **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (287) tallied on seventeen WV counts was a 50% increase from last season, a high count of 88 birds were reported on the Huntington count. Rare, but found on occasion on a WV CBC, a **Pine Warbler** was found on the Morgantown count. **New to the WV CBC**, an **Orange-crowned Warbler** was found and photographed on the Huntington count!

**Other Noteworthy Birds:** Three counts found **Horned Larks** (127), Charles Town (93) the high count. **House Wrens** are not a common WV CBC species, but single birds were found on the Canaan, Moorefield, and Morgantown counts. A nice, very rare find this season, were the two **Indigo Buntings** on the Morgantown CBC. **Note:** Historically on the WV CBC, this is only the fourth record of INBU.

**120<sup>th</sup> WVPP Point Pleasant (Trial) CBC:** Back on the 54<sup>th</sup> CBC (1954) a new count was formed in WV in Mason county. That count ran on and off until the 77<sup>th</sup> CBC (1977). During that time the circle shifted between two center points. In 2018 Josh Holland expressed interest in creating a circle once again in Mason County. At that point I stated the amount of work to create and run a CBC, and that I would like to see at least one trial year conducted to see how it goes. The WVPP count didn't come to fruition on

## The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count: West Virginia

the 119<sup>th</sup>, but did come together for the 120<sup>th</sup>. With thirteen participants, which included two feeder watchers, the group found 75 species on count day and added 6-cw birds! Together they tallied 6,722 birds. All of this is very impressive; these results show that this is a very rich and diverse CBC circle. The WVPP CBC came in third place, in the most abundant species category in WV this season!

Creating a new CBC in WV is great, we have many areas within the state that have superb diverse habitats that are not in a current WV CBC circle. There are lots of wintering birds here that need to be counted, but we need to be able to support these new counts and all the other West Virginia Christmas Bird Counts that have been running here for decades. As always, please help where you can and on as many counts as possible!

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/wv-cbc-results.html>

This shows where all the West Virginia circles are located, compiler contact information, and count dates (when available) for all WV counts.

This is my fourth year as the West Virginia State Editor and I would like to again thank all the WV state compilers for their dedication and all their hard work. Without these compilers and all their participants our state would not have been so well represented in this 120<sup>th</sup> winter bird survey.

Respectfully submitted,

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