



MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

37th Annual Christmas Bird Count (2018)

Co-sponsored by the MH Interpretive Program and The Society of Grasslands Naturalists

The 2018 Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday, December 16. Many thanks to the 37 participants who surveyed territories during the count, including 2 new contributors. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 15 feeder watchers who participated. There were 2 new people that helped with the feeder watch part of the count as well. Starting in 2010, the Interpretive Program began soliciting Hatters with feeders to help with the count. Since then, there has been a consistent group of 15 to 30 observers annually. Having these folks participate usually adds one or more species seen exclusively by feeder watchers to the count's species total.

Count day temperatures were relatively mild (Low = -7°/High = 7°C) and winds were moderate (E-SW 6 to 26 km/hr). Snow was virtually non-existent throughout the count circle. All of the 24 territories in our count circle were surveyed in 2018.

In 2018, 58 species were observed, which was 7 more than 2017. This number is similar to species totals since 2001 (average = 54), and about 27% above the long-term average (36 years) of 46. Total individual birds counted (28,677) were 8% above 2017's total (26,662) and well above the long-term and 10-year averages (14,041 and 20,487, respectively).

As in 2017, most of this increase was attributed to the record number of 21,586 Canada Geese observed in this year's count. The high for Geese likely involved some double counted birds as flocks moved across territories during count day but still represented an accurate picture of geese in the area. The individual bird total was not a count record but was the second highest observed (Highest = 29,541 in 2015). Mallards contributed heavily to the total as they were 23% greater in 2018 than 2017 (2,495 and 1,740, respectively) and 5% above the long-term average (2,387).

Other species, that make a notable impact on total birds annually, showed increased numbers from 2017. These included Northern Flicker (18%), Blue Jay (73%), Black-capped Chickadee (17%), Red-breasted Nuthatch (111%), European Starling (169%), and House Finch (77%) – see Species List page 8. Impact species that were down in 2018 were Ring-necked Pheasant (-43%), Rock Dove (-53%), Eurasian Collared-dove (-39%), Black-billed Magpie (-26%), and House Sparrow (-19%) – see Species List page 8. If this last group of birds were at 2017 numbers, the total individual bird count would have easily been a record.

Two species, Gray Catbird (1) and Brambling (1) were observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. Catbirds, common here in warm months, are rarely if ever seen this late in the fall and Brambling, a Eurasian visitor, have only a few records in Alberta. The Brambling was reported with photographic documentation to the international monitoring site for birds eBird. No new species to the count were found in 2017. Feeder watchers observed 1 species exclusive of those monitoring assigned territories: Common Grackle (2). Other species of note seen by feeder watchers included: Pine Siskin (4) and Common Redpoll (1).

Since 1997, high counts have been closely associated with Canada Goose numbers. Geese comprised about 20% of total birds from 1982 to 1996. From 1997 to present, that proportion increased to 48%. Non-Canada Goose totals have appeared to be relatively consistent over the count's history (see Figure 1).

In addition to Canada Goose, there were 3 species with high counts this year (Table 1). They were Northern Flicker (167, previous high 143 in 2014), Blue Jay (130, previous high 83 in 2013), and Black-capped Chickadee (321, previous high 286 in 2012). One species, House Sparrow, had an all time low for the count (460, previous low 493 in 2013).

Once again, I have included a graph of House Sparrow and House Finch observations from our CBC (Figure 2). Some participants commented that House Sparrow numbers seemed low for the second straight year. House Sparrow observations decreased after House Finches appeared in 1995; since then both populations appear to be stable and observations seemed to track similarly. This year House Sparrow numbers declined whereas House Finch numbers increased bucking the previous 12-year trend.

Regarding the Top Ten Species, the list remained consistent from 2017 with Canada Goose leading the way followed by Mallards. The most noticeable change was that Common Redpoll dropped off the list down to 13 observations as compared to 272 in 2017. Northern Flicker replaced Redpolls on this year's list. The other 7 species were on the list in 2017.

Other items of note:

- Although Black-billed Magpie observations declined this year, they remain 3% above the long-term average and 55% above the 2004-2009 average when West Nile Virus likely impacted the population (524, 511, and 339, respectively).
- Horned Larks continued to have few observations in recent years; from 2010 to 2018 there was only 1 year (2016, 79) when more than 4 were seen on the count.
- Several species of "Winter Finches" or finch-like birds were seen in low numbers or missing from the count this year. These included Pine Grosbeak, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Common Redpoll, and Snow Bunting.

Fourteen species returned to the count in 2018. Six species had absences of 5 years or more and included: Canvasback (2008), Ring-necked Duck (2011), Harris's Sparrow (2012), White-throated Sparrow (2013), Purple Finch (2009), and American Goldfinch (2012). The remaining 8 species were last seen within the past 2 to 3 years – see Table 2 below for details.

There were 17 species typically seen on our CBC that were not observed in 2018 (see full list in Table 3 below). Seven species have not been observed for 5 or more years: Northern Shoveler (2013), Gadwall (2012), Northern Harrier (2005), Cooper's Hawk (2013), Short-eared Owl (2010), Red Crossbill (2012), and Evening Grosbeak (2007).

A complete species list, along with data from the previous 3 years is enclosed below. Birders interested in the results of this and/or other Christmas bird counts can find them at <http://web4.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>. Your comments are welcomed, and should be forwarded to the Nature Line at (403) 529-6225 or marty.drut@natureline.info.

Good Birding!

Marty Drut

Marty Drut, Compiler
January 6, 2019



Table 1. List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2018

Species	2018 Total	Previous High	Year of Prev. High
HIGHS:			
Canada Goose	21,586	19,848	2017
Northern Flicker	167	143	2014
Blue Jay	130	83	2013
Black-capped Chickadee	321	286	2012
LOWS:			
House Sparrow	460	493	2013

Table 2. Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2017 but were seen in 2018:

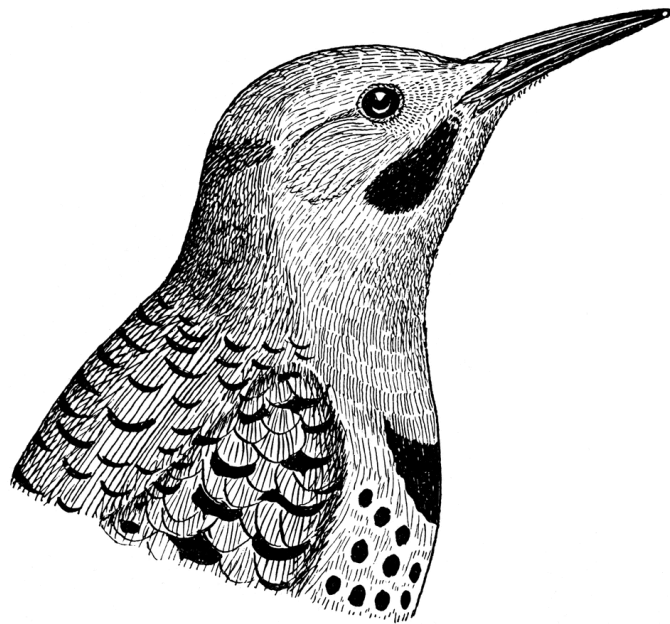
Species	Number Seen	Year Last Seen
American Wigeon	4	2016
Redhead	1	2016
Canvasback	1	2008
Ring-necked Duck	1	2011
Golden-crowned Kinglet	4	2016
Townsend's Solitaire	1	2016
Bohemian Waxwing	27	2016
Song Sparrow	1	2016
Harris's Sparrow	1	2012
White-throated Sparrow	3	2013
Common Grackle	2	2015
Purple Finch	2	2009
Pine Siskin	43	2016
American Goldfinch	2	2012

Table 3. Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2018:

Species	Year Last Seen
Northern Pintail	2014
Northern Shoveler	2013
Gadwall	2012
Green-winged Teal	2017
Northern Harrier	2005
Cooper's Hawk	2013
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2017
American Kestrel	2017
Short-eared owl	2010
Belted Kingfisher	2015
White-crowned Sparrow	2015
Snow Bunting	2016
Rusty Blackbird	2017
Pine Grosbeak	2017
Red Crossbill	2012
White-winged Crossbill	2015
Evening Grosbeak	2007

Top 10 Species:

Canada Goose	21,586
Mallard	2,495
European Starling	936
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	778
Black-billed Magpie	524
House Sparrow	460
House Finch	422
Black-capped Chickadee	321
Northern Flicker	167
Eurasian Collared Dove	159



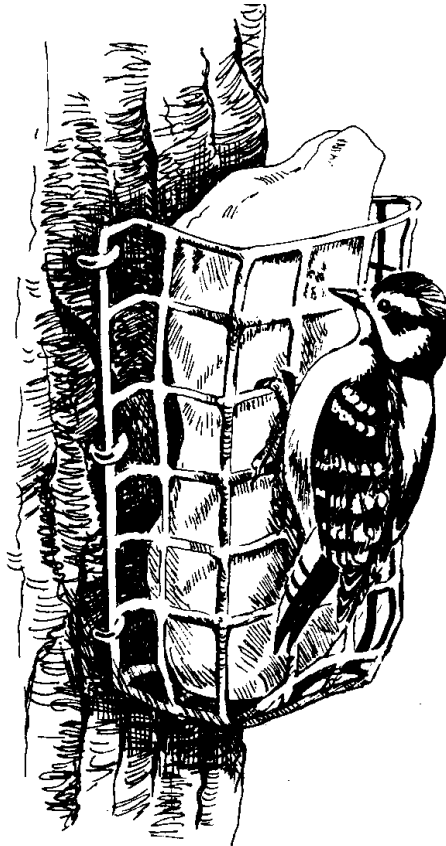
FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein
Dan Schiebelbein
Rob Gardner
Corlaine Gardner
Ben Velner
Michael Velner
Hugh Armstrong
Dee Armstrong
Rob Wapple
Bob Frew
Phil Horch
Annalora Horch
Deby Sprinkle*
Milt Spitzer
Elaine Spitzer
Donna McFarland*
Cam Lockerbie
Colton Prins
Marty Drut
Wendy Blackwell
Barb Cameron*
Jo-Anne Reynolds
Ian Turner
Angela Turner
Dave McKenzie
Anne McKenzie
Dwayne Myers
Ian Wallis
John Slater
Linda Fisher
Jennifer Stroh
Marie Stein
Anneke Baker
Jim Black
Darlene Black
Val Felesky
Charmaine Leidal

*New Participants in 2018

FEEDER WATCHERS:
(If not already listed under
Field Participants)

Frances Barnes*
Rob Benn
Len Boris
Verla Diamond
John Dobbin
Keith Gerrard
Nelson Hogg
Sue Masterman*
Gordon Meyers
Linda Purchase
Lorrie Sielski
Judy Simmonds
Jack Simmonds
Randy Stotz
Sandra Wilson



SPECIES	Dec 16 2018	Dec 17 2017	Dec 18 2016	Dec 20 2015
Canada Goose	21,586	19,848	9,889	18,907
Snow Goose	-	-	-	2
Mallard	2,495	1,740	3,382	5,632
American Wigeon	4	-	1	2
Green-winged Teal	-	1	-	3
Northern Pintail	-	-	-	-
Common Goldeneye	110	49	76	111
Bufflehead	8	5	5	8
Lesser Scaup	5	4	3	1
Greater Scaup	2	1	-	-
Redhead	1	-	-	1
Canvasback	1	-	-	-
Ring-necked Duck	1	-	-	-
Common Merganser	13	15	15	5
Hooded Merganser	-	-	2	-
American Coot	4	20	2	8
Bald Eagle	6	11	26	7
Golden Eagle	2	6	3	2
Merlin	3	1	2	4
American Kestrel	-	1	-	2
Prairie Falcon	2	5	1	2
Northern Harrier	-	-	-	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	-	-
Rough-legged Hawk	3	4	6	9
Northern Goshawk	1	2	2	-
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	1	1	-
Gray Partridge	8	4	60	72
Ring-necked Pheasant	47	82	111	57
Sharp-tailed Grouse	12	32	58	38
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	778	1,648	1,384	1,031
Eurasian Collared-dove	159	260	211	140
Mourning Dove	1	2	3	4
Great Horned Owl	4	6	2	8
Snowy Owl	1	1	1	2
Belted Kingfisher	-	-	-	1
Downy Woodpecker	44	28	27	36
Hairy Woodpecker	2	3	2	6
Northern Flicker	167	142	85	86
Pileated Woodpecker	-	1	-	2
Horned Lark	4	1	79	-
Blue Jay	130	75	31	59
Black-billed Magpie	524	711	557	417

American Crow	25	24	62	19
Common Raven	6	15	14	2
Black-capped Chickadee	321	275	264	240
Red-breasted Nuthatch	114	54	46	32
White-breasted Nuthatch	12	2	CW ¹	9
Brown Creeper	4	2	3	CW ¹
Golden-crowned Kinglet	4	-	1	-
Townsend's Solitaire	1	CW ¹	1	-
American Robin	7	38	9	6
Gray Catbird	CW ¹	-	-	-
Bohemian Waxwing	27	-	51	-
Cedar Waxwing	40	7	5	-
European Starling	936	348	380	1,197
Northern Shrike	3	2	1	-
American Tree Sparrow	28	11	15	78
Harris's Sparrow	1	-	-	-
White-crowned Sparrow	-	-	-	2
White-throated Sparrow	3	-	-	-
Song Sparrow	1	-	1	-
Dark-eyed Junco	71	42	49	51
Pine Siskin	43	CW ¹	38	6
Snow Bunting	-	-	118	41
Common Grackle	2	CW ¹	-	2
Red-winged Blackbird	-	21	-	-
Brewer's Blackbird	-	-	3	-
Rusty Blackbird	-	23	-	-
Western Meadowlark	-	-	2	-
Common Redpoll	13	272	17	141
Brambling	CW ¹	-	-	-
Pine Grosbeak	-	8	-	11
House Finch	422	238	473	349
Purple Finch	2	-	-	-
American Goldfinch	2	-	-	-
Red Crossbill	-	-	-	-
White-winged Crossbill	-	-	-	1
House Sparrow	460	569	757	598

¹CW indicates species seen during count week but not on count day and are not included in total species or total individual birds.

Count Statistics					
	Dec 16 2018	Dec 17 2017	Dec 18 2016	Dec 20 2015	36 Year Average
TOTAL SPECIES	58	51	52	51	46
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	28,677	26,662	18,337	29,541	14,041
Territory Participants	37	39	41	37	36
Walking hours	44.0	50.5	38.0	46.5	45.0
Walking km	81.0	103.0	63.0	77.5	83.0
Driving hours	43.5	37.5	38.5	42.5	30.0
Driving km	744.0	654.5	608.5	745.0	461.0
Biking hours	-	4	-	-	-
Biking km	-	26	-	-	-
Feeder Watchers Only	15	17	18	19	19
Feeder hours	46.5	53.0	37.0	47.5	29.0
Temp °C min/max	-7/7	-4/6	-10/-1	-15/2	-12/-3
Snow cover	0cm	0-1cm	0-2cm	0-2cm	4-11cm
Weather - Sky	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Very Windy	Cloudy Windy	N/A

Figure 1. Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count Observations (1982 to 2018) for Total Birds, Canada Geese, and Non-Canada Geese.

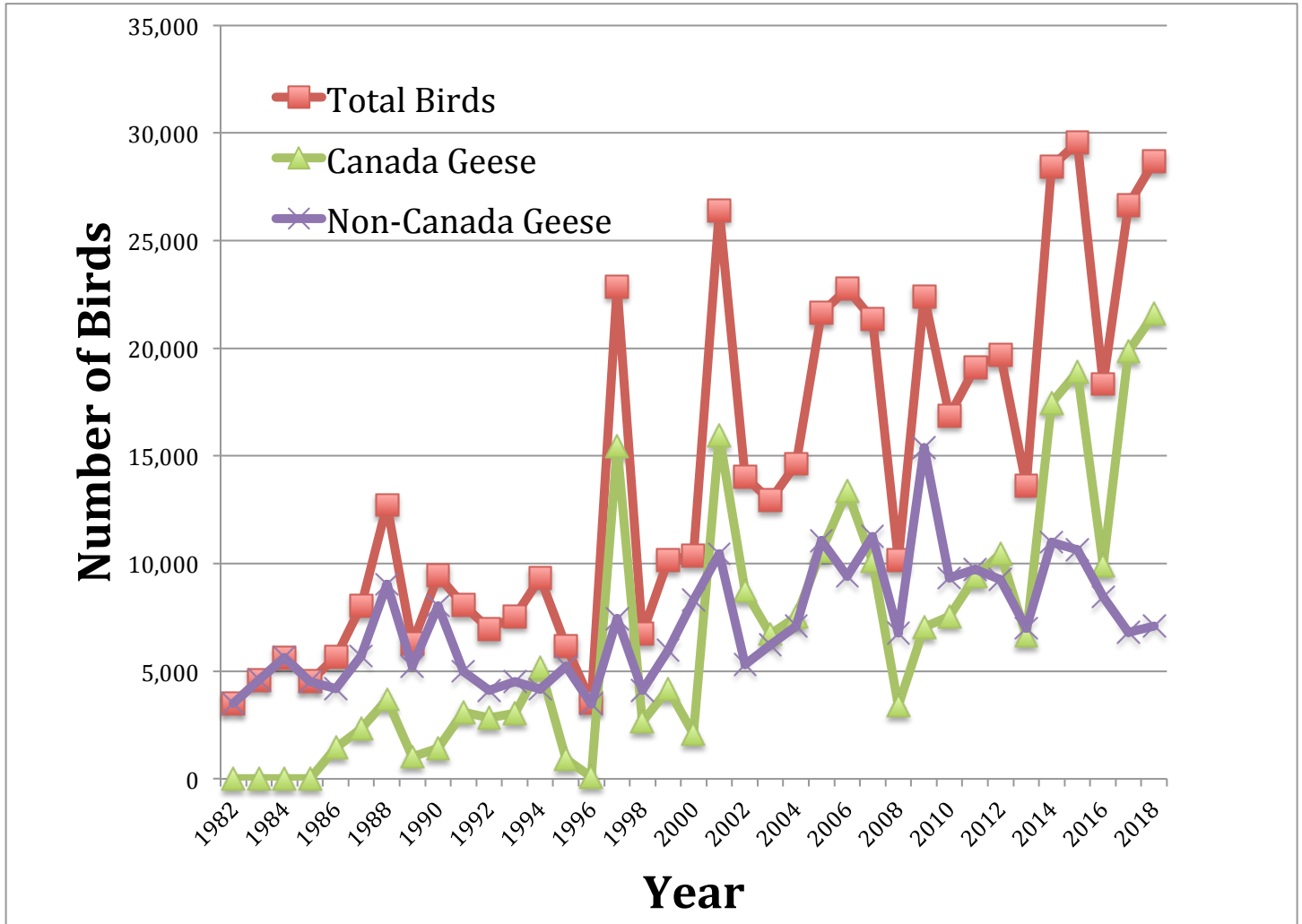


Figure 2. Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count Totals for House Sparrow (1982 to 2018) and House Finch (1995 to 2018). House Sparrows were observed each year of the MHCBC and House Finches were first observed in 1995.

