



# MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS  
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

## 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count (2019)

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

The 2019 Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday, December 15. Many thanks to the 44 participants who surveyed territories during the count, including 4 new contributors. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 19 feeder watchers who participated. There were 2 new people that helped with the feeder watch part of the count in 2019. 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 = -5° C) and winds were light (W-NW 0 to 13 km/hr). Snow was present and ranged from 5 to 15 cm; there were no reports indicating access to normal count areas was limited by snow. One of the 24 territories in our count circle was not surveyed because of illness.

In 2019, 56 species were observed, which was 2 fewer than 2018. This number is similar to species totals since 2001 (average = 54), and about 22% above the long-term average (37 years) of 46. Total individual birds counted (27,265) were 5% below 2018's total (28,677) but still well above the long-term and 10-year averages (14,389 and 22,338, respectively).

As in most recent years, changes were attributed to the observed number of Canada Geese. In 2019, "only" 16,764 were counted, which was down about 22% from 2018 (21,586). Annual changes likely reflect challenges in counting this species rather than real fluctuation. Mallards, another species that can have a large impact on total birds, showed a relatively large annual fluctuation but in the opposite direction. In 2019, Mallards were up 26% from 2018 (3,135 versus 2,495). Both species were above their long-term averages (Canada Goose: 7,331, up 137% and Mallard: 2,407, up 31%).

Other species with a notable impact on total birds annually, showed increased numbers from 2018. These included Gray Partridge (263%), Ring-necked Pheasant (177%), Rock Dove (200%), Eurasian Collared-dove (48%), Downy Woodpecker (50%), Blue Jay (8%), Black-billed Magpie (52%), Black-capped Chickadee (14%), Bohemian Waxwing (359%), House Finch (52%), Common Redpoll (200%), and House Sparrow (40%). Impact species

that were down in 2019 were Common Goldeneye (-51%), Northern Flicker (-6%), and Red-breasted Nuthatch (-39%) -- see Species List page 8.

Two of the impact species with increases in 2019 also had all-time highs for the count: Rock Dove totaled 2,332 (previous high = 2,213 in 1991) and Black-capped Chickadee totaled 367 (previous high = 363 in 2007) (Table 1). One other species, Common Raven, exhibited an all-time high in 2019 (28; previous high = 15 in 2017 and 2014, respectively). Sightings of this species have become more common since 2005. Only 2 Ravens were observed on the count from 1982 to 2005 whereas 88 were seen in the past 14 years. No species had all-time lows in 2019.

One new species to the count, Ruddy Duck, was observed in 2019. Three species, Eared Grebe (2), Mourning Dove, and Townsend's Solitaire were observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. Feeder watchers did not observe any species exclusive of those monitoring assigned territories. Species of note seen by feeder watchers included: White-breasted Nuthatch (2) and Common Redpoll (3).

Regarding the Top Ten Species, the list remained consistent from 2018 with Canada Goose leading the way followed by Mallards. The most noticeable change was that Northern Flicker dropped off the list down to number 12. Northern Flicker was replaced by Snow Bunting on this year's list. The other 7 species were on the list in 2018.

Other items of note:

- Snow Buntings are a hit or miss species. None were observed on the count the previous 2 years but in 2019 they were in the top ten with 321 observed.
- Several species of "Winter Finches" or finch-like birds were seen in higher numbers this year. These included the already mentioned Snow Buntings; the first Lapland Longspurs (10) seen on the count since 1991; and 61 Pine Grosbeaks (none were seen in 2018 and 2016 and only 8 in 2017).
- Horned Larks had a major bounce back year in 2019 with 197 observed. Before this year, Horned Larks had 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.
- There were 2 unusual goose observations reported. The first involved 2 "graylag" geese observed on the sewage lagoons at the Water Treatment Plant. Likely these birds were hybrids. This sighting was documented in a separate report. The second involved a small flock (30) of white birds with black wing tips observed at a distance on the western end of the count circle. It could not be determined if these were snow geese; no photos were taken. There have only been 6 snow goose observations in our count's history; the most ever observed in any single observation was 4. Numbers from these sightings were not included in the final totals.

Seven species returned to the count in 2019. Three species had absences of 5 years or more and included: Northern Shoveler (2013), Short-eared Owl (2010), and Lapland Longspur (1991). The remaining 4 species were last seen within the past 2 to 3 years – see Table 2 below for details.

There were 20 species typically seen on our CBC that were not observed in 2019 (see full list in Table 3 below). Five species have not been observed for 5 or more years: Northern Pintail (2014), Gadwall (2012), Cooper’s Hawk (2013), 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](mailto:marty.drut@natureline.info).

Good Birding!

*Marty Drut*

Marty Drut, Compiler  
January 7, 2020



Table 1. List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2019

Species	2019 Total	Previous High	Year of Prev. High
HIGHS:			
Rock Dove	2,332	2,213	1991
Common Raven	28	15	2017, 2014
Black-capped Chickadee	367	363	2007
LOWS:			
None			

Table 2. Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2018 but were seen in 2019:

Species	Number Seen	Year Last Seen
Northern Shoveler	2	2013
Green-winged Teal	2	2017
American Kestrel	1	2017
Short-eared Owl	1	2010
Lapland Longspur	10	1991
Snow Bunting	321	2016
Pine Grosbeak	61	2017

Table 3. Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2019:

Species	Year Last Seen
Northern Pintail	2014
American Wigeon	2018
Gadwall	2012
Redhead	2018
Ring-necked Duck	2018

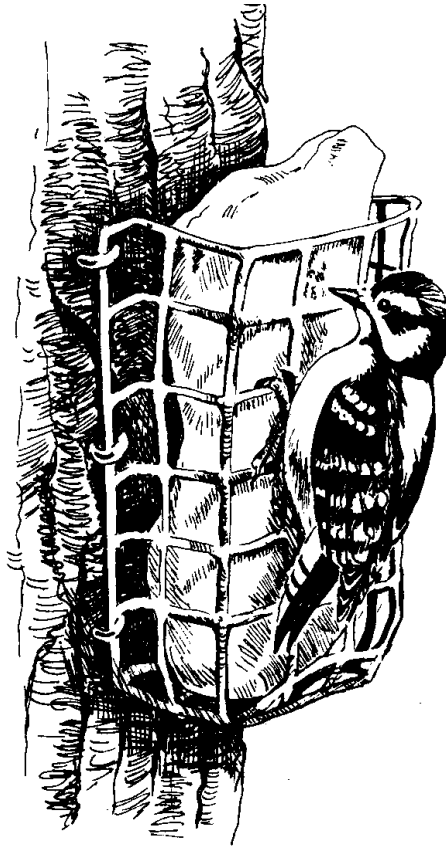
Northern Harrier	2015
Cooper's Hawk	2013
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2017
Snowy Owl	2018
Pileated Woodpecker	2017
Belted Kingfisher	2015
White-crowned Sparrow	2015
Song Sparrow	2018
Harris's Sparrow	2018
White-throated Sparrow	2018
Rusty Blackbird	2017
Purple Finch	2018
Red Crossbill	2012
White-winged Crossbill	2015
Evening Grosbeak	2007

**Top 10 Species:**

1	Canada Goose	16,764
2	Mallard	3,135
3	Rock Dove (Pigeon)	2,332
4	European Starling	854
5	House Sparrow	645
6	House Finch	642
7	Black-billed Magpie	566
8	Black-capped Chickadee	367
9	Snow Bunting	321
10	Eurasian Collared-dove	236

FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein  
Dan Schiebelbein  
Rob Gardner  
Corlaine Gardner  
Christine Foster\*  
Ben Verner  
Michael Verner  
Hugh Armstrong  
Dee Armstrong  
Rob Wapple  
Bob Frew  
Phil Horch  
Jim Marshall  
Greg Martin  
Annalora Horch  
Donna Steele  
Sue Higgins  
Eileen Cowtan  
Cam Lockerbie  
Jeremy Williamson  
Colton Prins  
Abigail Doerksen\*  
Ava Doerksen\*  
Deby Sprinkle  
Marty Drut  
Eric Vokes\*  
Ian Turner  
Angela Turner  
Dave McKenzie  
Anne McKenzie  
Jill Gatfield  
John Slater  
Val Felesky  
Fay Felesky  
Linda Fisher  
Barry Anderson  
Lauren Hider  
Marie Stein  
Anneke Baker  
Jim Black  
Darlene Black  
Genevieve Mathieu  
Dale Holmes  
Charmaine Leidal



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

Sara Joan Armour  
Gwenda Baldie\*  
Rob Benn  
Len Boris  
Verla Diamond  
John Dobbin  
Keith Gerrard  
Lisa Holmes  
Treena Knelson\*  
Sue Masterman  
Gordon Meyers  
Jennofer Nygaard  
Al Olson  
Jo-Anne Reynolds  
Lorrie Sielski  
Judy Simmonds  
Jack Simmonds  
Randy Stotz  
Sandra Wilson

\*New Participants in 2019

SPECIES	Dec 15 2019	Dec 16 2018	Dec 17 2017	Dec 18 2016
Eared Grebe	CW <sup>1</sup>	-	-	-
Canada Goose	16,764	21,586	19,848	9,889
Snow Goose	-	-	-	-
Mallard	3,135	2,495	1,740	3,382
American Wigeon	-	4	-	1
Green-winged Teal	2	-	1	-
Northern Shoveler	2	-	-	-
Common Goldeneye	54	110	49	76
Bufflehead	3	8	5	5
Lesser Scaup	2	5	4	3
Greater Scaup	4	2	1	-
Redhead	-	1	-	-
Canvasback	1	1	-	-
Ring-necked Duck	-	1	-	-
Common Merganser	6	13	15	15
Ruddy Duck	<b>1 NEW</b>	-	-	-
American Coot	4	4	20	2
Bald Eagle	18	6	11	26
Golden Eagle	3	2	6	3
Merlin	4	3	1	2
American Kestrel	1	-	1	-
Prairie Falcon	2	2	5	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	1	-
Rough-legged Hawk	9	3	4	6
Northern Goshawk	1	1	2	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	-	1	1
Gray Partridge	29	8	4	60
Ring-necked Pheasant	130	47	82	111
Sharp-tailed Grouse	31	12	32	58
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	2,332	778	1,648	1,384
Eurasian Collared-dove	236	159	260	211
Mourning Dove	CW <sup>1</sup>	1	2	3
Great Horned Owl	6	4	6	2
Snowy Owl	-	1	1	1
Short-eared Owl	1	-	-	-
Downy Woodpecker	48	44	28	27
Hairy Woodpecker	3	2	3	2
Northern Flicker	158	167	142	85
Pileated Woodpecker	-	-	1	-
Horned Lark	197	4	1	79
Blue Jay	122	130	75	31
Black-billed Magpie	566	524	711	557

American Crow	38	25	24	62
Common Raven	28	6	15	14
Black-capped Chickadee	367	321	275	264
Red-breasted Nuthatch	72	114	54	46
White-breasted Nuthatch	12	12	2	CW <sup>1</sup>
Brown Creeper	2	4	2	3
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	4	-	1
Townsend's Solitaire	CW <sup>1</sup>	1	CW <sup>1</sup>	1
American Robin	24	7	38	9
Gray Catbird	-	CW <sup>1</sup>	-	-
Bohemian Waxwing	124	27	-	51
Cedar Waxwing	13	40	7	5
European Starling	854	936	348	380
Northern Shrike	4	3	2	1
American Tree Sparrow	35	28	11	15
Harris's Sparrow	-	1	-	-
White-throated Sparrow	-	3	-	-
Song Sparrow	-	1	-	1
Dark-eyed Junco	73	71	42	49
Pine Siskin	20	43	CW <sup>1</sup>	38
Lapland Longspur	10	-	-	-
Snow Bunting	321	-	-	118
Common Grackle	2	2	CW <sup>1</sup>	-
Red-winged Blackbird	-	-	21	-
Brewer's Blackbird	-	-	-	3
Rusty Blackbird	-	-	23	-
Western Meadowlark	-	-	-	2
Common Redpoll	39	13	272	17
Brambling	-	CW <sup>1</sup>	-	-
Pine Grosbeak	61	-	8	-
House Finch	642	422	238	473
Purple Finch	-	2	-	-
American Goldfinch	2	2	-	-
House Sparrow	645	460	569	757

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



<b>Count Statistics</b>					
	<b>Dec 15 2019</b>	Dec 16 2018	Dec 17 2017	Dec 18 2016	37 Year Average
TOTAL SPECIES	56	58	51	52	46
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	27,265	28,677	26,662	18,337	14,389
Territory Participants	44	37	39	41	36
Walking hours	41.5	44.0	50.5	38.0	45.0
Walking km	82.0	81.0	103.0	63.0	83.0
Driving hours	51.0	43.5	37.5	38.5	31.0
Driving km	689.5	744.0	654.5	608.5	467.0
Biking hours	-	-	4	-	-
Biking km	-	-	26	-	-
Feeder Watchers Only	19	15	17	18	19*
Feeder hours	49.5	46.5	53.0	37.0	29.0
Temp °C min/max	-7/-5	-7/7	-4/6	-10/-1	-12/-3
Snow cover	5-15cm	0cm	0-1cm	0-2cm	4-11cm
Weather - Sky	Overcast	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Very Windy	N/A

\*Feeder Watchers Only participants started in 2010.