



MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

MANAGED BY GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS
BASED IN POLICE POINT PARK

39th Annual Christmas Bird Count (2020)

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

The 2020 Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday, December 20. Many thanks to the 42 participants who surveyed territories during the count, including 6 new contributors. Also, a big thank you goes out to the 21 feeder watchers who participated. There were 7 new people that helped with the feeder watch part of the count in 2020. 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 = 3° C/High = 8° C) but winds were very strong (S-SW 28 to 44 km/hr and gusting to 50+). Snow was present but very patchy and ranged from 0 to 5 cm; in some areas, snow had turned to ice making access challenging. All of the 24 territories in our count circle were surveyed.

In 2020, 52 species were observed, which was 4 fewer than 2019. This number is similar to species totals since 2001 (average = 54), and about 12% above the long-term average (38 years) of 46. Total individual birds counted (21,869) were 20% below 2019's total (27,265) but still well above the long-term average (14,580). Two species observed that could not be identified (Gull and Blackbird) were included in total birds but not in total species.

In recent years, changes in total birds were attributed to the observed number of Canada Geese. This was not the case in 2020 as goose numbers increased about 1% from 2019. The species most responsible for the 2020 decrease was Mallards as they dipped 80% from 3,135 in 2019 to 674 this year and were the lowest since 2002 (545). This was also down about 70% from the long-term average of 2,300.

Other species with a prominent impact on total birds annually showed decreased numbers from 2019 and contributed to the lower count. These included Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Dove, Eurasian Collared-dove, Horned Lark, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, House Finch, and House Sparrow. The observations for Pheasants and Starlings were the lowest since 2006 (4) and 1998 (57), respectively -- see Species List page 8.

In contrast, there were several species of note that increased in 2020 from 2019. These included Black-billed Magpie, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, and Common Redpoll. The Magpie observation was the second highest count between 2003 and 2019 (711 in 2017) -- see Species List page 8.

There was only 1 species, White-winged Crossbill, with an all time high in 2020. Two groups (17 and 5) were observed eclipsing the previous high of 11 seen in 1995. This was also the first observation of White-winged Crossbills since 2015.

Gulls were observed for the first time during the count. There were two sightings (4 and 1) but unfortunately none could be identified to species. Three species, Brown Creeper, Cedar Waxwing (16), and Common Grackle (12) were observed during Count Week but not on Count Day. Feeder watchers reported 2 species (White-breasted Nuthatch and American Goldfinch) not observed by participants involved with surveying an assigned territory. One feeder watcher noted an individual leucistic House Finch.

Regarding the Top Ten Species, Canada Goose remained at the top but there were some changes. The most noticeable change was that Snow Bunting dropped off the list, as none were observed, and was replaced by Red-breasted Nuthatch. The other 8 species were on the list in 2019; however, Mallards dropped one position to the third slot and European Starlings went from fourth to ninth.

Other items of note:

- One possible impact of the windy conditions were the limited observations of flocking species typically observed in open grassland areas. There were relatively few Horned Larks and Common Redpolls recorded and no Snow Buntings or Lapland Longspurs were seen. Horned Larks decreased from 197 in 2019 to only 2 this year and had consistently low counts over the past 10 years. Common Redpolls increased from 39 in 2019 to 67 in 2020 but were still about 64% below the long-term average of 164. Both of the latter 2 species were observed in 2019 when wind conditions were milder. See Figure 1 for Horned Lark and Common Redpoll data.
- For the first time in count history, more Common Ravens (15) were observed than American Crows (10). Ravens were noted during our first count in 1982 then not seen again until 2006. Crows were counted in 31 of 39 years; the longest gap was from 1990 to 1995. See Figure 2 for American Crow and Common Raven data.

Six species returned to the count in 2020 after short absences and included: American Wigeon, Hooded Merganser, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Townsend's Solitaire, and White-winged Crossbill – see Table 2 below for details.

There were 28 species typically seen on our CBC that were not observed in 2020 (see full list in Table 3 below). Five species had not been observed for 5 or more years: Northern Pintail (2014), Gadwall (2012), Cooper's Hawk (2013), White-crowned Sparrow (2015),

Red Crossbill (2012), and Evening Grosbeak (2007). This was the first time since 2003 that no Hairy Woodpeckers were observed.

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 12, 2021

Table 1. List of Species with Record Highs and Lows in 2020

| Species | 2020 Total | Previous High | Year of Prev. High |
|------------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------|
| HIGHS: | | | |
| White-winged Crossbill | 22 | 11 | 1995 |
| | | | |
| LOWS: | | | |
| None | | | |

Table 2. Species seen in previous years that were not seen in 2019 but were seen in 2020:

| Species | Number Seen | Year Last Seen |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| American Wigeon | 1 | 2018 |
| Hooded Merganser | 2 | 2016 |
| Mourning Dove | 9 | 2018 |
| Belted Kingfisher | 3 | 2015 |
| Townsend's Solitaire | 7 | 2018 |
| White-winged Crossbill | 22 | 2015 |

Table 3. Species seen in most years that were not seen in 2020:

| Species | Year Last Seen |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Northern Pintail | 2014 |
| Gadwall | 2012 |
| Green-winged Teal | 2019 |
| Redhead | 2018 |
| Canvasback | 2019 |
| Ring-necked Duck | 2018 |
| Greater Scaup | 2019 |
| Bufflehead | 2019 |
| Northern Harrier | 2015 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 2013 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 2017 |
| Snowy Owl | 2018 |
| Short-eared Owl | 2019 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 2019 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 2017 |
| Brown Creeper | 2019 |
| Cedar Waxwing | 2019 |
| White-crowned Sparrow | 2015 |
| White-throated Sparrow | 2018 |
| Song Sparrow | 2018 |
| Harris's Sparrow | 2018 |
| Snow Bunting | 2019 |
| Rusty Blackbird | 2017 |
| Common Grackle | 2019 |
| Purple Finch | 2018 |
| Red Crossbill | 2012 |
| Evening Grosbeak | 2007 |

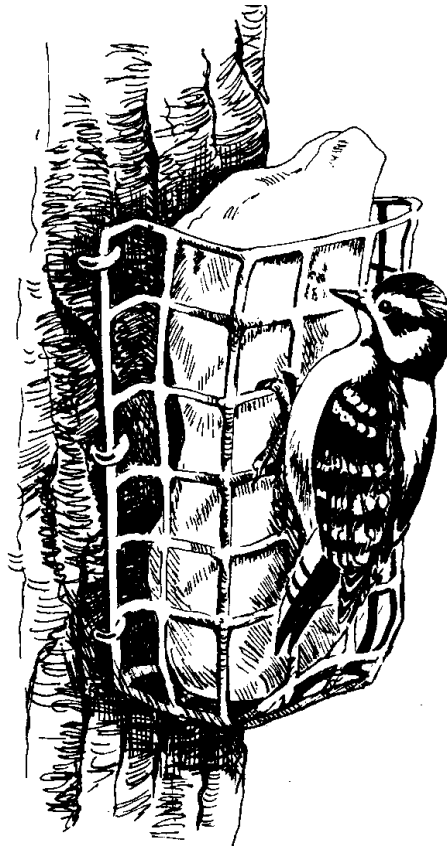
Top 10 Species:

| | | |
|----|------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Canada Goose | 16,849 |
| 2 | Rock Dove (Pigeon) | 1,194 |
| 3 | Mallard | 674 |
| 4 | Black-billed Magpie | 643 |
| 5 | House Sparrow | 596 |
| 6 | House Finch | 431 |
| 7 | Black-capped Chickadee | 255 |
| 8 | Eurasian Collared-dove | 184 |
| 9 | European Starling | 175 |
| 10 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 148 |



FIELD PARTICIPANTS:

Mark Schiebelbein
Dan Schiebelbein
Milt Spitzer
Ben Velner
Michael Velner
Rob Gardner
Corlaine Gardner
Rob Wapple
Bob Frew
Phil Horch
Annalora Horch
Donna Steele
Sue Higgins
Eileen Cowtan
Cam Lockerbie
Jeremy Williamson
Colton Prins
Marty Drut
Hugh Armstrong
Dee Armstrong
Jo-Anne Reynolds
Ian Turner
Angela Turner
Carol Wickenheiser*
Christy Wickenheiser*
Eric Vokes
Amy Moores
Sandi Robertson*
Pam Hodgkinson*
John Slater
Val Felesky
Bruce McLeod*
Linda Fisher
Barry Anderson
Judy Anderson
Lauren Hider
Genevieve Mathieu
Martin Mathieu*
Jim Black
Darlene Black
Dale Holmes
Charmaine Leidal



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

Amanda Baxter-Fix*
Justine Bolen*
Len Boris
Gerry Ehlert*
Terri Ehlert*
Keith Gerrard
Pat Harding
Kent Harding
William Haysom
Lisa Holmes
Krista Kambeitz*
Kelly Kambeitz*
Sue Masterman
Gordon Meyers
Darryl Moore*
Jennifer Nygaard
Lance Nygaard
Al Olson
Lorrie Sielski
Randy Stotz
Sandra Wilson

*New Participants in 2020

| SPECIES | Dec 20 2020 | Dec 15 2019 | Dec 16 2018 | Dec 17 2017 |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Eared Grebe | - | CW ¹ | - | - |
| Canada Goose | 16,849 | 16,764 | 21,586 | 19,848 |
| Mallard | 674 | 3,135 | 2,495 | 1,740 |
| American Wigeon | 1 | - | 4 | - |
| Green-winged Teal | - | 2 | - | 1 |
| Northern Shoveler | 6 | 2 | - | - |
| Common Goldeneye | 68 | 54 | 110 | 49 |
| Bufflehead | - | 3 | 8 | 5 |
| Lesser Scaup | 2 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Greater Scaup | - | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Redhead | - | - | 1 | - |
| Canvasback | - | 1 | 1 | - |
| Ring-necked Duck | - | - | 1 | - |
| Common Merganser | 11 | 6 | 13 | 15 |
| Hooded Merganser | 2 | - | - | - |
| Ruddy Duck | 1 | 1 NEW | - | - |
| American Coot | 12 | 4 | 4 | 20 |
| Bald Eagle | 16 | 18 | 6 | 11 |
| Golden Eagle | 3 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| Merlin | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| American Kestrel | 1 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Prairie Falcon | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 7 | 9 | 3 | 4 |
| Northern Goshawk | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | - | - | - | 1 |
| Gull species ² | 5 NEW | - | - | - |
| Gray Partridge | 7 | 29 | 8 | 4 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 20 | 130 | 47 | 82 |
| Sharp-tailed Grouse | 4 | 31 | 12 | 32 |
| Rock Dove (Pigeon) | 1,194 | 2,332 | 778 | 1,648 |
| Eurasian Collared-dove | 184 | 236 | 159 | 260 |
| Mourning Dove | 9 | CW ¹ | 1 | 2 |
| Great Horned Owl | 3 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Snowy Owl | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Short-eared Owl | - | 1 | - | - |
| Belted Kingfisher | 3 | - | - | - |
| Downy Woodpecker | 40 | 48 | 44 | 28 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | - | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Northern Flicker | 131 | 158 | 167 | 142 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | - | - | - | 1 |
| Horned Lark | 2 | 197 | 4 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Blue Jay | 97 | 122 | 130 | 75 |
| Black-billed Magpie | 643 | 566 | 524 | 711 |
| American Crow | 10 | 38 | 25 | 24 |
| Common Raven | 15 | 28 | 6 | 15 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 255 | 367 | 321 | 275 |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | 148 | 72 | 114 | 54 |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 1 | 12 | 12 | 2 |
| Brown Creeper | CW ¹ | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 3 | 1 | 4 | - |
| Townsend's Solitaire | 7 | CW ¹ | 1 | CW ¹ |
| American Robin | 10 | 24 | 7 | 38 |
| Gray Catbird | - | - | CW ¹ | - |
| Bohemian Waxwing | 7 | 124 | 27 | - |
| Cedar Waxwing | CW ¹ | 13 | 40 | 7 |
| European Starling | 175 | 854 | 936 | 348 |
| Northern Shrike | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| American Tree Sparrow | 14 | 35 | 28 | 11 |
| Harris's Sparrow | - | - | 1 | - |
| White-throated Sparrow | - | - | 3 | - |
| Song Sparrow | - | - | 1 | - |
| Dark-eyed Junco | 44 | 73 | 71 | 42 |
| Pine Siskin | 31 | 20 | 43 | CW ¹ |
| Lapland Longspur | - | 10 | - | - |
| Snow Bunting | - | 321 | - | - |
| Common Grackle | CW ¹ | 2 | 2 | CW ¹ |
| Red-winged Blackbird | - | - | - | 21 |
| Brewer's Blackbird | - | - | - | - |
| Rusty Blackbird | - | - | - | 23 |
| Blackbird species ² | 1 | - | - | - |
| Western Meadowlark | 2 | - | - | - |
| Common Redpoll | 67 | 39 | 13 | 272 |
| Brambling | - | - | CW ¹ | - |
| Pine Grosbeak | 14 | 61 | - | 8 |
| House Finch | 431 | 642 | 422 | 238 |
| Purple Finch | - | - | 2 | - |
| White-winged Crossbill | 22 | - | - | - |
| American Goldfinch | 8 | 2 | 2 | - |
| House Sparrow | 596 | 645 | 460 | 569 |

¹CW indicates species seen during count week but not on count day and are not included in Total Species or Total Individual Birds.

²Individuals not identified to species were added to Total Individual Birds but not to Total Species.

| Count Statistics | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| | Dec 20 2020 | Dec 15 2019 | Dec 16 2018 | Dec 17 2017 | 38 Year Average |
| TOTAL SPECIES | 52 | 56 | 58 | 51 | 46 |
| TOTAL INDIVIDUALS | 21,869 | 27,265 | 28,677 | 26,662 | 14,580 |
| Territory Participants | 42 | 44 | 37 | 39 | 37 |
| Walking hours | 47.0 | 41.5 | 44.0 | 50.5 | 45.0 |
| Walking km | 105.5 | 82.0 | 81.0 | 103.0 | 83.0 |
| Driving hours | 44.5 | 51.0 | 43.5 | 37.5 | 31.0 |
| Driving km | 777.0 | 689.5 | 744.0 | 654.5 | 475.0 |
| Biking hours | - | - | - | 4 | - |
| Biking km | - | - | - | 26 | - |
| Feeder Watchers Only | 21 | 19 | 15 | 17 | 19* |
| Feeder hours | 49.5 | 49.5 | 46.5 | 53.0 | 30.0 |
| Temp °C min/max | 3/8 | -7/-5 | -7/7 | -4/6 | -11/-3 |
| Snow cover | 0-5cm Patchy | 5-15cm | 0cm | 0-1cm | 4-11cm |
| Weather - Sky | Mostly Sunny + Strong Winds | Overcast | Mostly Cloudy | Mostly Sunny | N/A |

*Feeder Watchers Only participants started in 2010.

Figure 1. Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count Totals for Horned Lark and Common Redpoll (1982 to 2020).

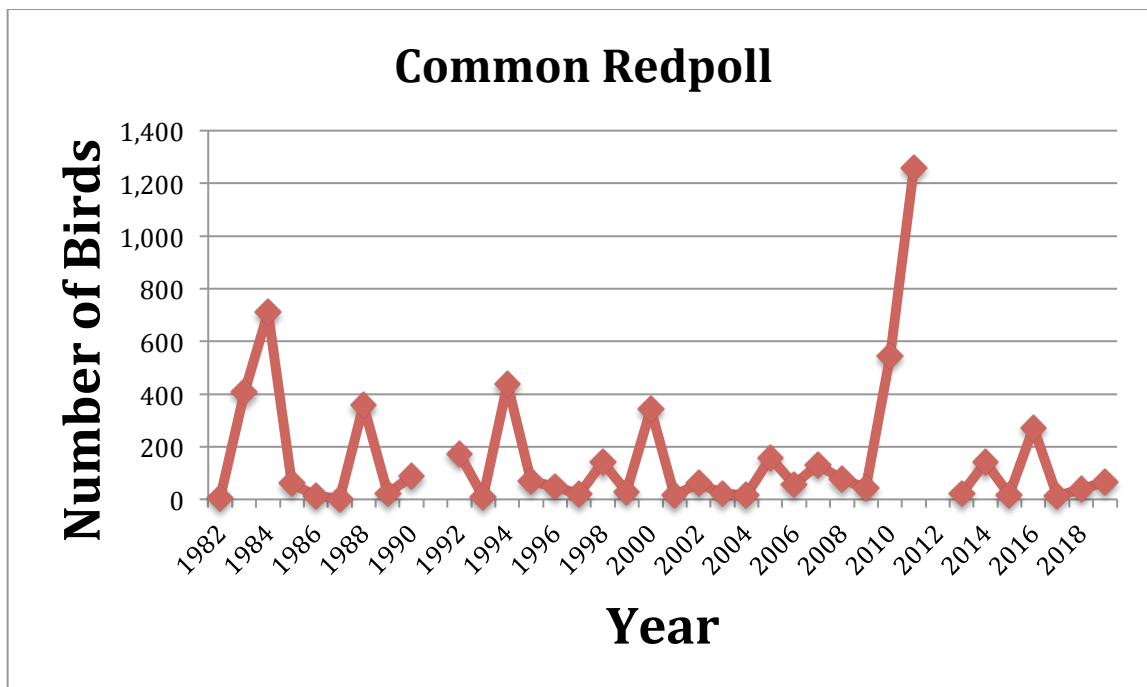
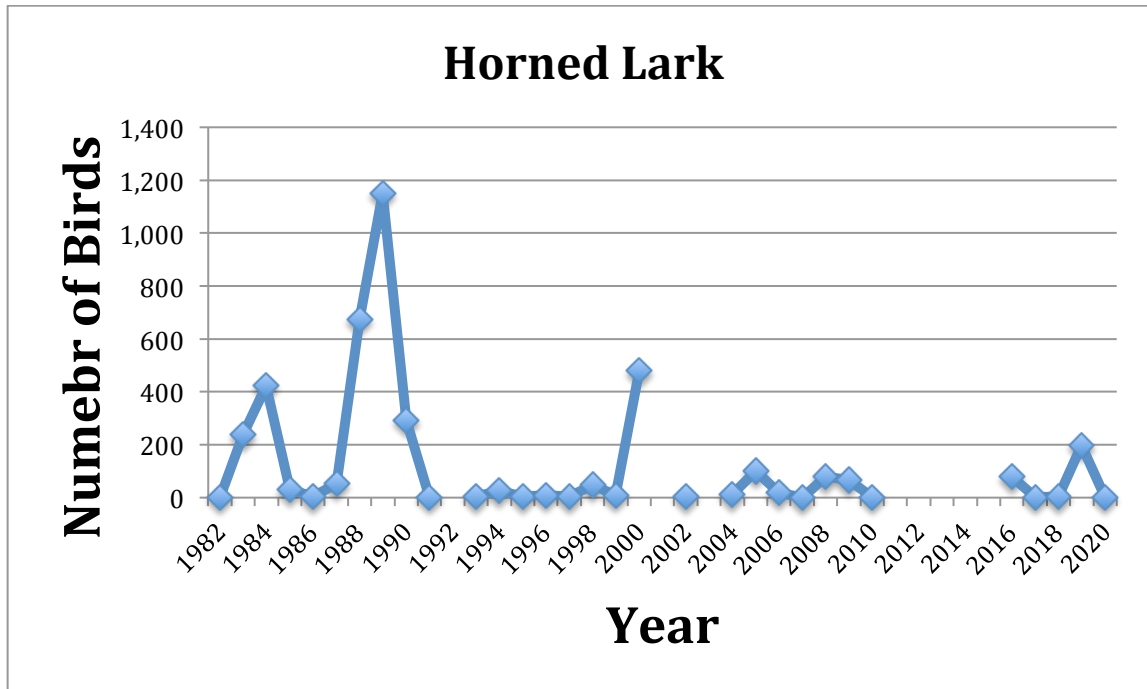


Figure 2. Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count Totals for American Crow and Common Raven (1982 to 2020).

