

The 109th Christmas Bird Count

American Birds

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Birders may not often think of American Coots (*Fulica americana*) as lovely photographic subjects, but these coots in motion at Clear Lake, California, provide just such an image. Photo/Barbara Bridges

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ON THE COVER: Though penguins have been tallied on Christmas Bird Counts in or near southern South America over the past few seasons, they have been of species that breed on the mainland, not birds restricted to the ice of the Antarctic continent. During the 109th CBC Adelle Penguins (*Pygoscelus adeliae*) were tallied for the first time (in the hundreds of thousands!), their inclusion a result of the brand new count, the first ever in Antarctica, at Cape Crozier. Photo/Noah Strycker

The 109th Christmas Bird Count

December 14, 2008 to January 5, 2009

Geoffrey S. LeBaron

Weather, weather, weather—when we plan, participate on, or summarize any given Christmas Bird Count, it always seems to boil down to a discussion of the effects of the weather. Good or bad, during the count period or leading up to it, or even in other parts of the globe, it's weather that drives birds and birders alike to do what they do and be in the places they are during the early winter period in which the Christmas Bird Count is held.

You'd think that the law of averages would allow an area that was particularly hard-hit in one season to have a year or three off, but Mother Nature doesn't seem to recognize such fairness. "Exceptional" and "Extreme" drought conditions continue—as they have for many years—over South Texas, while the "Severe" drought classification continues to cover most of the state of California. The Gulf Coast, just beginning to recover from the ravages of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, was clobbered again in September 2008 with Hurricane Ike, the third most destructive hurricane ever to hit the United States. While Galveston, Texas, took the brunt of the storm and garnered most of the media attention, little note was made of the fact that the southwestern coastal areas of Louisiana were again inundated by a major storm surge, effectively obliterating the natural and human recovery that was under way from three years prior.

On a more immediate level for the 109th Christmas Bird Count, severe ocean storms again pummeled the West Coast from coastal British Columbia to northern California during much of the count period, causing multiple postponements and outright cancellation of

a number of counts. Rather than the El Niño season predicted by some, La Niña had returned for a second winter. Record snowfalls also fell across the Midwest and in the Mountain West, and a snowstorm in Louisiana (!) on December 11th moved to the northeast as an ice storm within 24 hours, encasing much of New York, New England, and the Atlantic Provinces with devastating amounts of ice just prior to the count period. Up to a million people were without power, some for weeks. Heavy snowstorms continued throughout the 109th Christmas Bird Count season, and CBC compilers and participants alike had their work cut out for them.

The 109th count stage was also set bird-wise; during the fall of 2008, a major southward flight of Pine Siskins occurred, and Snowy Owls and Rough-legged Hawks began to appear both early and in good numbers. Discussions were shared regarding the likelihood of a winter finch flight, perhaps including different species from those of the flight of 2007–2008. Also, conditions in the fall had been fairly mild in some regions, while others (especially the northern Rockies) were hit with early heavy snow. As always, there were high hopes among birders of lingering migrants or wayward vagrants. Such are the carrots that entice us into the field during the CBC, or on any day of birding for that matter!

And out we went indeed, in full force, from December 14th, 2008, through January 5th, 2009, on the 109th Christmas Bird Count. Amazingly, despite needing to thread the needle of opportunity with weather conditions, another new record number of Christmas Bird Counts was submitted in the 109th count—2124, edging out

last season's all-time high of 2113 by 11 circles. Just think what would have been possible if a good number of counts had not been canceled due to weather! Of the 2124 areas included, 361 were in Canada (which took the brunt of the weather cancellations), 1673 were in the United States, and 90 in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and beyond. As is virtually always the case, a good representation of new circles is included in those totals, and Table 1 lists the new counts included during the 109th season—9 in Canada, 18 in the United States, and 16 south of the United States-Mexico border. Again this season we welcome a flock of new counts (13) in Colombia, where enthusiasm for the CBC program continues to grow. We also welcome a new continent to the universe of the Christmas Bird Count—Antarctica! People may wonder why the Antarctic is relevant to the avifauna of North America. Sidestepping a discussion of melting ice sheets and global climate change, remember that many seabirds familiar to pelagic birders off the coasts of North America are deep austral breeders.



Each CBC season has its own avian highlights, and for the 109th count the big story was a major flight of Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*). Though siskins were widespread on CBCs across much of North America, this one was photographed during the Great Backyard Bird Count. Photo/Linda Koning

This is confirmed by the fact that the Cape Crozier CBC list (five species in all) includes Wilson's Storm-Petrel, a common breeder along the rocky coasts of Antarctica and its nearby islands, but certainly also among the most familiar of all seabirds in North American waters. Also included is South Polar Skua—one of those real “carrots” that gets birders offshore on boats in the Northern Hemisphere. For more details of the Cape Crozier CBC, please see Noah Stryker's feature article included in these pages.

Thousands of circles means tens of thousands of observers, and in the 109th count we fanned out again across the countryside and waters to tally birds. All told, 59,813 total observers (50,475 field observers plus 9338 feederwatchers) participated on counts, not surprisingly (given the conditions) slightly shy of last season's all-time record number of participants. The regional breakdowns are as follows: 7515 field observers plus 3544 feederwatchers in Canada; 41,180 field observers plus 5750 feederwatchers in the United States, and 1780 field observers plus 44 feederwatchers in the Caribbean, Latin America, the Pacific Islands, and Antarctica.

Effectively mustering all those birders is one of the many tasks of CBC compilers and subcompilers; without their careful management and efforts, the Christmas Bird Count would be a much less valuable tool for the conservation and research communities. Managing large groups of observers is no mean feat, and Table 2 lists the Christmas Bird Counts in the 109th season with some of the busiest compilers of all—the areas with 100 or more observers. Many thanks go to all compilers, with groups large or small.

The total number of birds tallied in the 109th Christmas Bird Count—65,596,663—is up from last season, possibly due to the effect of more roosts of some species being included in this year's count circles. The regional breakdown (2,836,595 in Canada; 61,347,290 in the United States; and 1,412,778

elsewhere) reflects not only the areas with the most coverage, but also the regions where the abundance of birds is likely to be highest. Many boreal breeders leave their northern haunts for more moderate climes in southern North America, while the abundance of birds encountered in the Neotropics is notoriously low. Numbers of birds encountered in the field in Latin America can be surprisingly small, even as the species diversity may be incredibly high. Table 3 lists all circles in the 109th Christmas Bird Count tallying 150 or more species, and thus blessed with both a diversity of habitats and species. Comparing counts with the highest species totals in North America and South America, we see that the stellar effort of 233 species tallied at Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, Texas, is eclipsed by the total of 420 species at Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador. Yet if we look at the actual number of birds encountered, the 97 observers in Texas tallied 628,451 birds, while the 161 observers in Ecuador found only 11,264 birds. In fact, if one large roost had been encountered in Texas, they could easily tally millions of birds; conversely, some groups in Latin America tally numbers of birds only in the hundreds. Each type of count has its own special challenges—and rewards!

While on the subject of bird diversity, 661 species (plus 38 forms and 28 introduced exotics) were tallied during the 109th Christmas Bird Count in Canada and the United States. Included this season are two new species to the cumulative CBC list: **Jack Snipe** from Eugene, Oregon, and **Little Bunting** from Greater Massett, British Columbia. The notoriously difficult to find but long-present **Sinaloa Wren** at Patagonia, Arizona, was frustratingly only seen during count week, even though it was present in the circle both before and after the census day. Additionally, one new taxon currently recognized as subspecies was tallied in the 109th CBC season: **“Brewster's” Brown Booby** from Laysan Island, Hawaii. And while not new to the overall Christmas Bird Count,

Table 1. New counts in the 109th (2008–2009) Christmas Bird Count

Count Code	Count Name
CANADA	
ABRD	Red Deer, Alberta
ABSV	Spruce View, Alberta
BCGF	Grand Forks, British Columbia
BCSH	Stewart-Hyder, British Columbia
BCVT	Valemount, British Columbia
MBPP	Portage la Prairie, Manitoba
ONMY	Massey, Ontario
ONPL	Pickle Lake, Ontario
YTJC	Johnson's Crossing, Yukon Territory

UNITED STATES

AKCW	Cantwell, Alaska
CATJ	Tejon Ranch, California
FLFG	Flagler, Florida
IDGV	Garden Valley, Idaho
ILME	Monroe County, Illinois
ILRC	Rock Cut S.P., Illinois
KYLD	London, Kentucky
MIAM	Antrim-Old Mission, Michigan
MIER	Eaton Rapids, Michigan
MIOD	Oscoda, Michigan
MITW	Tawas, Michigan
MOCF	Confluence, Missouri
NCHR	Hanging Rock S.P., North Carolina
NMCV	Clovis, New Mexico
NMLR	Ladder Ranch, New Mexico
TXGT	Georgetown-Andice, Texas
VABH	Buchanan, Virginia
VTRD	Randolph, Vermont

CARIBBEAN, LATIN AMERICA, ANTARCTICA

AQCC	Cape Crozier, Antarctica
CLAM	Parque Nacional Natural Amacayacu-Sector Matamata, Amazonas, Colombia
CLAQ	Andaqui, Caqueta, Colombia
CLIN	Ibague Zona Norte, Tolima, Colombia
CLIR	Islas del Rosario and Barz, Bolivar, Colombia
CLIZ	Ibague Zona Central, Tolima, Colombia
CLLC	Santuario de Fauna y Flora Los Colorados, Bolivar, Colombia
CLPB	Paipa, Boyaca, Colombia
CLPI	Pisba AICA, Boyaca, Colombia
CLPO	Pachaquiario, Meta, Colombia
CLSA	San Andres, San Andres y Providencia Islands, Colombia
CLSI	San Isidro, Huila, Colombia
CLTU	Tunja, Boyaca, Colombia
CRCV	CATIE-Villa Florencia, Costa Rica
MXBL	Barranca Rancho la Liebre, Sinaloa, Mexico
MXMD	Madera, Chihuahua, Mexico

Table 2. Counts with 100 or more participants in the 109th (2008–2009) CBC.

Code	Count Name	# Observers	(Field + Feeder)
ABED	Edmonton, AB	409	(119 + 290)
MACO	Concord, MA	353	(192 + 161)
OREU	Eugene, OR	228	(155 + 73)
CASB	Santa Barbara, CA	212	(209 + 3)
CAOA	Oakland, CA	208	(189 + 19)
ABCA	Calgary, AB	200	(77 + 123)
CAPR	Point Reyes Peninsula, CA	197	(197 + 0)
ONLO	London, ON	180	(102 + 78)
ORPD	Portland, OR	173	(130 + 43)
VAFB	Fort Belvoir, VA	173	(167 + 6)
BCVI	Victoria, BC	164	(164 + 0)
ECNM	Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador	161	(161 + 0)
CAWS	Western Sonoma County, CA	158	(158 + 0)
SCHH	Hilton Head Island, SC	156	(156 + 0)
CASZ	Sonoma Valley, CA	155	(151 + 4)
ABSA	St. Albert, AB	148	(46 + 102)
WASE	Seattle, WA	148	(141 + 7)
OHCF	Cuyahoga Falls, OH	144	(103 + 41)
NSHD	Halifax-Dartmouth, NS	142	(75 + 67)
AKAN	Anchorage, AK	136	(88 + 48)
OHCI	Cincinnati, OH	135	(111 + 24)
WASD	Sequim-Dungeness, WA	134	(92 + 42)
ONOH	Ottawa-Gatineau, ON	132	(94 + 38)
DCDC	Washington, DC	131	(130 + 1)
NSWO	Wolfville, NS	131	(44 + 87)
BCVA	Vancouver, BC	130	(113 + 17)
LABR	Baton Rouge, LA	129	(39 + 90)
MANO	Northampton, MA	129	(116 + 13)
COBO	Boulder, CO	128	(106 + 22)
CASF	San Francisco, CA	123	(117 + 6)
NYIT	Ithaca, NY	123	(108 + 15)
CODV	Denver (urban), CO	122	(93 + 29)
FLSC	Sanibel-Captiva, FL	122	(122 + 0)
CAMC	Marin County (southern), CA	121	(113 + 8)
ONTO	Toronto, ON	120	(118 + 2)
VACL	Central Loudon, VA	119	(118 + 1)
CTHA	Hartford, CT	118	(108 + 10)
CAPA	Palo Alto, CA	117	(117 + 0)
NSKI	Kingston, NS	117	(20 + 97)
NJLH	Lower Hudson, NJ-NY	116	(116 + 0)
WIMI	Milwaukee, WI	116	(105 + 11)
RIBI	Block Island, RI	113	(113 + 0)
SCSC	Sun City-Okatie, SC	113	(95 + 18)
CAOC	Orange County (coastal), CA	112	(112 + 0)
PAPI	Pittsburgh, PA	112	(95 + 17)
MDSE	Seneca, MD	108	(106 + 2)
CRRF	Rain Forest Aerial Tram, Costa Rica	106	(106 + 0)
SKSA	Saskatoon, SK	105	(50 + 55)
AKFA	Fairbanks, AK	104	(72 + 32)
MAGB	Greater Boston, MA	104	(100 + 4)
TXBF	Buffalo Bayou, TX	103	(93 + 10)
OHMI	Millersburg, OH	102	(102 + 0)
CAON	Orange County (northeastern), CA	101	(101 + 0)
NJPR	Princeton, NJ	100	(88 + 12)

Sage Thrasher was added to the cumulative Canadian CBC list from Blenheim, Ontario.

Canada and the United States only comprise a portion of the geographic area covered by the Christmas Bird Count, and all told there were 2126 species of birds tallied (plus additional 251 forms and hybrids) in North

America, the Caribbean, South America, Antarctica, and the Pacific Islands. Given the 13 new counts in Colombia, this species list is an ever-increasing roster of the birds of the Americas and beyond. Equally important on those Colombian (and other Latin American) CBCs are the North American breeding species that are tal-



Though Winter Wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) are found across much of North America on CBCs, this “Eastern” subspecies bird was a treat on California’s Santa Barbara CBC. Photo/Evan Caves

lied on their wintering grounds. Perusing the lists of the neotropical CBC results gives a staggering array of spectacular and range-restricted resident species as well as an amazing variety of species that breed in North America. Birds from across the hemisphere are counted all in turn, and the regional totals can often be impressive. Table 4 lists the areas that tallied the most species in their given state, province, or other area—the regional high counts in the 109th Christmas Bird Count.

In the big picture bird-wise, the 109th Christmas Bird Count is best characterized as a major irruption season for Pine Siskins. The event began earlier in the fall, with a big southward push, especially along the East Coast (where thousands of flyover siskins were tallied at hawk watches) from mid-October to early November. There was a bit of a lull, then just prior to the CBC period in December a second more widespread flight occurred. Pine Siskins blanketed much of North America south of Canada and east of the Pacific Coast states during the CBC, with high or record numbers encountered by CBC participants from New England westward through the Rockies and southward to Florida, the Gulf Coast, and south Texas and New Mexico. They made it just over the border into Mexico in small numbers, but missed Bermuda to the east.



Pine Warblers (*Dendroica pinus*) are fairly hardy birds and often linger far north of other warbler species. But this bird—a CBC first for Montana at Eureka—was decidedly out of place on a thermometer reading -20 degrees Fahrenheit! Photo/Lynda Young

Also in the east and mid-continent, a major flight of White-winged Crossbills was developing. Across south-central Canada and the northern tier of states from New England to the Rockies, White-winged Crossbills were recorded in good to record numbers. Interestingly in the west, both the siskins and White-winged Crossbills were replaced by a significant flight of Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings. Last season the Bohemians and Pine Grosbeaks moved eastward and southward; this season it was the coast of the Pacific Northwest that bore the fruit (probably literally) for these two species. Some other “winter finches” (Purple Finches, Red Crossbills, Common Redpolls, and American Goldfinches) were noted as up in some regions, especially in the Great Lakes and the West, but not in numbers of siskins or White-winged Crossbills. Unfortunately, Evening Grosbeak continues to be mentioned across the continent by its absence or low numbers; this species is declining dramatically just about everywhere, and the causes are not well understood.

Other avian events occurred during the 109th CBC as well, beginning with a winter raptor push prior to the count period. Snowy Owls, in some instances with near-record early dates, moved southward in October and November. But somehow the flight fizzled; during the count period, these majestic white raptors were encountered in average

Table 3. Counts with 150 or more species recorded in the 109th (2008–2009) CBC.

Table 3a. Counts north of the United States-Mexican border.

Count Code	Rank	Count Name	Species Recorded
TXMM	1	Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, TX	233
TXGF	2	Guadalupe River Delta-McFadden Ranch, TX	217
CASB	3	Santa Barbara, CA	209
CAOC	4	Orange County (coastal), CA	202
CASD	5	San Diego, CA	201
CAMD	6	Moss Landing, CA	199
TXFR	6	Freeport, TX	199
CAPR	8	Point Reyes Peninsula, CA	197
CAMP	9	Monterey Peninsula, CA	196
CARS	10	Rancho Santa Fe, CA	193
CAOV	11	Oceanside-Vista-Carlsbad, CA	192
CACB	12	Centerville Beach to King Salmon, CA	188
CAMR	12	Morro Bay, CA	188
CAVE	14	Ventura, CA	187
TXSB	14	San Bernard N.W.R., TX	187
CACS	16	Crystal Springs, CA	184
CATO	17	Thousand Oaks, CA	183
CAWS	17	Western Sonoma County, CA	183
CAAR	19	Arcata, CA	181
CALB	20	Long Beach-El Dorado, CA	179
NCMC	21	Morehead City, NC	177
TXAR	22	Aransas N.W.R., TX	176
FLNR	23	West Pasco (New Port Richey), FL	175
CAMC	24	Marin County (southern), CA	174
CAOA	24	Oakland, CA	174
FLMI	24	Merritt Island N.W.R., FL	174
CAAN	27	Año Nuevo, CA	173
FLZE	27	Zellwood-Mt. Dora, FL	173
TXPA	27	Port Aransas, TX	173
TXWS	27	Weslaco, TX	173
CABE	31	Benicia, CA	172
CALA	31	Los Angeles, CA	172
CASF	31	San Francisco, CA	172
SCMC	31	McClellanville, SC	172
TXAZ	31	Anzalduas-Bentsen S.P., TX	172
TXCC	31	Corpus Christi, TX	172
CASC	37	Santa Cruz County, CA	171
CASJ	38	San Jose, CA	170
CASZ	38	Sonoma Valley, CA	170
CAPA	40	Palo Alto, CA	166
FLCO	40	Cocoa, FL	166
NCSB	42	Southport-Bald Head-Oak Islands, NC	165
TXAP	42	Attwater Prairie Chicken N.W.R., TX	165
TXLA	42	Laguna Atascosa N.W.R., TX	165
CAHF	45	Hayward-Fremont, CA	164
CASS	45	Salton Sea (south), CA	164
FLSP	47	St. Petersburg, FL	163
TXLS	47	La Sal Vieja, TX	163
CASM	49	Sacramento, CA	162
FLJA	50	Jacksonville, FL	161
CARC	51	Rio Cosumnes, CA	160
FLSR	51	Sarasota, FL	160
NCWI	51	Wilmington, NC	160
SCLP	51	Litchfield-Pawleys Island, SC	160
SCWB	51	Winyah Bay, SC	160
FLGA	56	Gainesville, FL	159
CADN	57	Del Norte County, CA	158
CAPP	57	Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA	158
TXBV	57	Brownsville, TX	158
CAMU	60	Malibu, CA	157
MDOC	60	Ocean City, MD	157
TXCF	60	Corpus Christi (Flour Bluff), TX	157
CALU	63	La Purisima, CA	156
NCMA	63	Mattamuskeet N.W.R., NC	156
NJCM	63	Cape May, NJ	156
TXGA	63	Galveston, TX	156
TXHG	63	Harlingen, TX	156
VACC	63	Cape Charles, VA	156
AZGV	69	Green Valley-Madera Canyon, AZ	155
TXSA	69	Santa Ana N.W.R., TX	155
CAES	71	Escondido, CA	154
CAON	71	Orange County (northeastern), CA	154
ORCB	71	Coos Bay, OR	154
FLSB	74	South Brevard County, FL	153
GASV	74	Savannah, GA-SC	153
TXKI	74	Kingsville, TX	153
SCHH	77	Hilton Head, SC	152
TXAY	77	Armand Bayou, TX	152
AZRC	79	Ramsey Canyon, AZ	151
CASG	79	Santa Maria-Guadalupe, CA	151
CASU	79	San Juan Capistrano, CA	151
FLAL	82	Alafia Banks, FL	150
LACW	82	Crowley, LA	150
TXBP	82	Bolivar Peninsula, TX	150
TXCY	82	Cypress Creek, TX	150
TXRO	82	Rockport, TX	150

Table 3b. Counts south of the United States-Mexican border.

Count Code	Rank	Count Name	Species Recorded
ECNM	1	Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador	420
CRRF	2	Rain Forest Aerial Tram, Costa Rica	398
CRLS	3	La Selva, Lower Braulio Carillo N.P., Costa Rica	375
ECYY	4	Yanayacu, Ecuador	373
CRPR	5	Pacific Rainforest Aerial Tram-Carara Reserve, Costa Rica	310
CRMO	6	Monteverde, Costa Rica	299
RPPC	7	Pacific Canal Area, Panama	268
RPAC	8	Atlantic Canal Area, Panama	254
BLBC	9	Belize City, Belize	251
RPCC	9	Central Canal Area, Panama	251
BLPG	11	Punta Gorda, Belize	239
BLBE	12	Belmopan, Belize	233
GMAV	13	Atitlan Volcano, Guatemala	229
ECLA	14	Loma Alta, Ecuador	202
BLGJ	15	Gallon Jug, Belize	201
GMTK	16	Tikal, Guatemala	193
RPVC	17	Volcan, Chiriqui, Panama	184
MXCZ	18	Coast of Central Veracruz, Mexico	175
TRTR	19	Trinidad, W.I.	173
CLBB	20	Rio Barbas-Bremen Natural Reserve, Quindio, Colombia	172
MXES	21	Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico	168



Smallest of the North American white geese, the Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) is apparently increasing in numbers and is showing up more frequently in eastern regions of the continent. But this bird on the Bermuda CBC, a thousand miles or so out in the Atlantic Ocean, was a real treat. Photo/Andrew Dobson

numbers in expected areas. However, Rough-legged Hawks also moved early and remained more of a presence during the count. They were noted in high numbers particularly in two regions—New England and Montana/Idaho. Apparently their movements were focused along two continental barriers, the Atlantic seaboard to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west.

Another dispersal of sorts was detected by observers during the 109th CBC—birds moving northward from Mexico. The aforementioned Sinaloa and also “Brown-throated” wrens in Arizona, plus vagrants such as Crimson-collared Grosbeak and Blue Bunting in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas illustrate this. Perhaps the most notable was a veritable incursion of five Masked Ducks at La Sal Vieja, Texas—a remarkable record for

this notoriously reclusive waterfowl.

Four species that are the subject of reintroduction programs in North America deserve note. Trumpeter Swans, while declining in their native Yellowstone Basin, are the subject of several highly successful introduction projects. In addition to the native western birds, these largest of all North American waterfowl were tallied across much of the upper Midwest and the East. Whooping Cranes, not yet “countable” except along the Gulf Coast of Texas, are being noted on CBCs in many regions. This year, in addition to Florida (where reintroduced birds have been tallied for several years now), Whoopers were seen in Indiana, Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina. Two reintroduced raptors—California Condor and Aplomado Falcon—seem to be taking

hold well. Condors were reported on three California counts this season and have been seen once in the past on a CBC in Utah. Their numbers are increasing in the Grand Canyon—perhaps more counts in Arizona and Utah will find them in the upcoming years. Reintroduced Aplomado Falcons are doing well along the Gulf Coast of Texas, and we hope soon will be tallied in New Mexico and west Texas, where a second reintroduction effort for that species is under way.

So what is it that drives us to get out into nature and go birding and to continue the Christmas Bird Count tradition? Of course, birders want to see birds, and they are aware of the changes in species over time. As detailed elsewhere in this issue, the Christmas Bird Count has readily documented what thousands of us have known for some decades—that many species are shifting their ranges. Southern resident species are marching northward, and migrant species are wintering farther and farther northward and inland. It's nice to have the confirmation from a formal study, though we all knew that was going on. But why do we care?

Birding, and a general appreciation for the natural world, can be instilled in people at many times during their lives. Mentors or enthusiastic friends can turn people on to nature and promote an environmental awareness. Outdoor activities, whether through birding clubs, Audubon chapters, or scout and school groups, get people young and old inspired to watch wildlife—“Connecting People with Nature.” But perhaps the biggest influence can come from our parents and extended family during our formative years. I was incredibly fortunate to grow up with a family—and parents—who readily appreciated nature and were birdwatchers. Nothing was ever forced upon me, but the general philosophy of an appreciation of things “out there” was always present. My mother did balk during the season when I raised black widow spiders in our house for a high school senior science fair project,

but anything bird (or butterfly) related was always fair game. Cross-country trips with my parents became birding outings; expeditions with scouting and high school groups often turned into natural history tours. Those years molded my college and career paths and instilled in me a love for, and desire to share, birds and nature with others, even those who can seem unwilling field partners. We who participate on Christmas Bird Counts and similar outdoor activities are in an enviable position to positively influence those who are in the field with us and to pass on our ardor for birds and the rest of the natural world.

This past season, my CBC field partner Doug and I were trudging along in late afternoon in the wildlife refuge where we end our day. Over the years we've had some wonderful finds there, but also spent hours walking miles through thickets and along the salt pond shores tallying only a few common species. One of our "old friends" (birds as well as birders are old friends) was an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull we were thrilled to discover on December 22, 2001. Each year since then we've tallied the same bird—often on the same rock—as part of our count. That bird has become a part of our tradition. But this season, the gull wasn't around, on the rocks, in the bay, or flying around. No manner of scoping could find our special gull, and we wondered if it had gone on to the great gull garbage dump in the sky.

As we finished our trek, we cast one last glance toward the rock where our missing friend had been and were surprised to see an elegant, dark-mantled gull flying towards us. It circled around the bay and landed—you guessed it—right on that rock. Our Lesser Black-backed Gull had returned, tallied for its eighth year. Was it looking for us as much as we were hoping to find it? That's doubtful, but it was a wonderful way to end the count. 🐦

This summary is dedicated to my mother, Margaret Shaw LeBaron, an avid birder and concerned environmentalist who passed away on May 11, 2009.

Table 4. Regional high counts for the 109th (2008–2009) Christmas Bird Count.

Region	# of CBCs	Highest Count (species total)
St.-Pierre et Miquelon	2	Île St.-Pierre (50)
Newfoundland	11	St. John's (75)
Nova Scotia	18	Halifax-Dartmouth (134)
Prince Edward Island	2	Hillsborough (49)
	2	Prince Edward Island N.P. (49)
New Brunswick	10	Grand Manan Island (82)
Québec	31	Montréal (69)
Ontario	112	Blenheim (115)
Manitoba	16	Cypress River-Spruce Woods (41)
Saskatchewan	21	Saskatoon (39)
Alberta	37	Calgary (65)
British Columbia	83	Victoria (137)
Northwest Territories	6	Fort Smith (21)
Nunavut	2	Arviat (2)
Yukon Territory	9	Rankin Inlet (2)
Alaska	37	Whitehorse (22)
Maine	29	Ketchikan (75)
New Hampshire	17	Greater Portland (115)
Vermont	18	Coastal New Hampshire (94)
Massachusetts	33	Ferrisburg (80)
Rhode Island	4	Nantucket (134)
Connecticut	16	South Kingstown (128)
New York	68	New London (125)
New Jersey	29	L.I.: Southern Nassau County (141)
Pennsylvania	70	Cape May (156)
Delaware	7	Southern Lancaster County (106)
Maryland	24	Cape Henlopen-Prime Hook (145)
District of Columbia	1	Ocean City (157)
Virginia	44	Washington (101)
North Carolina	46	Cape Charles (156)
South Carolina	20	Morehead City (177)
Georgia	26	McClellanville (172)
Florida	65	Savannah, GA-SC (153)
Ohio	62	West Pasco (New Port Richey) (175)
West Virginia	18	Toledo (96)
Kentucky	14	Charles Town (80)
Tennessee	30	Land Between the Lakes (97)
Alabama	11	Reelfoot Lake (119)
Mississippi	17	Gulf Shores (142)
Michigan	65	Jackson County (144)
Indiana	38	Southern Hancock County (144)
Wisconsin	41	Rockwood (93)
Illinois	58	Goose Pond (105)
Minnesota	46	Madison (83)
Iowa	31	Rend Lake (114)
Missouri	26	Bloomington (60)
Arkansas	21	Keokuk (90)
Louisiana	21	Mingo N.W.R. (103)
North Dakota	17	Holla Bend N.W.R. (120)
South Dakota	16	Crowley (150)
Nebraska	10	Garrison Dam (45)
Kansas	21	Minot (45)
Oklahoma	19	Pierre (71)
Texas	103	Lake McConaughy (97)
Montana	32	Arkansas City (98)
Idaho	26	Oklahoma City (125)
Wyoming	20	Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh (233)
Colorado	42	Stevensville (82)
New Mexico	33	Nampa (93)
Utah	22	Jackson Hole (69)
Nevada	12	Pueblo Reservoir (121)
Arizona	35	Caballo (127)
Washington	39	St. George (109)
Oregon	39	Trukee Meadows (106)
California	120	Green Valley-Madera Canyon (155)
Hawaii	10	Grays Harbor (142)
Northern Mariana Islands	5	Coos Bay (154)
Mexico	22	Santa Barbara (209)
Belize	4	Waip'i'o, Oahu (51)
Guatemala	2	Saipan (52)
Nicaragua	1	Coast of Central Veracruz (175)
Costa Rica	5	Belize City (251)
Panama	4	Atitlan Volcano (229)
Colombia	24	Sierritas de Managua, Conteo Navideño (96)
Ecuador	4	Rain Forest Aerial Tram (398)
Chile	1	Pacific Canal Area (268)
Antarctica	1	Rio Barbas-Bremen Natural Reserve, Quindio (172)
Trinidad	1	Mindo-Tandayapa (420)
Bahamas	4	Drake Passage, South Atlantic Ocean (21)
Dominican Republic	2	Cape Crozier, Antarctica (5)
Puerto Rico	3	Trinidad (173)
British Virgin Islands	2	New Providence Island (119)
U.S. Virgin Islands	3	Puerto Escondido (77)
Bermuda	1	Cabo Rojo (133)
		Tortola (43)
		St. Croix (69)
		Bermuda (105)

The 109th Christmas Bird Count in Canada

December 14, 2008, to January 5, 2009

Richard J. Cannings

A total of 361 Canadian counts reported this year, down 10 from the 371 counts reporting for the last two years. For the second year in a row, weather played a dramatic role in counts across the country, particularly in the west. Four major counts on the British Columbia coast were canceled outright when a series of heavy snowfalls blocked roads for days on end. Only Atlantic Canada escaped the cold, enjoying a relatively balmy count period. Despite the decrease in counts done, there were nine new counts added to the Canadian fold: Grand Forks, Valemount, and Stewart-Hyder, BC; Red Deer and Spruce View, AB; Johnson's Crossing, YT; Portage la Prairie, MB; Massey and Pickle Lake, ON. The Kluane National Park count in southwestern Yukon was restarted after a long absence.

Participant numbers dropped by about 500 to 11,059, entirely due to a decrease in the numbers of field observers. The number of feederwatchers increased by about 200 this year—perhaps a further indication of the effects of bad weather. Bird numbers predictably fell as well; the individual total was down to 2.8 million from last year's 3.2 million, while the species total remained steady (albeit at a relatively low level) at 283.

The weather differential between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts made things interesting in the battle for top count this year. In the end, Victoria, BC, with 137 species, narrowly beat out Halifax-Dartmouth's 134, this despite Victoria enduring one of the snowiest days in that city's history. Blenheim, ON had the best inland count with 115 species. At the other end of the diversity spectrum, counts in Nunavut tallied two species—Common Eider and Common Raven. Other provincial high counts are shown in Table 1.

In last year's report I remarked how cold it had been, but this year made the previous effort look downright tropical (Table 2). Every region except the Atlantic coast was significantly colder than last year. In terms of abundance (Table 3), European Starling stabilized at last year's lower numbers but kept its number one position. The commonest waterbirds—Canada Geese and Mallards—also maintained their positions near the top of the list but continued to fall in numbers even when compared to last year's low results. The only common birds that really increased this year were American Crow, Snow Bunting, and American Goldfinch. The crow results are heartening (for crow lovers, at least), indicating a possible

rebound from losses due to West Nile virus in the northern part of their range.

Two species were added to the official Canadian Christmas Bird Count list this year. The most remarkable was a **Little Bunting** found in a flock of juncos at Greater Massett, BC. This little Eurasian sparrow is not only new for Canadian counts, but a first for any Christmas count anywhere. The other new species was a **Sage Thrasher** decidedly out of habitat at Blenheim, ON. The all-time Canada species list for Christmas Bird Counts now stands at 411. Wolfville, NS, had a Le Conte's Sparrow, only the second ever for a Canadian count, and a Manx Shearwater got on the count week list at Grand Manan, NB, the first time that species has made it into a Canadian CBC report.

Northern owls drifted southward in decent numbers this year, perhaps driven by snow and cold in the west. Snowy Owl numbers were well up this year, with 252 reported compared to last year's 65. These birds were distributed across the country (though BC only had one), with Ontario reporting 96. Northern Hawk Owls were seen almost everywhere as well, particularly in the west, with a total of 49 this year compared to 19 last year. Great Gray Owls also increased from 29 last year to 52 this

Table 1. Provincial and territorial summaries for the 109th Christmas Bird Count.

Province or Territory	Counts	Field observers	Feeder watchers	Species	Individuals	Highest species total and count
Alberta	37	791	783	105	159,551	65, Calgary
British Columbia	82	1794	596	215	787,006	137, Victoria
Manitoba	16	248	104	74	47,170	41, Cypress River-Spruce Woods
New Brunswick	10	193	86	110	51,952	82, Grand Manan
Newfoundland and Labrador	11	176	49	112	37,358	75, St. John's
Nova Scotia	18	431	464	161	226,872	134, Halifax-Dartmouth
Northwest Territories	6	64	19	23	5152	21, Fort Smith
Nunavut	3	2	0	2	129	2, Arviat, Rankin Inlet
Ontario	112	2813	1175	175	1,222,430	115, Blenheim
Prince Edward Island	2	36	4	64	22,215	49, Hillsborough, Prince Edward Island N.P.
Québec	32	620	144	116	188,037	69, Montréal
St.-Pierre et Miquelon	2	21	1	69	10,615	50, Île Saint-Pierre
Saskatchewan	21	237	85	79	73,729	39, Saskatoon
Yukon Territories	9	89	34	28	4379	22, Whitehorse
TOTAL	361	7515	3544	283	2,836,595	



Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*), on British Columbia's Abbotsford-Mission CBC. Photo/Gord Gadsden



Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) at St. Johns, New Brunswick. Photo/Merv Cormier

year, more than half of them in Alberta.

In this wintry winter, it's nice to celebrate the summery birds that decided not to migrate, or more likely, migrated in the wrong direction and thus brightened the count lists of birders across the country. This year's lists included a Black Vulture at Brier Island, NS, White-eyed Vireo at Long Point, ON, a Western Kingbird and Summer Tanager at Halifax-Dartmouth, and a Black-headed Grosbeak at Chilliwack, BC. Some of

the vagrant gulls seem to be settling down—St. John's, NL, had a Yellow-legged Gull for the third year in a row, and Abbotsford-Mission, BC, had a Slaty-backed Gull for the second year in a row.

And at least one species is doing rather well in Canada despite the chilly winter. The Eurasian Collared-Dove continues its quest for world domination; this year 410 were seen on 18 counts from Terrace, BC, to Riverside, NB. 🐦

Table 2. Yes, it was a cold count: average minimum temperatures reported on Christmas Bird Counts across Canada (°C/°F).

Region	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
British Columbia	-2.4/27.7	-3.6/25.5	-2.4/27.7	-12.1/10.2
Prairies	-11.8/10.8	-11/12.2	-13.1/8.4	-25.8/-14.4
Central	-7.1/19.2	-1.7/28.9	-9.9/14.2	-11.2/11.8
Atlantic	-4.7/23.5	-2.9/26.8	-9.7/14.5	-8.2/17.2
Territories	-14.1/6.6	-20.4/-4.7	-24.3/-11.7	-31.8/-25.2



Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) at Beauce Sud, Québec. Photo/Paulin Rodrigue

Table 3. The 15 most abundant birds reported on the 109th Christmas Bird Count in Canada, with totals from the past two counts for comparison.

Species	109th Count	108th Count	107th Count
European Starling	326,355	317,615	457,478
American Crow	282,492	253,898	191,328
Canada Goose	176,799	207,993	297,987
Mallard	146,063	184,012	224,279
Black-capped Chickadee	115,657	121,875	132,821
Rock Pigeon	111,654	117,384	124,107
House Sparrow	100,767	124,430	138,627
Snow Bunting	99,059	80,289	41,469
Glaucous-winged Gull	90,482	93,513	112,596
Bohemian Waxwing	86,597	86,595	76,004
Dark-eyed Junco	74,437	85,397	66,514
Herring Gull	70,049	77,615	97,568
American Goldfinch	58,961	37,583	57,760
Dunlin	53,906	72,663	52,872
Mourning Dove	47,093	55,009	59,632



Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) at St. Albert, Alberta. Photo/Ted Hindmarch