The 2019 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was conducted under cloudy skies. The day started for
one team at 6:00 AM with a temperature of 32 degrees F. and a 17mph W wind and at 8:00
AM when the other teams started the temperature had dropped to 30 degrees F., with the
same wind and cloud cover. There was no snow on the ground and no frozen waters. The day
ended as it began with no change in temperature or cloud cover compared to last year’s
unseasonably warm temperature of 45 degrees F and a mix of sun and clouds.

There was a decline in species numbers this year. Initially our total species number for 2019
was 79 which at the time was a provisional number pending approval of a House Wren, which
was unusual for this time of year, was sighted in Fort Island/Griffiths Park area of Fairlawn,
and 12 Fish Crows which are a first for our area, were sighted at the Chapel Hill Mall area.
However since there were no photographs or audio recordings of the crows’ vocalizations as
required by our Regional Editor, the Fish Crow was removed from our totals and since no
documentation was submitted in a timely manner, the House Wren was also removed from
our totals. Therefore our initial species total of 79 dropped to 77 species which ties our total of
77 in 2001 and which is quite surprising since in the last 4 years our totals have been in the
80s. As an example, the totals for 2017 and 2018 were 82 and 88 for 2016. Interestingly, the
77 total at this time seems to support the question, “What has happened to the birds?”, being
asked by many CBC participants and birdwatchers in general.

Adding to the surprise of the low number of species was the low number of individual birds
which was 26,924. This number is indeed low compared to the 2018 number of 124,147, to
the 2017 number of 216,351, and even to the 2016 number of 32,106 species. These lower
numbers have prompted the same question, “What has happened to the birds?”. Is this
decline in species and individual numbers an indication of bird population decline, habitat loss
or is it climate change or all the above? Or perhaps it is merely that we have gotten used to
CBC totals consistently in the 80 plus numbers in recent years. Since our 1982 CBC, when
we first reached the 80 species total, there have been only 10 years that the total has been in
the 70s. Future CBCs will certainly be important in determining the answer to that question.

Here are a few CBC result highlights. This year there were 3 Pied-billed Grebes, a species
first counted in 1943 and not seen every year until after 1965. There were 14 Great Blue
Herons which were first counted in the 1944 CBC but were not seen every year until 1973.
Although Lake Erie and smaller lakes were not frozen, we still had a good number of Canada
Geese (3801) and we had 11 duck species even though their numbers were lower. This year
we had 53 Tundra Swans compared to none last year. The Tundra Swans were first counted
in 1971. We counted 1126 Ring-billed gulls compared to 359 last year and counted 15 Herring
Gulls this year compared to 14 last year. The most notable waterfowl sighting were 4 Green-
winged Teals, one of the 23 species seen on our first CBC in 1939. The Bald Eagle numbers
have increased over the years since the one counted for the first time in 1986. They are now
a common sight. On a note of interest, their higher numbers were recently reported in a Plain Dealer article, an Akron Beacon Journal article and on a WKSU FM radio commentary.

All the Hawks were seen, but their numbers were down. For the third year in a row we had Northern Harriers. Although counted every year since 1973, no Sharp-shinned Hawks were seen this year. There were 56 Wild Turkeys counted which is the most since 2007 when 92 were counted. The numbers for the Woodpecker species were all down except for the Downy Woodpecker number which equaled the 2018 number of 325. The Blue Jay number dropped from 1189 last year to 838 this year and the American Crow number dropped from 1790 to 1538. The decline in numbers continues down the list except for a slight increase in numbers for Horned Larks, Cedar Waxwings, Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches and American Goldfinches. Remaining the same as last year were the Winter Wrens at 3, Ruby-crowned Kinglets at 2, and Northern Cardinals at 716.

The only warblers seen this year were the Common Yellowthroat and the Yellow-rumped Warblers compared to last year when the Yellow-rumped was seen along with a Blackpoll Warbler and an Orange-crowned Warbler. Missing this year were the high numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds (139 compared to 823 last year), Rusty Blackbirds (40 compared to 105 last year), Common Grackles (8 compared to 1842 last year), and Brown-headed Cowbirds (10 compared to 653 last year). The all time record for these birds was the 2017 Christmas Bird Count when 150,216 Red-winged Blackbirds, 15,122 Common Grackles, and 5,058 Brown-headed Cowbirds were counted.

There was also a decline in the total number of participants in 2019. We had 121 participants in the field and 27 at the feeders making for a grand total of 148, compared to 163 for 2018, to 159 for 2017. Our record breaking total of 221 participants in 2015 still remains our all-time record. In 2019, 52 parties spent a total of 137 hours on foot walking 144 miles and 66 hours in the car traveling 599 miles with 2 parties traveling 24 miles looking/listening for owls. In 2018, 56 parties spent 157 hours on foot walking 164 miles and 69 hours in the car traveling 679 miles. 4 parties in 2018 spent 4 hours looking/listening for owls which included traveling 14 miles. In 2019, 27 individuals spent 30 hours counting birds at the feeders compared to 22 individuals spending 37 hours counting birds at feeders in 2018. There was an increase in feeder counters this year which is encouraging to see but compared to previous years there has been an overall decline in feeder counters.

In spite of our recent decline in participation, we have come a long way since our first Christmas Bird Count in 1939 when we had 9 participants, 1450 individual birds, and 23 species. Our counts could not have grown over the years without the help of our dedicated veteran participants over many, many years and all the new people who have joined us in recent years. We thank you all for your loyalty and participation in counting birds in the field and/or at the feeder. The 2019 Christmas Bird Count is now a part of our Chapter’s long history of CBCs and we look forward to the 2020 Count that will be on December 20.

Marie Morgan
Bill Osborne
Bert Szabo
NOTES:
It is with sadness that we announce the death of two of our loyal Christmas Bird Count participants, Ed Pierce and Cecil Dobbins.

Ed Pierce died on July 31, 2019. Ed started birding the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge in 1973 and became the census leader in 1981. Each month throughout the years, he went to Ottawa accompanied by his birding buddies, Jim Reyda and Doug Vogus. His last time at Ottawa was June 2019. At some point in the late 1970s he began to participate in the Christmas Bird Count with his friend, Dave (Woody) Stover in the Territory that included Goodyear Park. In 2002 he joined Jim Reyda’s Christmas Bird Count Territory team in the Southwestern portion of our Circle. He participated in his last Christmas Bird Count on December 16, 2018.

Cecil Dobbins died on January 9, 2020. Cecil, along with his wife, Joanne, was a long-time Christmas Bird Count participant as a Feeder Counter since the 1980s. He and his wife, Joanne, faithfully attended meetings of the Greater Akron Audubon Chapter meetings. After his retirement as a college administration officer, he started his own hiking tour company called the Adventure Trails Tours and led over 2000 people on trips to the Swiss Alps. He participated in his last Christmas Bird Count on December 16, 2018.

ANNOUNCEMENT:
For the past 27 years it has been our privilege to serve as compilers for the Greater Akron Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Counts and to work with many wonderful field and feeder CBC participants. We believe it is now time for us to pass the task on to someone else who will continue our Chapter’s long tradition of participating in the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Counts.

That person is Mike Edgington who is well qualified to be compiler beginning with the 2020 Christmas Bird Count, which happens to be our 80th. Mike has been a long time member of the GAAS Chapter, a long time CBC participant and a birder since the age of 6. He is a member of the American Bird Association and the Cornell Ornithology program. He has been a member of OOS (Ohio Ornithological Society) since 2005 and was a Regional Director. He is currently the OOS Membership Chair.
2019 GAAS Christmas Bird Count - Bird Species

1. Canada Goose 3801
2. Tundra Swan 53
3. Wood Duck 1
4. Gadwall 7
5. American Black Duck 24
6. Mallard 990
7. Northern Shoveler 3
8. Green-winged Teal 4
9. Redhead 1
10. Ring-necked Duck 65
11. Bufflehead 9
12. Hooded Merganser 17
13. Ruddy Duck 35
14. Wild Turkey 56
15. Pied-billed Grebe 3
16. Great Blue Heron 14
17. Northern Harrier 2
18. Cooper's Hawk 19
19. Bald Eagle 20
20. Red-shouldered Hawk 20
21. Red-tailed Hawk 86
22. American Coot 88
23. Killdeer 2
24. Ring-billed Gull 1126
25. Herring Gull 15
26. Rock Pigeon 803
27. Mourning Dove 602
28. Eastern Screech-Owl 1
29. Great Horned Owl 2
30. Barred Owl 2
31. Belted Kingfisher 20
32. Red-bellied Woodpecker 334
33. Downy Woodpecker 325
34. Hairy Woodpecker 75
35. Northern Flicker 46
36. Pileated Woodpecker 38
37. American Kestrel 3
38. Merlin 4
39. Eastern Phoebe 2
40. Blue Jay 838
41. American Crow 1538
42. Horned Lark 12
43. Black-capped Chickadee 537
44. Tufted Titmouse 301
45. Red-breasted Nuthatch 3
46. White-breasted Nuthatch 321
47. Brown Creeper 7
48. Winter Wren 3
49. Carolina Wren 128
50. Golden-crowned Kinglet 24
51. Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
52. Eastern Bluebird 140
53. Hermit Thrush 1
54. American Robin 999
55. European Starling 8654
56. Cedar Waxwing 528
57. Common Yellowthroat 1
58. Yellow-rumped Warbler 15
59. American Tree Sparrow 137
60. Chipping Sparrow 2
61. Field Sparrow 4
62. Fox Sparrow 1
63. Dark-eyed Junco 494
64. White-crowned Sparrow 9
65. White-throated Sparrow 115
66. Song Sparrow 130
67. Swamp Sparrow 12
68. Eastern Towhee 6
69. Northern Cardinal 716
70. Red-winged Blackbird 139
71. Rusty Blackbird 40
72. Common Grackle 8
73. Brown-headed Cowbird 10
74. House Finch 296
75. Purple Finch 2
76. American Goldfinch 654
77. House Sparrow 1379
Territory Leaders and their Territory Totals are in Bold Type
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