

The 39th Angwin Christmas Bird Count January 1, 2011

The January 1 Angwin CBC attracted 49 birders into the field, tallying 24000 individual birds of 126 species. A little fewer than one-half of these were starlings and robins. Only a single additional species turned up during count week, Red-breasted Nuthatch. Overall, the count seemed to follow the trend of the Northern California CBC season: numbers were down with a routine species composition. Our count's weather added to the challenge of finding everything that was out there.

In the Angwin area above 1500 feet, it began snowing before dawn, with some form of frozen precipitation continuing into mid-morning. At Bell Canyon freezing rain preceded the snowfall, encasing every branch and leaf in ice. An hour of sleet followed the snowfall. Lower elevations east of Angwin experienced flurries and patches of slush. A hard, cold rain moved through the circle around lunch time. From the Napa Valley birders looked up through breaks in the low clouds at snow-dusted hills.

The table below shows nine years of count basics. The complete historic results of every CBC is found at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.htm.

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Participants	38	38	45	31	47	43	40	57	49
Party Hrs	86	70	62	51	79	71	77	98	94
Species	122	122	125	111	134	131	130	134	126
Low Temp	38	41	37	45	38	37	38	49	37
High Temp	60	48	47	56	62	53	52	56	45
Weather	Prtly cldy	Occ'l rain	Occ'l rain	Rain	Fair	Fair	Prtly cldy	Occ'l rain	Occ'l rain- snow

The Birds

With the abundant rains of December filling reservoirs and wetlands everywhere, waterfowl were dispersed and in low numbers. Lake Hennessey typified the trend holding only about 300 ducks. White or speckled geese failed to appear, as did the recently reliable Barrow's Goldeneye in St. Helena. Hennessey did have a continuing Common Loon, with two more at L. Berryessa. Despite the low overcast, diurnal raptors were fairly well represented. Nine Bald Eagles and four Merlins are good counts. Pope Valley with its many reservoirs is becoming an eagle hot spot. After a year's absence, three Ferruginous Hawks surfaced in Pope Valley. A year ago low water and lots of mud equaled almost no shorebirds. This time, high water and no mud equaled same. Take a look at the CBC website and marvel at some of the historic numbers of shorebirds on the count.

In total we didn't devote much time to finding owls. The weather was nasty before dawn and after dark, those that took the time were quickly frustrated by conditions. Most owls were located in the daylight hours, including a wintering Burrowing Owl at Pope Valley, N. Pygmy-Owls at Pope and Bell Canyon.

The list of notable songbirds is kind of short. It is unfortunate that Loggerhead Shrike is now among those notables; once fairly common, it is now a struggle to find one in its old stronghold of Pope Valley. Yet, indeed, there was the one. The cold and clouds concentrated large numbers of swallows at L. Hennessey, a mix of an estimated thousand-plus Trees and Violet-greens, a record number of each species for the count. The Tree Swallow count has exceeded 150 in three of the past four years. Prior to this run, the historic high was 16. For whatever reason, perhaps it's the same birds every year, two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers again are wintering at Hennessey. Probably a first for the Napa Valley section of the count was the California Thrasher near Rutherford. Way down the taxonomic list lies the only real rarity of the count, the Swamp Sparrow at Hennessey, present since around Thanksgiving, and the first on the count this century. A real live snowbird, Slate-colored Junco, was in Angwin.

Thanks to all of the participants for coming out to find birds on another inclement New Year's Day. For their efforts and special local knowledge, the party leaders in every area have my deepest appreciation for what they do to make the count successful. Cheryl Harris and Louise Vicencio do most of the pre-count organization. Cheryl, Helen Dake and Lore Dias put together the compilation dinner. Thanks to everyone.