

The 43rd Angwin Christmas Bird Count

Four consecutive sunny New Year's Day counts may be a couple too many. Lakes Hennessey and Luciana were full of water, and every ranch pond was overflowing. Especially on the larger lakes, this did not translate into abundance, but it is pleasing to the eye. The 133 count day species, plus two count week, made this an average count. Average is always good. The feeling here and elsewhere in the region was the low number of individuals across a range of species. The table below describes nine recent counts. Complete results of past CBCs - <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/>

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Participants	47	43	40	57	49	60	57	61	57
Party Hours	79	71	77	98	94	125	114	118	109
Species	134	131	130	134	126	148	135	139	133
Low Temp	38	37	38	49	32	32	33	30	32
High Temp	62	53	52	56	45	67	59	68	56
Weather	Fair	Fair	Prtly cldy	Occ'l rain	Occ'l rain- snow	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair

The Birds

Waterfowl were not big news. Numbers and diversity fluctuate a great deal between years, conditions notwithstanding. Empty reservoirs or full, the long term trend is down, perhaps as our larger reservoirs age, while the smaller ponds are simply unattractive. Ruddy Duck and Bufflehead are annually the most common ducks, with Ruddy concentrated at Hennessey, and Bufflehead distributed across smaller waters. The December storms dumped lots of loons into the inland North Bay. A Common Loon in the Napa Valley was unexpected on a small reservoir. At Hennessey on count day, I identified a flying loon as red-throated, but when a Pacific Loon appeared there on Saturday, rethinking was necessary, the result being that Hennessey hosted a 'not common' loon on count day, giving us two species.

Band-tailed Pigeon is roaming the hills this winter. However, the majority of the tally was birds in the Napa Valley where they are becoming more regular at feeders. The 268 Mourning Doves contrasted with the five-year average of 22. We all might appreciate that E. Collared-Dove is no longer increasing. However, the decline may be a sign that we are losing habitat that includes those of vacant lots and scruffy parks. Woodland owls were down a little, with owling effort average, that is, not enough. If you haven't looked for owls in your area, please give it a try. One need only sample a strategic bit of habitat to add a little extra to the count results. This year, in the hills a brisk pre-dawn breeze quieted the birds. A Burrowing Owl was in Pope Valley as it often is.

The Acorn Woodpecker tally was 7 birds shy of last year's record. This species dispersed widely in the fall as the acorn crop failed in part of their range. The three Lewis's Woodpecker in the Napa Valley is a first away from the upland eastern part of the count circle. American Kestrel is bottoming out. By every measure, 2015 is the lowest count ever and 2013-15 are three of the four lowest. Steller's Jay, another bird that dispersed throughout fall 2014, was counted in near-record numbers. Coverage of all of Putah Creek and Pope Canyon resulted in a high count of Rock Wren. Varied Thrush, while very common everywhere through November, began to thin out in winter. Still, most everyone saw plenty of thrushes, and like the pigeons, they were more common in the lowlands, in part due to the depletion of the upland madrone and toyon fruit crop. Does anyone remember 1/1/78, when this CBC tallied 5500 Varied Thrushes? For the first time since 1982, no one saw a Cedar Waxwing. They will return.

Passerine rarities were Mountain Bluebird in St. Helena, Western Tanager in Chiles Valley, and Red Crossbill at Angwin. This is the second consecutive year with a bluebird, the count's third ever. While tanagers don't appear annually, we believe that they should. The crossbill was entirely unexpected.

The 57 counters continued the great turn out since NSAS took over the CBC. We had seven first time visitors, including birders from Sacramento and the South Bay. Kayakers covered the length of both Putah and Pope Canyons. The Carnegie Building compilation went off to perfection thanks to Helen and Ava.