

GRAVENHURST-BRACEBRIDGE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2009

by Al Sinclair - compiler

The 30th Gravenhurst-Bracebridge Audubon Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20, 2009 with 28 observers in 11 groups covering the 24 km diameter circle centred between the towns. Having 30 years of consecutive counts in the same circle is a considerable achievement providing valuable data on changes in bird numbers in central Ontario. This year we counted a total of 2290 birds of 38 species. While the number of species was higher than the last 10 years average (34) the number of individuals was below the average (2558).

The weather was good: not too cold, cloudy to partly sunny with a few light snow showers. Snow cover was 36 to 59 cm most of it coming in a 3 day storm the week before the count. A lot of snow but not like last year when it snowed most of December giving us the record for the most snow cover of all counts in Ontario, 90 cm. We had lots of open water this year, Lake Muskoka and the Muskoka River wide open but small ponds frozen over. Probably the most significant factor affecting the results this year was the lack of wild food. Trees produced a low number of seeds and berries in central Ontario causing many birds to move further south or stay north. Another factor was the sudden onset of freezing temperatures and heavy snow just before the count that caught some species that are usually gone by late December.

There were 2 Common Loons, several Common Goldeneyes and 2 Common Mergansers found on Lake Muskoka and a Mallard on the river near Wilson's Falls. With the lake open there were still lots of gulls, 86 Herring Gulls, 6 Ring-billed Gulls and 5 Glaucous were found. Every year recently we have set a new count high for Wild Turkey, this year 106 nearly twice the record last year 56. Two other record highs were set this year, Common Raven (126) and Pileated Woodpecker (10). Blue Jays (94) were down considerably from last year (510). The usual feeder birds, White-breasted Nuthatches, Chickadees, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers were found in good numbers. Cardinals were easy to find, 5 in each town but Red-breasted Nuthatches (11) were scarce.

Finch numbers were unusually low likely because of the poor tree cone production this year. The most common were American Goldfinch. There were a few Pine Siskins in Bracebridge and one flock of Evening Grosbeaks near Barkway. All other finch species were absent. The only House Sparrows were at the Equidome horse stables on Fraserburg Rd. and a feeder nearby. A thorough search in all the usual places in Gravenhurst turned up zero.

The best bird found in 2009 and "New for the Count", was a Carolina Wren that has been seen and photographed at feeders in the Meadow-Heights subdivision in Bracebridge. It has been around for several weeks and was seen on count day on Glendale Rd. Other unusual species found this year were Glaucous Gull at the Gravenhurst Landfill, Sharp-shinned Hawk in Bracebridge, Cooper's Hawk in Gravenhurst, Belted Kingfisher by the river below Matthiasville, Northern Shrike east of Bracebridge, Golden-crowned Kinglet at the Fire College and a White-throated Sparrow at a feeder in Bracebridge. In count week a Bald Eagle was seen flying over Gravenhurst and a Great-horned Owl was near Barkway.

Following the count the results were tallied at a potluck supper in Bracebridge. Thanks to Karen Love and Mary Ann Johnson for organizing the meal. And finally here are the results of the Team competition. This year Bracebridge led by Al Sinclair had a convincing win beating Gravenhurst led by Dan Burton 32 species to 29, this despite the fact that Gravenhurst split into more groups and brought in some outside talent. The Bracebridge team had a close call though when the leader's group was stranded in the South Falls canyon at the bottom of a slippery road. On their third attempt their car finally crept over the top. As usually the loser was presented with the "Plastic Owl Trophy" by the official trophy keeper Ron Stager. Thanks to all the participants for making this another successful count.

GRAVENHURST TEAM

G1-Marion & Terry Whittam
G2a-Dianna Wolfe, Rob Wilson
G2b-Marilee Koenderink, Dan Burton
G3-Pauline & Jim Goodfellow, Cyril & Marion Fry
G4-Rosemarie Hinzmann, Ron Stager
G5a-Janice House, Moira Payne
G5b-Burke Korol, Brian Pfrimmer
species seen = 29
individuals counted = 1504

BRACEBRIDGE TEAM

B6&10-Al Sinclair, Linda Boon, Stephanie Lehman
B7-Bill Dickinson, Ian & Mary Willmott
B8-Joan Paget, Bob Burton, Doug Smith
B9-David & Regan Goodyear, Vicki Goran
species seen = 32
individuals counted = 786

GRAVENHURST-BRACEBRIDGE - DEC 20, 2009

WEATHER: cloudy to partly sunny, winds light, light snow showers, -9/-3 C, snow cover 36 to 59 cm

SPECIES LIST

COMMON LOON 2
CANADA GOOSE 6
MALLARD 1
COMMON GOLDENEYE 11
COMMON MERGANSER 2
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK 1
COOPER'S HAWK 1
RED-TAILED HAWK 2
BALD EAGLE COUNT WEEK
RUFFED GROUSE 3
WILD TURKEY 106 (NEW COUNT HIGH)
RING-BILLED GULL 6
HERRING GULL 86
GLAUCOUS GULL 5
ROCK PIGEON 202
MOURNING DOVE 141
GREAT HORNED OWL COUNT WEEK
BELTED KINGFISHER 1
DOWNY WOODPECKER 31
HAIRY WOODPECKER 60
PILEATED WOODPECKER 10 (NEW COUNT HIGH)
BLUE JAY 94
AMERICAN CROW 27
COMMON RAVEN 126 (NEW COUNT HIGH)
BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE 793
RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH 11
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH 74
BROWN CREEPER 8
CAROLINA WREN 1 (NEW COUNT SPECIES)
GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET 1
NORTHERN SHRIKE 1
EUROPEAN STARLING 233
NORTHERN CARDINAL 10
AMERICAN TREE SPARROW 7
WHITE-THROATED SPARROW 1
DARK-EYED JUNCO 10
PINE SISKIN 12
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH 136
EVENING GROSBEAK 44
HOUSE SPARROW 24

Count Week: species missed on count day but seen 3 days before or after count day