

Fairbanks Christmas Bird Count Summary by Laurel Devaney

The Arctic Audubon Society's 62nd annual Fairbanks Christmas Bird Count was held on December 17 this year. Counters in the field faced challenges due to recent heavy snowfalls and the first cold snap of winter. Despite trying conditions, 149 people counted birds at their home feeders or hit the roads and trails in cars, and on skis, snowshoes, and snow machines. A total of 6,986 birds were tallied representing 26 species. An additional 3 bird species were located during count week.



Redpolls and white-winged crossbills tend to range widely across the boreal forest and their numbers can vary wildly from year to year. Redpoll numbers were back up to 905 this year after a record low of only 30 individuals found in the entire circle last year. Field counters located 95 crossbills this year compared to 1,195 and 1,343 redpolls seen during our last big spruce cone crop in 2018.

A few birds normally considered summer residents were found for the CBC. A single slate-colored junco and white-crowned sparrow were discovered along with a phenomenal 9 American robins counted in a single chokecherry tree on Ft. Wainwright. Bald eagles continued their recent trend of over-wintering in Fairbanks in small numbers. Three were found by Michelle Sopoliga as she hiked the trails at Tanana Lakes Recreation Area.



Notable misses this year were great-horned owl and boreal owl. Great-horned owls are one of the earliest breeders in the Interior, but cold temperatures might have kept them from calling. Boreal owls are easy miss unless they are seen hunting at bird feeders. Golden-crowned kinglets are a tiny songbird that have been successfully overwintering in small numbers-perhaps due to warming winters. They have been found for the CBC since 2015 but eluded counters this year.

Perhaps the biggest success of the 2022 Christmas Bird Count was that counters could meet in person for a count re-cap for the first time since 2019. Count veterans and new recruits enjoyed sharing a potluck and recounting bird stories from their day in the field.