

# 2019 Oakridge Christmas Bird Count

by Joel Geier, Count Coordinator and Compiler

A nine-hour break in early January rains was timed perfectly for the daylight portion of the Oakridge CBC on January 4, 2020. Thanks to that, plus the efforts of 13 energetic volunteers, we found 73 species (plus a Mute Swan of suspect origin) on Count Day. That's the highest number of species found on this count since its restart in 2009, after 25 years of dormancy.

Three more species – Hooded Merganser, Killdeer, and White-crowned Sparrow – were found during Count Week.

Two new species that have been expanding their presence in western Oregon made it onto the all-time list: a Barred Owl responded to small-owl imitations in Greenwaters Park just before dawn, and a Black Phoebe turned up at the wetland below Hills Creek Dam. Virginia Rail, previously found only as a Count Week bird, finally made it onto the Count Day list when one called from a remedial wetland on the old mill site, reacting to a Bald Eagle that flew over.

Red-shouldered Hawk and Lesser Goldfinch – first recorded in 2012 and 2017, respectively – were found again this year. New high counts were recorded for Ruddy Duck (7 on Hills Creek Reservoir), Great Gray Owl (2 hunting separately on private land around High Prairie), and White-throated Sparrow (2 visiting separate feeders). The tally of 9 Anna's Hummingbirds was the second-highest on record. The presence of 2 Great Gray Owls raises hopes that they might still be nesting in the same area documented by USFS biologists about a decade ago.

A lone American Pipit on the west side of Hills Creek Reservoir was the first record since the count was restarted in 2009. High marks were also set for Steller's Jay (88), California Scrub-Jay (45), Black-capped Chickadee (77), Spotted Towhee (41), Song Sparrow (55), and Golden-crowned Sparrow (46).

Oddly enough, the nice weather might have depressed counts of species associated with conifer-forest habitat in the higher elevations of the circle. As the day warmed up, trees laden with snow from the previous night began to shed their loads, producing a nearly continuous cascade of wet snow. Forest birds seemed to respond by staying under cover.

No grouse were found, Canada Jays (6) were wary, and notably low tallies were recorded for Brown Creeper (2) and Golden-crowned Kinglet (75). Only 2 American Dippers were found, perhaps because streams were flowing at all elevations, so there was no need for them to concentrate in more visible locations lower down.

Thanks to our volunteers including Oakridge-Westfir locals Alicja Nichols, Scott Nelson, Mary Lee Sayre, and Amy Weih, plus Alison Center, Grace Fowler-Gore, Lindsey Wickre, and Aaron Eastman, who drove up from Cottage Grove, Sue Nay from Pleasant Hill, and Eugene-Springfield birders David Braunschweiger, Diane Horgan, and Don Laufer.