

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

74th RAS and 121st National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count Summary

Date: 12/20/2020

Thanks to all our field and feeder counters for making this effort such a success despite the COVID-19 restrictions and deep snow!

Weather: Weather conditions during the RAS 74th annual CBC were cold and messy due to the deep snow still on the ground left over from the Nor'easter of December 16-17. During daylight birding hours, it was mostly overcast to partly sunny with temperatures ranging from 25 to 32°F (**Figure 1**). Dew Point temperatures ranged from 19 to 27°F. Sustained winds ranged from 0 to 2 mph. Wind gusts ranged from 1 to 4 mph until about 2 PM. Thereafter, gusts increased to 4 to 7 mph as the wind direction shifted from the South to ENE.

Temperatures during nocturnal birding hours (from the earliest start time, 5:30 AM, to sunrise, 7:17 AM) ranged from 24 to 25°F with dew point temperatures ranging from 18 to 20°F. Winds during the period were 0 mph.

Prior to Count Week (Dec 17-23), air temperatures were relatively mild from December 1 through December 14 when the average daily air temperature ranged from 35 to 48°F. Temperatures dropped precipitously to 31 on Dec 15 and then 23°F on Dec 16 as the Nor'easter moved in. There were only six days with low temperatures above freezing, but all 14 days had daily high temperatures above freezing. The arrival of the Nor'easter so close to Count Week and Count Day resulted in rapid freezing of most waterbodies and left a residual 5-10 inches of snow on the ground.

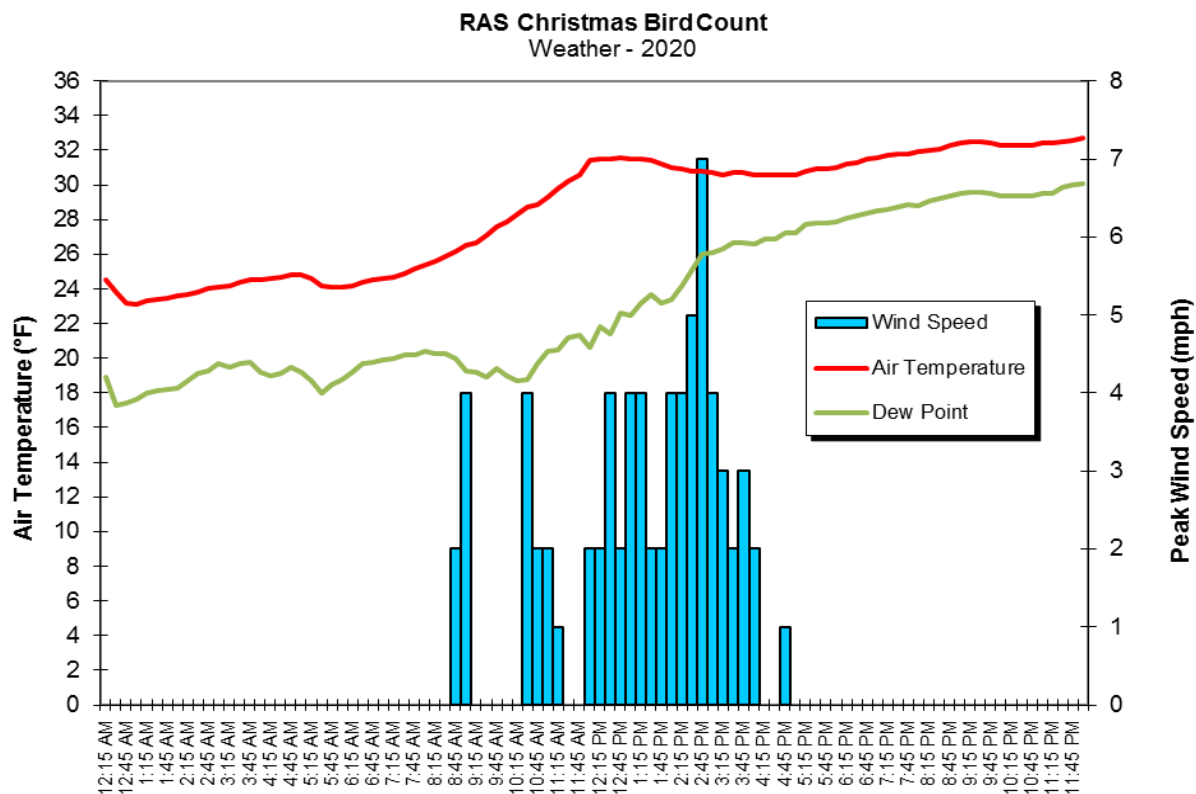


Figure 1. Weather conditions for December 20, 2020 RAS CBC: Air temperature, dew point, and maximum wind gusts.

Field Observers: 35 field counters (+ 1 future official counter) on Count Day.

District	No.	Counters
1	4	Alan Wells (Compiler), Della Wells, Julia Warger, Tom Cunningham
2	5	Simon Streatfeild, Elyse Fuller, Tom Fuller, (+ Phoebe Fuller), Tom Glover, Gene Herskovics
3	3	Frank Kemmer, Catherine Parker, Cherill Stroud
4	3	Nancy Slowik, Karen Nickeson, Joanna Galdone
5	2	Zenon Bachir, Pat Murray
6	4	Stephanie Garber, Michael Garber, Suzanne Barclay, Walter Aurell
7	3	Carol Weiss, Nigel Bark, Bernie Doyle
8	3	Ron Conzo, Karen D'Alessandri, Jean Arcieri
9	6	Vince Plogar, Drew Ciganek, Karl Knoecklein, Tom Dow, Elda Dow, Chris Healy
10	2	Elijah Goodwin, Bob Lewis

Districts: 01 Haverstraw and Stony Point; 02 North Ramapo; 03 South Ramapo; 04 North and West Clarkstown; 05 Central Clarkstown; 06 South Clarkstown; 07 West Orangetown; 08 East Clarkstown; 09 East Orangetown; 10 Westchester.

Feeder Counters (5 Locations): Gene Brown, Nancy Slowik, F. Allen Spooner, Judy Cinquina, Donna Nye

Coverage: Daytime birding activities logged 398 miles traveled by car, 51 miles traveled by foot; 63 hrs on foot and 32 hrs by car. An additional 7 hours were spent on nighttime birding (owling). The COVID-19 restrictions and snow conditions had a significant impact on our coverage this year. The number of participants, 35, is slightly below the 2002-2018 median of 39.

Results: Rockland Audubon Society conducted its 74th annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 20, 2020. Thirty-five individuals (plus 4 year old Phoebe Fuller) participated in the field count, tallying 14,911 birds of 82 different species. Five feeder counters (at 5 locations) added 215 birds of 21 species. Combining both field and feeder counts, 14,911 individuals representing 82 species were tallied. Four additional species were added during Count Week bringing the total number of species detected to 86.

The four Count Week species were:

Common Name	Date Seen	District	Location	Observers
Lesser Scaup	12/18/20	8	Rockland Lake	Ron Conzo, Zenon Bachir
Pied-billed Grebe	12/23/20	7	Rockland Lake	Alan & Della Wells
Purple Finch	12/21/20	7	Home Feeder	Judy Cinquina
Tennessee Warbler	12/22/20	10	Home Feeder	Bob Lewis

The number of species observed was relatively high by historic standards. The 82 count day species marks the 75th percentile of all RAS count years (1947-2020) and the 61st percentile of all modern RAS circle boundary years (1978-2020). The number of individuals is, however, among the lowest seen: the 45th percentile for 1947-2020 and 12th percentile for 1978-2020. Thirty-one (31) species made up 95% of the total number of birds counted.

New high counts were established for: **Canada Goose** (4,892 vs 4401 in 2013), **Mute Swan** (159 vs 152 in 2019), **Bald Eagle** (53 vs 44 in 2012), **Carolina Wren** (92 vs 59 in 2019), and **Red-breasted Merganser** (100 vs 45 in 1986). The two **Purple Sandpipers** seen at Piermont Pier this year double the previous high of one seen in 2010.

Some Highlights:

Red-breasted Merganser – The Rockland Lake sighting of approximately 50-100 Red-breasted Mergansers was highly unusual. In the previous 73 years, this species has been seen in only 21 years (or 28% of the counts). Of these, 16 were of just 1-3 individuals, three counts were of 5-8 individuals, and only two counts were greater than eight individuals. There was a count of 26 in 1981 and a count of 45 in 1986. Prior to 2020, none have been seen since 2012. We did have a couple of other sightings this year (12 in District 9 and 1 in District 10).

Purple Sandpiper – Prior to finding two Purple Sandpipers at Piermont Pier this year, this species has been reported on the RAS CBC only once before. A single individual was found in 2010 at Piermont Pier.

Rough-legged Hawk – While never common in the RAS CBC, this species was not an unusual winter occurrence from 1947 through 2000. During that period, Rough-legged Hawks were seen in 13 years (19 individuals). Since 2001 single individuals of this species have been found in only three years (2002, 2008, and 2020).

Chipping Sparrow – This small sparrow is a common summer resident in our area. It generally departs by late November only to be replaced by the similar appearing American Tree Sparrow. Winter reports of Chipping Sparrows are often misidentifications of the latter species. Since the inception of the RAS CBC, Chipping Sparrow reports have been accepted in only 17 years (23%). This year there were a number of well-documented reports of Chipping Sparrows throughout the county, especially at feeders, both before and after the RAS CBC. The team from District 2 located one among a large flock of juncos foraging in the parking lot at Rockland Community College on Count Day.

Tennessee Warbler – Bob Lewis reported this small, greenish warbler seen near the base of his feeder in Sleepy Hollow (District 10, our recently added count area). This is the first occurrence of this species during the entirety of the RAS CBC. A check of eBird records for December in the Northeast indicates that, while very rare, such an occurrence is not unprecedented.

Misses

Missed birds are those birds typically seen but not found during the current year. There were numerous “MISSES” this year with a “MISS” defined as any species not found on Count Day (or Count Week), but found in 40% or more (*except as noted*) of the RAS CBC counts since 1947.

Common Goldeneye – Common Goldeneye has been a nearly annual RAS CBC occurrence, often found in double digit numbers. It has been seen in 63 of the 74 (85%) year history of the RAS count.

Redhead – This duck is generally uncommon on the RAS CBC, having occurred in only 18 years since 1947 (23%). It is included in this list of misses, however, because two to three individuals were seen rather consistently at Rockland Lake both before and after Count Week. Somehow they were missed on Count Day and even during Count Week!

Ruffed Grouse and **Ring-necked Pheasant** were again missed this year. Both have been seen in 40 previous counts. Ring-necked Pheasant has not been seen since 1995 and are now probably extirpated from the county. Any recent sightings are likely released or escaped farm raised game birds. Ruffed Grouse has not been seen on the count since 2001.

American Kestrel – Seen in 55 (74%) previous years. Common before 1997, but sporadic and declining thereafter. Last seen in 2014.

Killdeer – Seen in 36 (49%) previous counts, last seen in 2017.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – Seen in 54 (73%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

Hermit Thrush – Seen in 49 (66%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

Gray Catbird – Seen in 61 (82%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

Yellow-rumped Warbler – Seen in 54 (73%) previous counts, last seen in 2017.

Eastern Towhee – Seen in 51 (69%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

Savannah Sparrow – Seen in 34 (46%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

Brown-headed Cowbird – Seen in 52 (70%) previous counts, last seen in 2019.

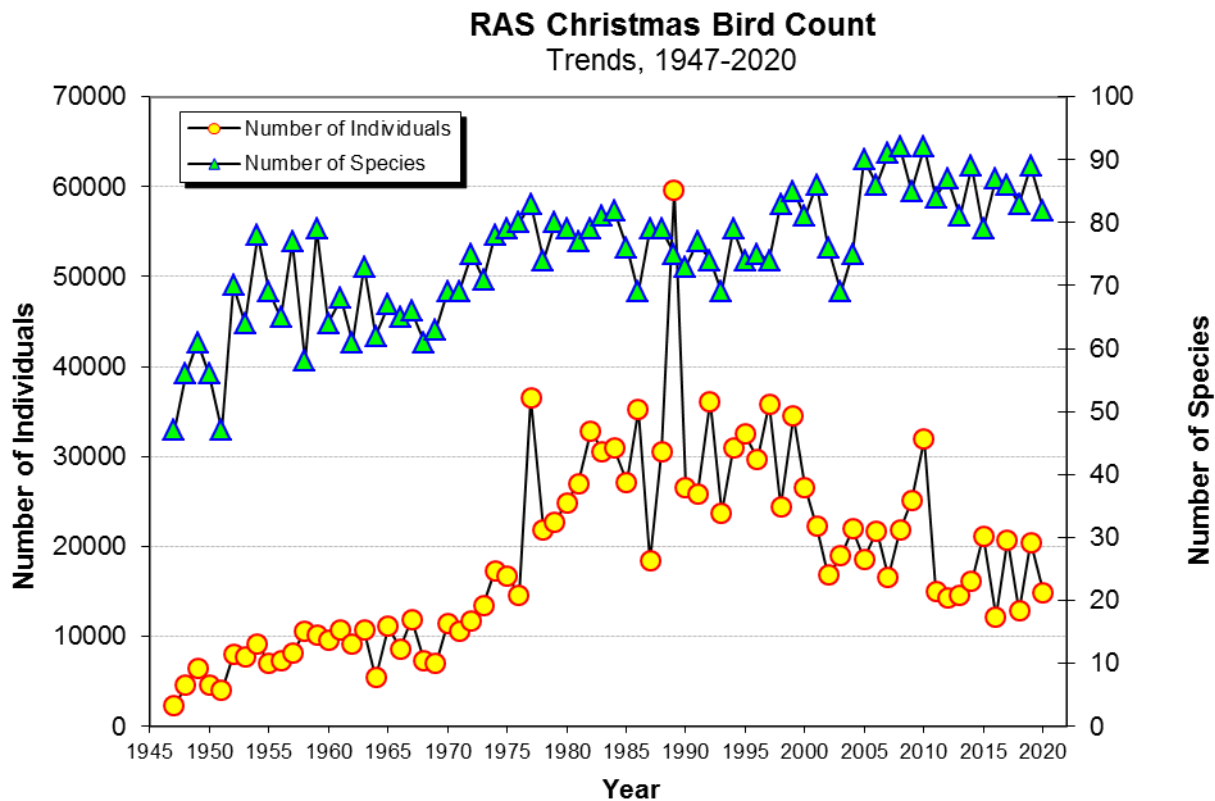


Figure 2. Number of species and individuals by year reported for Rockland Audubon CBC.



Photo 1. Purple Sandpiper is a costal species rarely seen as far inland as Rockland Co. The District 9 team discovered two at Piermont Pier on Count Day. These two individuals have been seen more or less consistently from that date to the time of this writing, January 11, 2021. The above photo was taken on January 6, 2021 by Alan Wells.



Photo 2. Bald Eagle numbers throughout the Lower Hudson Valley continue to rise. This year's high count of 53 handily surpassed the previous high of 44 established in 2012. The above first winter bird was photographed by Alan Wells at the Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site on January 8, 2021.



Photo 3. Carolina Wren is another species increasing in the Lower Hudson Valley. It was relatively uncommon on the RAS CBC until the late 1980s, when its abundance began to rise steadily. The previous high of 59 in both 2006 and 2019 was almost doubled to 92 in 2020. Photo by Alan Wells at Haverstraw Bay County Park on December 21, 2020.



Photo 4. Large numbers of Common Merganser congregate in large open waterbodies of the Lower Hudson Valley during winter until freeze up occurs. The pre Count Day Nor'easter resulted in an early freezing of several large waterbodies, likely resulting in the lower than typical count for this year. This adult female Common Merganser was photographed by Alan Wells at Rockland Lake on December 30, 2020 after the lakes began to reopen.



Photo 5. A nice Count Day find by the District 1 team was the flock of about 25 Horned Lark at the Haverstraw Landfill. Photo by Alan Wells on December 20, 2020.



Photo 6. After a recent period (2004-2016) of extraordinarily high numbers, American Robin numbers appear to now be returning to more historically “normal” levels. This individual was photographed by Alan Wells on December 27, 2020 in Harriman State Park.



Photo 5. One of the elusive trio of Redheads (two males and one female) that inhabited Rockland Lake before and after the RAS CBC. This male was seen and photographed on December 30, 2020 by Alan Wells.



Photo 6. Scattered reports of Chipping Sparrow occurred with surprising frequency this winter. One individual was found feeding with juncos in the Rockland Community College parking lot on Count Day by a District 2 team. Had this species not been found on Count Day, several more were reported during Count Week. This one was photographed in a feeder in Tomkins Cove on January 4, 2021 by Alan Wells.

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY, Christmas Bird Count 2020 Results

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2020															
Common Name	Total	D01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
TOTAL COUNT	14911	2479	1504	444	361	1193	641	1880	2493	3393	523				
TOTAL SPECIES	82	53	51	23	33	28	30	39	41	67	39				
Snow Goose	35								35			22	124		40
Canada Goose	4892	878	230	127	26	307	143	920	1056	1013	192	57	4401	Yes	1
Mute Swan	159	2	3					5	145	2	2	70	152	Yes	15
Wood Duck	3								2	1		38	42		68
Gadwall	24								24			44	189		45
American Black Duck	26	1	10							11	4	74	493		42
Mallard	346	39	22	17		42	6	36	93	63	28	73	2782		10
Northern Shoveler	30								30			39	133		41
Canvasback	200									200		68	4203		12
Ring-necked Duck	1										1	43	60		75
Bufflehead	86	11				30			20	12	13	63	138		21
Hooded Merganser	101	4					10		78	3	6	44	237		18
Common Merganser	1150	73	45		2	220		163	580	60	7	73	5700		3
Red-breasted Merganser	113								100	12	1	22	45	Yes	16
Ruddy Duck	65									65		67	761		27
Wild Turkey	11	3			7					1		28	86		52
Double-crested Cormorant	1								1			38	40		75
Great Cormorant	7										7	25	8		60
Great Blue Heron	37	3	1		2	1	4	2	15	9		49	53		38
Black Vulture	77	60	4		1				2	10		19	187		24
Turkey Vulture	15		4		1	1	1	2		6		34	143		48
Bald Eagle	53	14	1			4	4	14	4	8	4	43	44	Yes	30
Northern Harrier	5	1								4		42	5		63
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	1	1							2		48	11		67
Cooper's Hawk	9	1	1		2		2	2		1		39	10		58

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2020

Common Name	Total	D01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
Red-shouldered Hawk	1									1		29	12		75
Red-tailed Hawk	39	8	10	1	2			4	3	7	4	68	81		36
Rough-legged Hawk	1									1		16	3		75
Merlin	2	1	1									13	2		72
Peregrine Falcon	1	1										24	8		75
American Coot	40								40			67	304		35
Purple Sandpiper	2									2		2	1	Yes	72
Ring-billed Gull	649	129	21			167	92	45	34	139	22	72	8922		5
Herring Gull	55	15			2					14	24	74	5636		29
Great Black-backed Gull	14	4								10		74	458		50
Rock Pigeon	399	1	97			150	68	32		51		44	1027		8
Mourning Dove	200	26	31	26	27	19	12	19	4	30	6	73	750		12
Eastern Screech-Owl	10	2						1		6	1	58	22		56
Great Horned Owl	5	2								3		44	11		63
Barred Owl	2		1							1		24	4		72
Belted Kingfisher	7	1	1	1			1	1		1	1	71	20		60
Red-bellied Woodpecker	43	5	7	7	3	2	2	6	2	5	4	50	124		34
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	11	6	2			1		1		1		41	13		52
Downy Woodpecker	82	14	17	4	8	4	5	10	1	14	5	74	187		22
Hairy Woodpecker	25	3	4	3		2	2	1		6	4	74	58		44
Northern Flicker	11	1	2		1		1	3		3		72	34		52
Pileated Woodpecker	10	1	3	1					2	3		64	15		56
Blue Jay	72	11	13	5	8	9	1	5	4	14	2	74	508		25
American Crow	189	34	47	12	12	20	12	13	5	28	6	74	38520		14
Fish Crow	20	2	9					4		3	2	46	86		46
Common Raven	15	2	2		4			4		3		23	19		48
Horned Lark	26	25								1		16	56		42
Black-capped Chickadee	97	5	23	12	10	12	6	8	3	8	10	74	579		19
Tufted Titmouse	78	2	13	7	7	12	3	13	3	5	13	74	292		23
Red-breasted Nuthatch	3	2							1			49	17		68

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2020

Common Name	Total	D01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
White-breasted Nuthatch	69	6	13	6	5	10	2	9	3	9	6	74	150		26
Brown Creeper	1								1			72	26		75
Carolina Wren	92	15	15	4	6	8	1	12	2	16	13	65	59	Yes	20
Winter Wren	5	1	2					1			1	69	12		63
Golden-crowned Kinglet	5		1							4		66	41		63
Eastern Bluebird	8		3					4	1			36	135		59
American Robin	53		10	1	1			4		37		73	3702		30
Northern Mockingbird	45	17	6	2	2	1	2	3	2	7	3	69	170		33
European Starling	2032	716	328	62	13	59	163	345	43	284	19	74	13665		2
American Pipit	1									1		13	32		75
Cedar Waxwing	3		3									62	415		68
American Tree Sparrow	60	5	8		1					46		74	762		28
Chipping Sparrow	1		1									17	7		75
Field Sparrow	7									7		59	75		60
Fox Sparrow	13	3	1		2					6	1	64	32		51
Song Sparrow	283	102	56	17	9	5	15	4	6	48	21	74	322		11
Swamp Sparrow	3		1							2		64	38		68
White-throated Sparrow	492	53	73	6	24	38	7	16	81	170	24	74	587		7
Dark-eyed Junco	957	78	226	44	98	38	54	92	34	270	23	74	1224		4
Snow Bunting	16									10	6	16	46		47
Northern Cardinal	110	16	11	1	9	9	4	26	5	15	14	74	339		17
Red-winged Blackbird	596	14	2		20				10	550		74	4230		6
Common Grackle	46								6	40		65	8817		32
House Finch	36		4		2		4	17		7	2	59	333		39
Pine Siskin	11									11		37	949		52
American Goldfinch	38	1	2		12	2	1	11	1	6	2	74	486		37
House Sparrow	369	58	112	78	32	20	13	22	11	4	19	74	1293		9

Districts: 01 Haverstraw and Stony Point; 02 North Ramapo; 03 South Ramapo; 04 North and West Clarkstown; 05 Central Clarkstown; 06 South Clarkstown; 07 West Orangetown; 08 East Clarkstown; 09 East Orangetown; 10 Westchester