

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

77th RAS and 124th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count Summary

Date: 12/17/2023

This was one of the warmest and rainiest Christmas Bird Counts in recent memory, but once again our dedicated Teams came through with a successful count. The dedication of our counters is an inspiration. **THANK YOU** to all that participated!!

Weather: Weather conditions the week prior to the RAS 77th annual CBC were generally seasonable with average air temperatures ranging from 32 to 48°F and gusty WNW winds averaging 12-25 mph. During daylight birding hours on Count Day there were overcast skies during the morning giving way to mostly cloudy skies and rain in the afternoon. Average daytime temperatures ranged from 44 to 49°F (**Figure 1**). Dew Point temperatures ranged from 41 to 48°F. Sustained winds ranged from 0 to 3 mph with gusts from 2 to 12 mph from the ENE throughout the day.

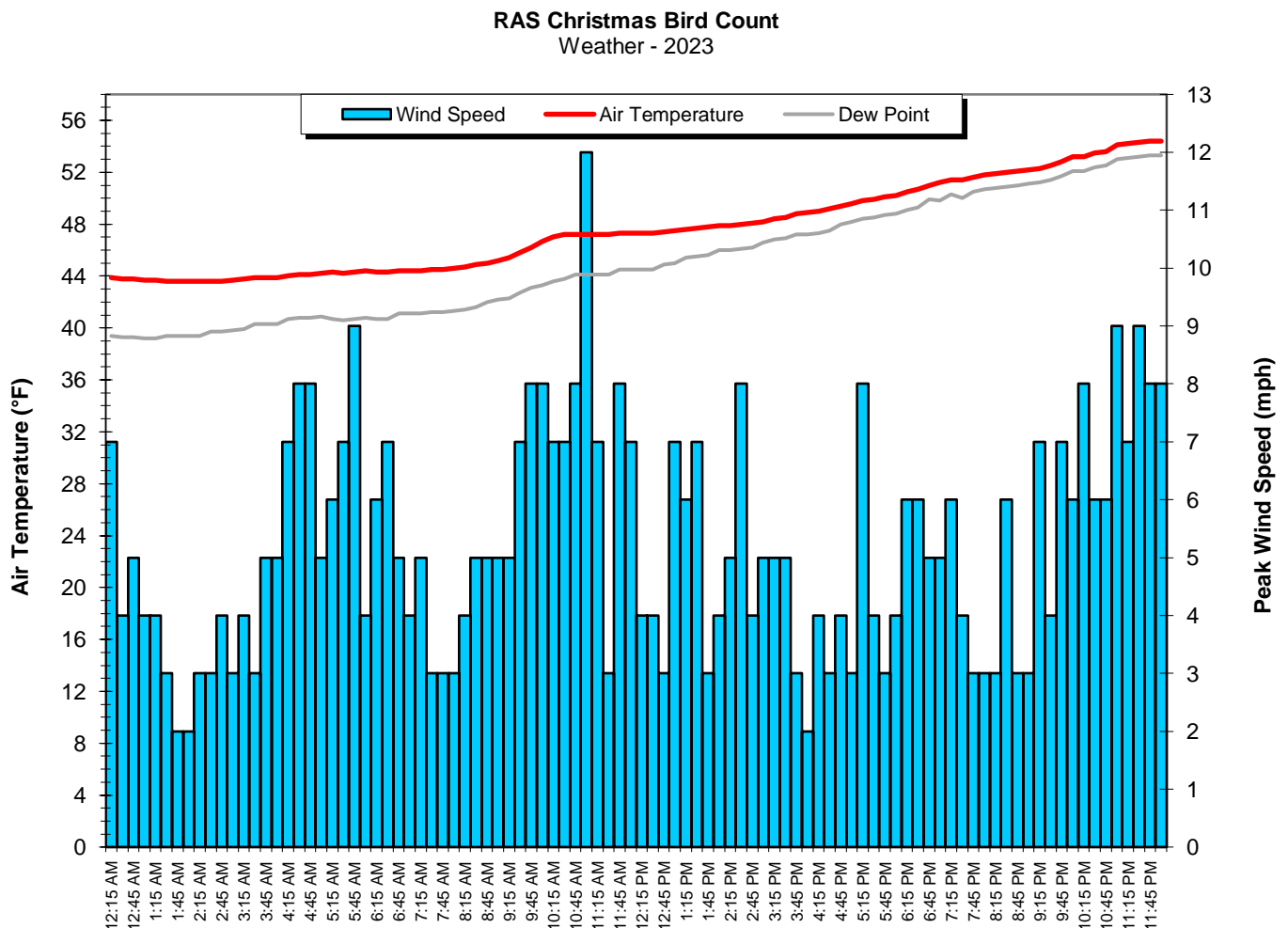


Figure 1. Weather conditions for December 17, 2023 RAS CBC: Air temperature, dew point, and maximum wind gusts.

Temperatures during nocturnal birding hours (from the earliest start time, 2:30 AM, to sunrise, 7:16 AM) ranged from 44 to 44°F with a dew point temperature of 41°F. Sustained winds during the period were 1-2 mph from the ENE. Wind gusts ranged from 4-9 mph from the NE.

Prior to Count Week (Dec 14-20), air temperatures were relatively mild from December 1 through December 13 with the average daily high air temperature ranging from 35 to 57°F and the daily low air temperature ranging from 26 to 42°F. A total of 2.57 inches of precipitation fell during the 16 days prior to Count Day, all as rain. Another 3.27 inches of rain fell on December 18, the first Count Week Day after Count Day. On Count Day itself rain fell from about 1:15 pm to 3:45 pm, dropping about 0.20 inches. Rain ceased from 3:45 pm to 6:15, then started up again lasting until midnight. During that period about 0.31 inches of precipitation fell.

Nearly all ponds, lakes, streams and rivers (including the Hudson River) were entirely ice-free during Count Week and on Count Day.

Field Observers: 54 field counters on Count Day.

District	No.	Counters
01	6	(Team 1) Alan Wells (Compiler), Tom Cunningham, John Tyler, Jim Coyle (Team 2) Della Wells, Julia Warger
02	7	(Team 1) Simon Streatfeild, Gene Herskovics, Mary Thurber (Team 2) Elyse Fuller, Tom Fuller, Phoebe Fuller, Tom Glover
03	1	(Team 1) Moe Lehmann
04	3	(Team 1) Karen Nickeson, Bonnie Koop, Christine Toth
05	3	(Team 1) Zenon Bachir, Peter Johnson (Team 2) Pat Murray
06	5	(Team 1) Stephanie Garber, Michael Garber, Suzanne Barclay, Walter Aurell, Veronika Krause
07	7	(Team 1) Carol Weiss, Nigel Bark, Frank Kemmer, Liz Cherry (Team 2) Linda Pistolesi, Bernie Doyle, Maude Lindsey
08	8	(Team 1) Stella Miller, Catherine Parker, Philip Yacuk, (Team 2) Julia Schlosser, Jonathan Schlosser, Jake Schlosser, (Team 3) Zach Schwartz-Weinstein (Team 4) Louis DeMarco
09	7	(Team 1) Vince Plogar, Drew Ciganek, Karl Knoecklein, Matt Papula (Team 2) Tom Dow, Elda Dow, Chris Healy
10	7	(Team 1) Elijah Goodwin, Dianne Fahy, Jack Fahy (Team 2) Robert Paxton, Sarah Plimpton (Team 3) Damian Didden, Matt Ceplo

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 (10 Locations): (01) Nancy Slowik, (02) Moe Lehmann, (03) Judy Cinquina, (04) Philip Yacuk, Joanna Galdone, (07) Alan Spooner, Belinda Cash, (08) Sarah Johnson, Florette Kupfer, Gene Brown.

Coverage: The twenty-three (23) teams spent a total of 109.7 team hours covering 79 miles by foot during their daylight (sunrise 7:16 am to sunset 4:28 pm) birding effort. These teams also spent an additional 34.1 team hours covering 368 miles by car during daylight hours. An additional 16.6 hours covering 12 miles were spent on nighttime birding (owling), 2:30 am to sunrise 7:16 am. The number of count participants, 54, is well above the 1977- 2021 median of 35 and is the highest participation number to date.

Results: Rockland Audubon Society conducted its 77th annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 17, 2023. Fifty-four (54) individuals participated in the field count, tallying 15,031 birds of 92 different species. Ten feeder counters added 449 birds of 26 species. Combining both field and feeder counts, 15,480 individuals representing 92 species were tallied. One additional species was added during Count Week bringing the total number of species detected to 93.

The single Count Week species was:

Common Name	Date Seen	District	Location	Observers
Red-headed Woodpecker	12/20	2	Lake Welch picnic area	Zenon Bachir, Stella Miller, Alan Wells, Della Wells

The number of species observed was tied for the highest species count ever recorded for the RAS CBC (**Figure 2**). The 92 count day species marks the 97th percentile of all RAS count years (1947-2023) and the 96th percentile of all modern RAS circle boundary years (1978-2023). The number of individuals is slightly below average (45th percentile) for the entire 1947-2023 count period and one of the lowest (13th percentile) for the 1978-2023 period.

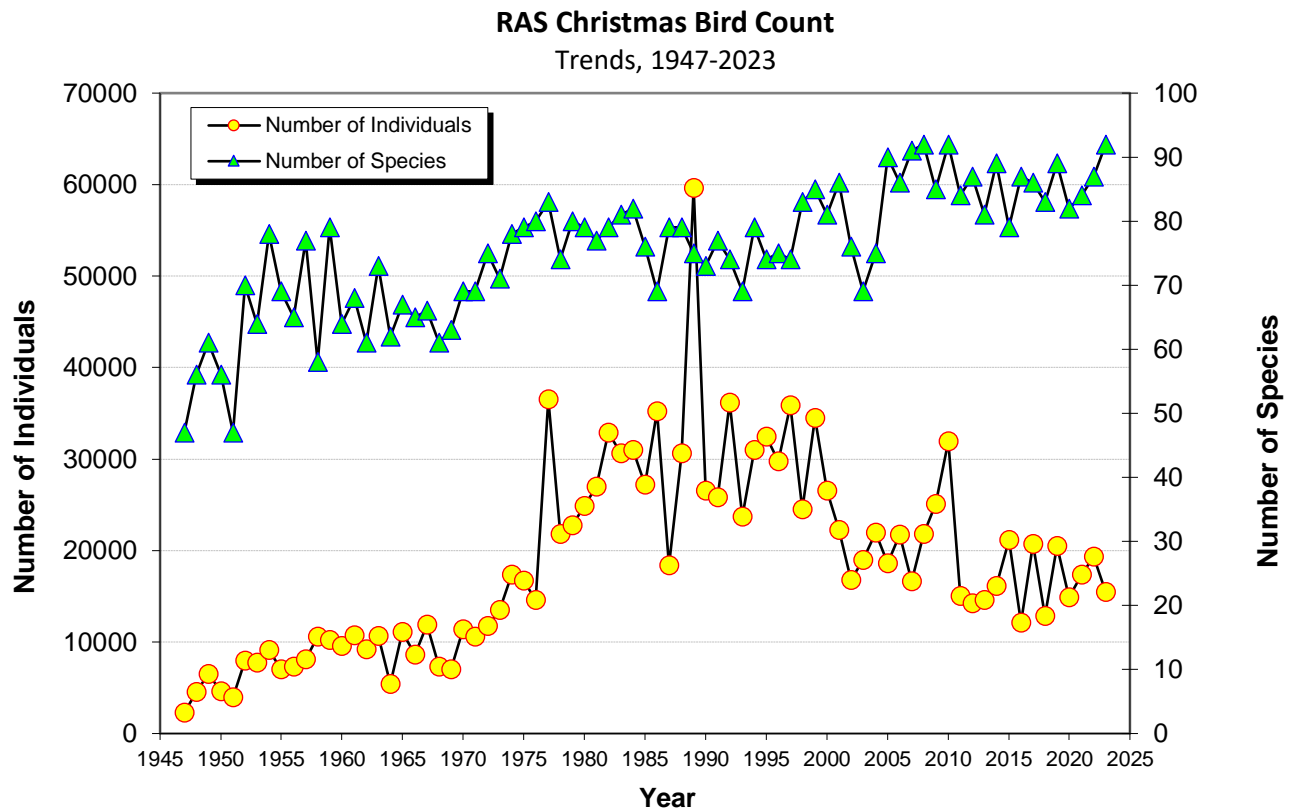


Figure 2. Number of species and individuals by year reported for Rockland Audubon CBC.

The ten most abundant species, in descending order, were: Canada Goose, European Starling, Common Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Blue Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, American Robin, Mourning Dove and Mallard. Together, they comprised 74% of the total individuals.

New High Counts:

New high counts were established for:

Merlin (6 v 3 in 2022; first seen in 1992)
Red-bellied Woodpecker (131 v 124 in 2010)
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (16 v 14 in 2021)
Pileated Woodpecker (17 v 15 in 2017)
Blue Jay (552 v 508 in 2017)
Carolina Wren (105 v 92 in 2020)
Winter Wren (15 v 12 in 2022)
Orange-crowned Warbler (2 v 1 in 2022)

Note: The RAS CBC has historically counted both Lesser and Greater Scaup as Scaup spp. To maintain consistency with the historical data, we follow that convention. It should be noted, however, that this year's Scaup spp. count of 14 (all from Lake Welch) includes 13 Lesser and 1 Greater Scaup.

Significant Misses

Missed birds are those birds “typically” seen but not found during the current year. A “MISS” is defined as any species not found on Count Day, but has been found in 50% or more of the RAS CBC counts since 1947, or 50% or more of the RAS CBC counts in the previous 10 years.

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.

Field Sparrow – Seen in 59 (79%) previous counts since 1947 and four (40%) out of the last 10 counts; last seen in 2020 when two were sighted.

Rusty Blackbird – Seen in 29 (38%) previous counts since 1947 and six (60%) out of the last 10 counts; last seen in 2022 when nine were found.

Unusual Finds

Red-headed Woodpecker has been observed in only five RAS Christmas Counts: 1956, 1979, 1994, 2013, and 2019. It was only by the slimmest of margins that it was not found for the 2023 count. Stella Miller had found, what turned out to be, a group of at least three juveniles Red-headed Woodpeckers in the picnic area of Lake Welch on November 29. These birds were very faithful to this small area and raucous enough to be easily found; they were monitored closely prior to the CBC. During the afternoon of Count Day, a Team headed up to the site to find them and to add them to the day's count. However, the main parking lot was closed on Sunday, and they had to walk much further than anticipated. By the time they arrived on site the rain had begun in earnest and a thick fog had rolled in. Conditions made it impossible to locate the birds. No effort was made to go back on the Monday of Count Week as the heavy rain continued. Conditions were still poor on Tuesday, so it was not until Wednesday that several of us made it back. On that day, at least three Red-headed Woodpeckers were easily found.

Prior to this year's count Marsh Wren has only been observed on only six RAS Christmas Counts, the most recent was approximately 50 years ago: 1973(1), 1970(1), 1959(2), 1958(2), 1957(1), and 1954(1). While a relatively common species during the summer months, the Marsh Wren has always been a rare and secretive species during the winter. This year, the District #6 Team found one in the newly constructed West Nyack Hamlet Green, a wetland restoration project on the old West Nyack Turnpike. It flew out of a large patch of grasses and cattails, down the pathway, and into another grassy clump on the east side of the wetlands.

Interviews with Participants

This being the 77th Annual Christmas Bird Count it occurred to us that there was a rather unique alignment of RAS stars taking place. Our oldest CBC participant, 96-year-old Gene Brown, just completed his 77th Rockland Audubon CBC, while our youngest participant, 7-year-old Phoebe Fuller just completed her 8th RAS CBC (she started before her 1st birthday, although slept through most of the day). Recognizing these achievements, we decided to ask them to reflect on their CBC experiences.

Our first questions went to Phoebe.

RAS: What was your most favorite bird seen during the CBC?

PF: My favorite bird was the Belted Kingfisher because I saw it through the scope.

RAS: What was the most fun or most exciting thing that happened during the CBC?

PF: The Black Vultures dumpster diving was my favorite part because it was funny.

RAS: [This response was unsolicited!]

PF: My least favorite part was when we saw a cat colony because it's bad for wildlife.

RAS: How many birds do you have on your "life list"?

PF: I will start my life list when I am eight.

RAS: Gene Brown was asked to recollect some of the highlights of his 77 counts.

GB: I was fortunate to have the great birder, Bob Deed*, as mentor. Never forgotten is the pre-dawn total blackness when Bob and I stood below the cliffs of Hook Mountain and were suddenly jolted by the wild cry of a Great Horned Owl.

But there were other types of adventures. At 1:30 am December 31, 1950, I was in conversation with a Herald Tribune reporter on the phone. On the December 30, 1951, Count I was photographed by newspaper reporters. At eight o'clock the next morning the Tribune arrived with two large pictures and a very nice article.

A fascinating aspect of my chain of Counts was the gradual appearance, over the years, of "southern" species. Bob Deed was soon an authority on these species. The birds knew what was happening, but the term "global warming" had not yet been invented!

* You can download a copy of Bob Deed's compendium "Birds of Rockland County, NY and the Hudson Highlands 1844-1976" with the 1983 Addenda from the RAS website [HERE](#).



Photo 1. Historically, **Winter Wren** has been a near-annual winter resident in Rockland County, but usually found only in small numbers (<5). Since 2006 its numbers have been slowly increasing, reaching a high of 15 this year. This archive photo was taken by Alan Wells at Kennedy Dells County Park on January 20, 2023.



Photo 2. **Snow Goose** is an unusual sighting for the RAS CBC, occurring in only 22 previous counts. The above bird stayed at Piermont Pier long enough to be counted and was photographed by Alan Wells on December 19, 2023.



Photo 3. Great Cormorants are always a GREAT find! The Haverstraw Marina has been a rather reliable location for this species over the last several years and proved so again this year. Alan Wells returned to this location on December 20, 2023, to obtain this photograph.



Photo 4. This **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** entertained us while taking a lunch break at the Stony Point Battlefield SHS. Since about 2000 this species has been undergoing a remarkable increase in numbers, reaching a high of 16 this year. Photo taken on 12/17/2023 by Alan Wells.



Photo 5. A small group of **Red-headed Woodpeckers** was discovered at Lake Welch, Harriman State Park on November 29, 2023, by Stella Miller. They seem well established, localized, and easily found, but were missed by happenstance on Count Day. They were seen on December 20, 2023, by Zenon Bachir and others. Photo taken on 12/20/23 by Alan Wells.



Photo 6. **Downy Woodpecker** has been seen in every RAS CBC count since the beginning (all 77 years) and its been notably consistent, especially after the circle shift in 1977. Photo taken on 12/9/23 by Alan Wells.



Photo 7. Merlin was not seen on the RAS CBC until 1992, and then only a few sporadic single sightings until 2015. Since that time, sightings of one or two individuals have increased in frequency. Last year set a new record of three; this year an astounding total of six (over three separate Districts) were tallied. This archival photo was taken on November 9, 2023, by Alan Wells.



Photo 7. Red-bellied Woodpecker did not appear in the RAS CBC counts until 1970, thereafter (with the exception of 1971), this species occurred in every count, with the numbers compounding at an average rate of approximately 7.6% per year. This individual was photographed at Lake Welch on December 20, 2023, by Alan Wells.

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2023

Common Name	Total	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
Number of Species	92	57	56	35	33	40	37	46	54	63	49				
Number of Individuals	15,480	2,201	1,482	544	1,458	1,637	856	1,728	1,548	2,881	1,145	76	59,622		
Snow Goose	1									1		23	124		85
Canada Goose	3676	302	226	84	188	340	164	578	633	701	460	59	4892		1
Mute Swan	92	7	4		2	3		3	73			72	205		29
Wood Duck	2								2			38	42		76
Gadwall	94	11	62						17	4		46	189		28
American Wigeon	4							4				26	116		66
American Black Duck	61		21				1		2	26	11	76	493		34
Mallard	355	61	81	33		20	6	17	27	48	62	75	2782		10
Black Duck x Mallard Hybrid	1										1	9	2		85
Northern Shoveler	34								34			41	133		40
Green-winged Teal	12	2						4			6	22	81		58
Canvasback	45									45		70	4203		36
Ring-necked Duck	97	97										45	193		27
Scaup spp. (Lesser/Greater)	14		14									53	315		56
Bufflehead	62	5	20						21	12	4	65	138		32
Common Goldeneye	1								1			64	155		85
Hooded Merganser	148	39	5			17		28	57	2		46	237		19
Common Merganser	1289	10			517	361	5	261	103	24	8	75	5700		3
Ruddy Duck	19								3	16		69	761		48
Wild Turkey	31			2						2	27	29	86		42
Common Loon	3										3	10	3		70

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2023

Common Name	Total	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
Pied-billed Grebe	1								1			40	13		85
Double-crested Cormorant	19	7			4				1	5	2	40	112		48
Great Cormorant	3	3										27	8		70
Great Blue Heron	27	4	1		2	3		8	5	2	2	51	53		45
Black Vulture	116	49	51		1	6	2			7		21	187		22
Turkey Vulture	101	5	3	5	2	19	9		9	46	3	36	186		26
Bald Eagle	47	6	1	1		4		18	5	7	5	45	98		35
Northern Harrier	2									2		43	5		76
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2										2	50	11		76
Cooper's Hawk	9	1	2				1	1		4		41	12		61
Red-shouldered Hawk	2		1							1		31	12		76
Red-tailed Hawk	33	4	1	2	1	2	2	7	1	5	8	70	81		41
American Kestrel	1	1										57	23		85
Merlin	6	1	4					1				15	3	YES	64
Peregrine Falcon	4	1				1			1	1		26	8		66
American Coot	21								21			69	304		47
Ring-billed Gull	730	232	7			119	26	205	7	128	6	74	8922		4
Herring Gull	9	3								3	3	76	5636		61
Great Black-backed Gull	10	2								6	2	76	458		59
Rock Pigeon	251		48	12		121		50		5	15	46	1027		13
Mourning Dove	370	71	38	28	39	29	17	56	23	57	12	75	750		9
Eastern Screech-Owl	22	2		1				9	3	5	2	60	22		46
Great Horned Owl	2								1	1		46	11		76

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2023

Common Name	Total	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
Barred Owl	1					1						26	4		85
Belted Kingfisher	17	4	3	1			3	1		4	1	73	20		51
Red-headed Woodpecker		CW										5	1		--
Red-bellied Woodpecker	131	8	11	7	10	30	5	16	16	12	16	52	124	YES	21
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	16	3	1	1				2	4	2	3	43	14	YES	53
Downy Woodpecker	89	8	13	6	6	4	5	11	10	23	3	76	187		30
Hairy Woodpecker	42	3	5	4	2	2	5	6	6	5	4	76	58		38
Northern Flicker	35	4	9	1	2	4	1	1	4	9		74	41		39
Pileated Woodpecker	17	1	6			1			4	3	2	66	15	YES	51
Blue Jay	552	60	76	40	18	134	23	43	60	75	23	76	508	YES	5
American Crow	172	26	14	11	4	24	17	46	6	4	20	76	38520		14
Fish Crow	14	5		3		1			1	2	2	48	86		56
Common Raven	31	3	2	1	2	2		4	7	9	1	25	34		42
Horned Lark	3									3		16	56		70
Black-capped Chickadee	164	16	10	10	18	12	22	14	22	27	13	76	579		15
Tufted Titmouse	158	16	23	23	23	5	5	15	27	8	13	76	292		17
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2		1				1					51	17		76
White-breasted Nuthatch	107	10	16	1	7	25	5	4	17	14	8	76	150		23
Brown Creeper	3		1				2					74	26		70
Carolina Wren	105	12	15	4	6	6	7	8	21	17	9	67	92	YES	25
Winter Wren	15	4	3					1	6	1		71	12	YES	55
Marsh Wren	1						1					6	2		85
Golden-crowned Kinglet	16	3	1		1	3		2	4	2		67	41		53

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2023

Common Name	Total	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	7	1	2				1	2		1		56	17		63
Eastern Bluebird	18		18									38	135		50
Hermit Thrush	2		1	1								51	14		76
American Robin	455	3	143	7	1	4	20	81	8	137	51	75	3702		8
Gray Catbird	3		1					1		1		63	11		70
Northern Mockingbird	44	15	3		1	2	1	6	5	8	3	71	170		37
European Starling	3070	774	281	96	500	117	172	50	66	835	179	76	13665		2
Cedar Waxwing	62		20	9				1	27		5	64	415		32
Yellow-rumped Warbler	1										1	55	280		85
Orange-crowned Warbler	2									2		1	1	YES	76
Eastern Towhee	3		1						1	1		53	23		70
American Tree Sparrow	30	5								17	8	76	762		44
Savannah Sparrow	4	4										35	50		66
Fox Sparrow	2		2									66	32		76
Song Sparrow	164	25	9	14	2	3	12	9	24	53	13	76	322		15
Swamp Sparrow	10		3	1			4		2			66	38		59
White-throated Sparrow	474	27	84	36	33	29	9	11	65	145	35	76	587		7
Dark-eyed Junco	483	105	37	49	8	50	30	50	34	71	49	76	1224		6
Northern Cardinal	152	12	15	16	16	4	8	21	21	28	11	76	339		18
Red-winged Blackbird	134	9			4			36		85		76	4230		20
Common Grackle	313					1	243	4	5	58	2	67	8817		12
Brown-headed Cowbird	4		2							2		52	431		66
Purple Finch	6	1			4				1			64	158		64

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 2023

Common Name	Total	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Years Seen	Previous High Count	New High ?	Current Year Rank
House Finch	64	4	6	22	10	3	4	13			2	61	333		31
American Goldfinch	107	8	19	6	10	10	16	5	8	23	2	76	486		23
House Sparrow	346	96	35	6	14	115	1	14	15	28	22	76	1293		11

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