

Beech Creek Christmas Bird Count – 20 December 2016

The weather on Tuesday 20 December 2016 was very favorable for birding. While close to freezing in the early morning, there was little wind and a good deal of sunshine during the day. The total number of species observed, 84, was reasonably normal, much increased over last year's poor showing, and the number of individual birds, while on the low side, was not particularly concerning. The total number of birds found on this count is highly dependent on the number of American Coots on Steinhagen Lake; this year it was not particularly high.

Four unusual species were recorded. An American Woodcock flushed in the early morning from the picnic area where we met. A Louisiana Waterthrush was found along the shore of the lake in Magnolia Ridge Campground. This is a very unusual species for the area in winter. However, the count circle is at the southern edge of the species' breeding range, and a bird incapable of flying any distance for whatever reason could easily have survived the mild fall. There are three December 2015 records of this species in the eastern half of Texas that are supported by good photographs, so this record would not be unique. A Fox Sparrow was seen along County Road 150 near the southern tip of Steinhagen Lake. A male House Finch was seen in Camper's Cove Park on the Tyler County side of Steinhagen Lake. The count circle is in the winter range of both Purple Finch and House Finch, but the extent of head color, and the absence of any response to a taped Purple Finch call confirmed House Finch.

The ducks on Steinhagen Lake were somewhat disappointing. The usual flock of Canvasback, often more than 100 birds, was not present. Dabbling Ducks were very scarce, but two American Wigeon were found. This species appears to be more plentiful than usual this winter. Most years there is active waterfowl hunting in the northern part of the Lake, outside the count circle, on count day, but there was no evidence of that this year, and it may be that the ducks which ordinarily are in the circle to escape the hunting pressure were able to remain north of the circle this year. As noted above, the number of American Coots was modest this year. Spotted Sandpipers were seen (on the dam!) after being missed the prior two years.

We were glad to see an Osprey after three years of missing this species on this count. A total of nine Bald Eagles was a new all-time high count, and it is remarkable that there were as many Bald Eagles as Red-shouldered Hawks! The number of American Crows was higher than for many years. More than 100 of these were seen flying in to a roost southwest of Spurger.

Brown Creeper and Brown-headed Nuthatch were seen again after being missed last year, but Winter Wren was missed. American Robins were well represented, but not at record levels. As throughout the region, sparrow numbers were very low, especially Chipping and White-throated, but the range of species was quite reasonable. It was disappointing not to find any Eastern Meadowlarks.

Species seen:

DUCK, Wood (12); WIGEON, American (2); DUCK, Ring-necked (6); SCAUP, Lesser (5); DUCK, Ruddy (10); GREBE, Pied-billed (61); CORMORANT, Double-crested (124); ANHINGA (2); PELICAN, American White (21); HERON, Great Blue (6); EGRET, Great (26); EGRET, Snowy (4); HERON, Little Blue (3); HERON, Tricolored (2); VULTURE, Black (41); VULTURE, Turkey (82); OSPREY (1); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Cooper's (1); EAGLE, Bald (9); HAWK, Red-shouldered (9); HAWK, Red-tailed (6); GALLINULE, Common (5); COOT, American (374); KILLDEER (17); SANDPIPER, Spotted (4); YELLOWLEGS, [species] (2); WOODCOCK, American (1); GULL, Ring-billed (1); GULL, [species] (5); TERN, Forster's (23); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (9); DOVE, Inca (1); DOVE, Mourning (18); OWL, Great Horned (1); OWL, Barred (2); KINGFISHER, Belted (3); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (1); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (32); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (23); WOODPECKER, Downy (21); FLICKER, Northern (4); WOODPECKER, Pileated (16); KESTREL, American (5); PHOEBE, Eastern (39); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (1); VIREO, Blue-headed (3); JAY, Blue (53); CROW, American (213); CHICKADEE, Carolina (56); TITMOUSE, Tufted (27); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (8); CREEPER, Brown (1); WREN, House (9); WREN, Carolina (37); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (5); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (17); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (61); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (87); THRUSH, Hermit (12); ROBIN, American (1193); CATBIRD, Gray (3); THRASHER, Brown (2); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (16); STARLING, European (20); WAXWING, Cedar (318); WATERTHRUSH, Louisiana (1); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (10); WARBLER, Pine (59); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (239); SPARROW, Chipping (134); SPARROW, Field (3); SPARROW, Fox (1); JUNCO, Dark-eyed (2); SPARROW, White-throated (24); SPARROW, Savannah (2); SPARROW, Song (5); SPARROW, Swamp (5); TOWHEE, Eastern (2); CARDINAL, Northern (71); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (123); FINCH, House (1); SISKIN, Pine (2); GOLDFINCH, American (355); SPARROW, House (8 (SPECIES, total (84); Number of Individuals (4230); Number of observers (13); Parties (4); Party-hours on foot (10.5); Party-miles on foot (6.25); Party-hours by car (24.57); Party-miles by car (111.2); Party-hours total (35.07); Party-miles total (117.45)

Participants

John Berner, Linda Currie, Craig Geoffroy, Sherry Gibson, Sheila Hebert, Steve Mayes, Sherrie Roden, Christine Sliva, Charles and Wanda Smith, Harlan Stewart, Jana and John Whittle.