

Fifteenth Annual Saskatchewan Christmas Bird Count, 1956

Edited by STUART and MARY HOUSTON

In spite of the mildest Christmas season on record, this year only 17 localities reported, the lowest number since 1950. However, a record of 57 species were observed bettering the totals of 53 species in 1955 and 51 species in 1954.

The Magpie was the commonest species, observed in all 17 localities. Next was the English Sparrow, from 15; Snow Bunting, from 13; Black-capped Chickadee, Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, from 12; and Pine Grosbeak and Downy Woodpecker from 11. The Horned Owl and Hungarian Partridge were seen in 10 areas, the Hairy Woodpecker in 9 and the Northern Shrike in 8. Thus it was an unusually good year for both Horned Owls and Northern Shrikes. The Ruffed Grouse was well up on the list. Farther down the "Christmas hit parade" were the Bohemian Waxwing and Common Redpoll, seen at only seven places. The Blue Jay, from six districts, and Canada Jay, from only four, were also less common than usual.

Special credit must go to Steve Mann, whose contagious enthusiasm sparked a party of eight observers at the rural post office of Skull Creek, south of Piapot. Notice should also be given the Saskatoon Natural History Society, who fielded a record 27 observers and combed their area most thoroughly.

The Regina group had only a short list of the expected winter birds, but had a real field day at the open water near the power house at Wasicana Marsh. They recorded 14 species of water birds, and added SEVEN NEW SPECIES to the master list of birds seen in all the 15 Saskatchewan Christmas bird counts—which therefore stands at the fabulous total of 85 species; The new species were: Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Herring Gull and Purple Finch.

The small accipiter, seen by Ed Brooman at Carlton, would have added an additional species to the list, if it could have been positively identified. Other unidentified hawks were a falcon at Dilke (Belcher), a

small hawk at Hawarden (Kvinge), a falcon at Carlton (Houston) and two hawks at Yorkton (Chillman and Cursons.)

HISTORICAL STUDY:

Bird watchers from Yorkton, Saskatoon and Prince Albert converged on the Carlton area, 50 miles north of Saskatoon, on Dec. 30, in order to compare their findings with those of Sir John Richardson 130 years before.

J. Richardson, M.D., F.R.S., F.L.S., later to become Sir John Richardson, was surgeon, naturalist and second-in-command to the first and second Arctic overland expeditions of Sir John Franklin. He was the first man to study and report on the birds, mammals, insects, fish, flowers and geology of what is now Saskatchewan. He spent the late winter and spring of 1827 at Fort Carlton on the North Saskatchewan River. The specimens he collected, including some new to science, were described in *Fauna Boreali Americana*, published in 1831.

The only species recorded by the 1956 Christmas count that had not been observed on the Saskatchewan at some time by Richardson, were those since introduced from Europe—the Hungarian Partridge and English Sparrow. (The fresh pheasant tracks seen by John Shadick indicated a third introduced species was also in the district.)

Nine species seen on the Saskatchewan by Richardson were not located in our one-day search: Spruce Grouse, Willow Ptarmigan, Hawk Owl, Great Gray Owl, Long-eared Owl (Richardson listed it as wintering, but this may have been a mistaken assumption), Richardson's Owl (named after Richardson), Pileate Woodpecker, American Three-toe Woodpecker and the White-winged Crossbill.

This Carlton count was arranged by long-distance telephone only two days before, but was entered into with great enthusiasm by those contacted. They felt that the enjoyment derived more than compensated for the distance and inconvenience involved.

Christmas Bird Count (Continued)

BANGOR, Dec. 26th. Around the farmyard, and by car 14 miles to Saltcoats. Total, 7 species, 87 individuals, additional 1 species, 5 individuals. **Mrs. A. Thompson.**

BLADWORTH, Dec. 22. 2 to 4:30 p.m.; sunny; temp. 17 to 20°; 8 inches snow, 2½ hours, on foot. Total, 5 species, 24 indiv.; add. 2 species, 701 indiv. (Excellent detailed map submitted—Ed.). **P. Laurence Beckie.**

CARLTON, Dec. 30. 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; mostly sunny; temp. 34 to 38°; wind W, 10 to 20 m.p.h.; 2 to 5 in. snow, 11 observers in 4 parties. Total party hours, 26½ (13 on foot, 13½ by car); total party miles, 115 (22 on foot, 93 by car). Total, 19 species, 642 indiv. A small accipiter, almost certainly a Sharp-shinned, was noted by **Ed Brooman**. — **Ed. Brooman, Elias Evasiuk, Tony Capusten, Mel Welsh** (Prince Albert Natural History Society); **Jonathan Gerrard, Dr. John Gerrard, J. R. Hogg, J. Frank Roy, John Shadick** (Saskatoon Natural History Society); **Dr. and Mrs. Stuart Houston** (compilers) (Yorkton Natural History Society).

DILKE, Dec. 26. 8 to 12 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m.; mostly cloudy; temp. 30 to 35°; wind 5 to 20 m.p.h.; 5 inches snow. 4 hours and 3 miles around farm at chores; 2 hours and 2 miles on foot. Total, 4 species, 52 indiv.; add. 3 species, 3 indiv. **J. B., S. R. and Margaret Belcher.**

FORT SAN, Dec. 23. 1:15 to 4:15 p.m.; heavily overcast; temp. 16°; calm; 6 in. snow. 3 observers. 24 miles by car. Total, 9 species, 116 indiv.; add. 7 species, 56 indiv. Three Robins Dec. 26 wintering at a spring on the lakeside eight miles west of Fort San. The Brown-capped Chickadees have been at Dr. Fyfe's feeding station daily since Nov. 20 and constitute a new record for this district. **Dr. J. G. Fyfe, Jack Lowe, E. M. Callin.**

GRENFELL, Dec. 30, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Clear; temp 30° to 34°; wind WNW 20 m.p.h.; 12 in. snow. 2 hrs. and 3 miles on foot; 6 miles by car. Total, 3 species, 91 indiv.; add. 8 species, 21 indiv. An American Rough-legged Hawk seen on Jan. 1. **Mr. and Mrs. John Hubbard.**

HAWARDEN, Dec. 22. 1:30 p.m.

to 4:30 p.m., temp. 16°; 4 in. snow. 9½ miles by car, 1 mile on foot. Total, 5 species, 206 indiv.; add. 2 species, 223 indiv. **Harold Kvinge.**

NIPAWIN, Dec. 27. 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cloudy, temp. 32°; calm; 12 in. snow. 1 hour and 22 miles by car; 6 hours and 10 miles on foot. Total, 12 species, 151 indiv.; add. 11 species, 118 indiv. Two Hawk Owls seen Dec. 31 and one Brewer's Blackbird on Dec. 26. **Ann, Walter and Billy Matthews.**

PRINCE ALBERT, Dec. 23. 11:45 to 3:15. Temp 10°; wind SE 5 m.p.h. 30 miles by car, 2 miles on foot. Total, 4 species, 64 indiv. Add. (on Dec. 26), 4 species, 5 indiv. **Tony Capusten.**

REGINA, Dec. 26. 147 miles by car; 14 miles on foot. Total, 21 species, 716 indiv. Add: 4 species, 4 indiv. Pigeon Hawk (Richardson's Merlin) noted by **Frank Brazier** (Dec. 25); Herring Gull noted by **Fred Bard, E. L. and R. Fox** (Dec. 30). **Fred G. Bard, F. Brazier, W. K. Cruickshank, E. L. Fox** (compiler), **R. Fox, Doug Gilroy, M. Goudie, W. H. Greenberg, Dr. G. F. Ledingham.**

SASKATOON, Dec. 26, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunny, overcast by noon; temp. 35° to 36°, wind SW 12 m.p.h. 27 observers in 6 parties. Total party hours, 35½ (18 on foot, 17½ by car); total party miles, 228 (23 on foot, 205 by car). The Pigeon Hawk was checked by 5 observers; the 8 Mallards were on the open water below the power-house. Total, 19 species, 2811 indiv. **Dr. R. M. Bremner, Mr. and Mrs. Glen Burgess, R. Burgess, Dr. and Mrs. J. Gerrard, Jonathan and Peter Gerrard, George and Ross Gerrity, Mr. and Mrs. Vic Harper, Mr. and Mrs. B. Hinde, Mary Hinde, Jim Hogg, J. Moore, Ralph Morris, Bob Pravda, Frank Roy, Dr. and Mrs. L. G. Saunders, John Shadick, Dr. E. Wait, R. Wait, H. W. Wicken, Mrs. M. Younger.** (Saskatoon Natural History Society)

SKULL CREEK, Dec. 30, 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Light clouds, temp. 26 to 40°, wind 15 m.p.h. Five miles on foot along Skull Creek; six miles by car. Total, 16 species, 328 indiv. **S. A. Mann, Helen Mann, Robert Mann, Betty Long, George Swain, Bern Swain, Iris Lyons, Harry Williams.**

SOMME, Dec. 28, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Calm, temp. 35°, cloudy, 15 in. snow. 3 hours and 20 miles by tractor; 4 hours on foot. Total, 13 species, 1064 indiv., add. 6 species, 21 indiv. **Ronald and Donald Hooper**.

SPIRIT LAKE, Dec. 30, 8 to 5:30 p.m. Clear with cloudy intervals; temp. 35°; windy; snow 6 to 20 in. deep. 2 observers separately. 10½ hrs. and 9 miles on foot. Total, 15 species, 133 indiv.; add. 2 species, 10 indiv. **Bill Anaka, Joyce Gunn**.

WALLWORT, Dec. 27. Mild, no wind. Around farm, and 22 miles by car. Total, 7 species, 101 indiv. **J. Turnquist**.

WYNYARD, Dec. 30. Total, 6 species, 38 indiv. Add: 2 species, 2 indiv. Robin was noted on Dec. 27. **D. Bardal**

YORKTON, Dec. 26, 8 a.m. to 5:30

p.m., temp 32° to 36°; 20 in. snow. 14 observers in 6 parties. Total party hours, 19½ (9 by car, 10½ on foot); Total party miles, 62 (51 by car and 11 on foot). Total, 16 species, 542 ind. **Wayne Bjorgan, Brother Clarence, Brother Clement, Henry Chillman, Jr., Ronald Coleman, Tom Cursons, Archie Fraser, Art Gellert, Dr. and Mrs. Stuart Houston**, (compilers), **Phil Pawluck, Bob Pearce, Cliff Shaw and Jeff Smith**. (Yorkton Natural History Society).

MINITONAS, Manitoba, Dec. 22. Around farm. Ruffed Grouse, 4; Blue Jay, 1; Black-capped Chickadee, 4; English Sparrow, 40; White-winged Crossbill, 30. Total, 5 species, 79 indiv. Add: Sharp-tailed Grouse, 1; Magpie, 3; Raven, 3; on additional days. **Fay and Will Ranson**. (This Manitoba count is not included in the Saskatchewan table following).

Bird Notes

YELLOW-SHAFTED FLICKER at **SASKATOON** — **Mrs. J. Gerrard** reports that none of the usual winter birds have come to their feeding station this winter. However, three times, January 13, 24, 31, they have seen a Yellow-shafted Flicker come and feed on the shrivelled berries of the Highbush Cranberry and the Virginia Creeper.

SLATE-COLOURED JUNCO WINTERING? — Noted by **Dr. L. G. Saunders** at Saskatoon on January 30.

IS THE HOODED MERGANSER RARE IN SOUTHERN SASKATCHEWAN? — This question is posed

by the following report from **E. M. Callin**, Fort San: "On October 27, 1956 I recorded this bird for only the second time—an apparent indication of its scarcity in the territory which I have been able to cover properly. A well-plumaged male was shot at the head of our group of lakes here and later shown to me. However, a resident at the head of the lakes and who seems to know his game birds very well states that each spring and fall he sees considerable numbers of Hooded Mergansers."

GOLDEN - CROWNED KINGLET AT YORKTON — Re: Anaka's record of the Golden-crowned Kinglet at Spirit Lake on Oct. 31, 1956 (**Blue Jay**, XIV, 119), **Dr. Stuart Houston**,

Yorkton, writes: "This is the fourth record for the Yorkton district—all since publication of **The Birds of the Yorkton District** (1949). A Golden-crowned Kinglet was found dead on Tupper Ave., Oct. 9, 1951 by Andrew Burant (**Blue Jay**, IX, Dec., p. 12). I saw two in the Yorkton hospital grounds on Dec. 22, 1953 (**Blue Jay**, XII, Jan., p. 32). On April 24, 1955, on a Y.N.H.S. outing to Hopkin's Lake on the western edge of Yorkton, I located a male in song, and later we observed a female from only four feet away. These were likely in migration.

GOLDEN - CROWNED KINGLET AT FORT QU'APPELLE — On Nov. 2, 1956, a single bird was seen by **E. M. Callin** on the Sanitorium grounds. Mr. Callin was attracted by the very high, shrill and somewhat rough quality of the call notes which were uttered insistently, and which he had never heard before. As far as he can recall, Mr. Callin has seen a Golden-crowned Kinglet only once before in the Fort Qu'Appelle area. He notes however, that the **Chickadee Notes** records two seen on November 5, 1956 (three days later than his own record) by Stanley Harrison of Fort Qu'Appelle. Mr. Harrison found them in his barn where they stayed for about an hour.