

Oakland's 70th CBC Succeeds Despite Rain

Intermittent rain overnight largely shut down predawn owling on December 19, 2010, and dampened—some say it soaked—daytime participants in Oakland's 70th Christmas Bird Count. But it surely didn't diminish their enthusiasm, or depress their appetites at the compilation dinner afterward.

As day dawned, 169 field observers spread out over Oakland's 15-mile-diameter count circle, while another 21 folks began to identify birds around their feeders and yards. Although there were 14 fewer observers in the field than in 2009, this year's birding parties put in very nearly as many hours and miles as the year before, and found two more species.

The rain and wind did affect results. One of our boats was unable to get onto the bay, the other was out for only two hours, and land bird activity was down markedly. Only 77,109 birds were counted, our second-lowest total since 1974 and less than half the number found in peak years of the mid-1970s. Waterbirds, whose numbers make up 50 percent of our total on average, naturally experienced the largest decline, but there were similar declines in percentage terms across other species groups, such as shorebirds and passerines.

Somewhat surprisingly, we found 177 species this year, one above our 20-year average. One reason: Of our "regular" 163 species—those recorded in at least eight of the last 10 years—we missed only two: Redhead and Western Screech-Owl. Two species that were new to the count, both found in Alameda, frosted the cake. A Yellow-billed Loon off Crown Beach was chosen at the compilation dinner as the count's best bird, and a female Baltimore Oriole found in Washington Park in late November obligingly lingered through count day.

Other notable finds included a Ross's Goose (in Oakland), 7 Snow Geese (in three different locations), a Black Scoter (Alameda Point), 18 Snowy Plovers (Alameda shoreline), a Tree or Violet-Green Swallow (Oakland airport), and a Black-throated Gray Warbler back for another winter (Emeryville's Heritage Square). Two species belong in the "by no means dependable, but sure glad we found them" category: Tufted Duck and Evening Grosbeak. Evening Grosbeaks occurred in many Bay Area locations this winter, and we're glad that one was detected in Tilden Regional Park on count day. A Tufted Duck, rare anywhere on the West Coast, has wintered on Lake Merritt most years since 1995. Also present there was the presumed male Hooded Merganser x Barrow's Goldeneye hybrid, first found in May 2004. An *Empidonax* sp. flycatcher, perhaps a Least Flycatcher, was seen in Tilden Regional Park before and after count day, but eluded field observers then.

Yard watchers made important contributions to the count again this year. Lincoln's Sparrow was found only by yard watchers—two of them—in the Oakland hills. And in the head-scratcher category, a yard watcher in Albany reported an *Amazona* sp. parrot, probably a Red-crowned Parrot.

This year the public was able to participate in the count vicariously while remaining warm and dry in their homes. A *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter and photographer joined the Berkeley waterfront team to describe the count for the next day's paper and on



Adult Ross's Goose found in Oakland's Middle Harbor Shoreline Park. The species has been recorded on seven previous Oakland CBCs, three in the last 10 years.

Calvin Lou

SFGate.com. A reporter from the online news site Oakland North joined the Lake Merritt team and posted her story the next day; it also appeared on the SFGate and the Bay Citizen websites. Nine days later, Dan Murphy was interviewed by Michael Krasny on KQED-FM's Forum program. The segment concentrated on the San Francisco CBC under way that day, but Michael and Dan also mentioned the Oakland count. We thank the area leaders and field observers who worked so well with the press, and thank the reporters for their fine work.

Oakland's compilation dinners are always fun, especially when the excellent dinner and warm room provide such a welcome contrast to the weather. Marsha Mather-Thrift made overall arrangements this year and at dinner was ably assisted by Pam Belchamber, Elinor Blake, Sophia Close, Jan Collins, Laura Gobbi, Mike Lynes, and Mark Welther. Della Dash produced an amazing array of bird-related merchandise for sale, helped by Pam and by Marj Blackwell. Our tasks as compilers again benefited from Stephanie Strait's support in many areas, and especially from the indefatigable leaders of our 29 count areas and the rest of the 190 CBC participants. We thank all of them (and anyone we inadvertently overlooked) for another successful count.

Looking ahead, we invite birders of every ability and age to mark their calendars for Oakland's 71st CBC: Sunday, December 18, 2011. See you then!

—Dave Quady and Bob Lewis, Compilers