

2020 Patuxent River Christmas Count Summary

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The Christmas Bird Count was held on December 27, 2020.

26 observers counted in 17 parties. We were sorry we had to miss our regular tally rally at the Ruddy Duck.

The weather conditions were quite favorable with temps ranging from 24 to 46 degrees and mostly sunny skies the entire day with little to no wind. Despite ice covered waterways in most of the shallow creeks and ponds 109 species were observed marking the highest species count in the 24 years of count history!

Four species were documented for the first time. These include **Green Heron** seen and photographed by **Mary Hollinger** at Green Holly Pond, a **Marsh Wren** and **Clapper Rail** were seen by **Scott and Stephen Clark** at Patuxent Naval Air Station and **Sue Hamilton** and **Sherman Suter** relocated the **Great White Heron** at Calvert Beach that has resided there since this summer.

Rusty Blackbird was observed on the Base for only the second time in count history and four species appeared for the third time. These were Osprey and Cackling Goose on the Base, Palm Warblers at two locations and Pine Siskins also at two locations.

Five species that are regularly seen were missed this year. For the first time in 5 years, Red-headed Woodpeckers were absent at Calvert Cliffs State Park. The Peregrine was not seen on the bridge and we missed Wild Turkey. Ice cover may be the reason we did not get our regular Wood Ducks and Pintails.

16,810 individuals were counted. We had record high numbers for Pied-billed Grebe, Swamp Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Great Cormorant (which hadn't been seen since 2000). Speaking of Cormorant, our original high number of 206 for Double-crested was crushed with 1840 tallied. Greater Black-backed Gulls were three times the previous high at 639. Lastly, 121 Brown Pelicans was the second highest ever recorded.

There were some disappointing record lows. Tundra Swan dropped to only 27 and only 42 Common Goldeneye were recorded. Something is going on with Ruddy Ducks. For many years, they were the most numerous duck species we had. Last year was a record low at 430 and only 290 were seen this year. Let's hope this pattern starts to turn around soon. Only 3 Scaup were seen this year. 1 Greater at Calvert Cliffs State park by **Gwen Brewer** and 2 Lesser by **Scott and Stephen Clark** at the Base.

Steve Ferrell found the only Sharp-shinned Hawk of the day at Jefferson Patterson Park. **Tyler and Jane** were able to deliver a lone Purple Finch in Wildwood and **Mike Carpenter and Karen Anderson** in the Broome's Island sector, had the only Fish Crow. For some reason, I was the only person to get Barred Owl also, in Broome's Island. The only Eastern Phoebe was seen by **Gwen Brewer** at Calvert Cliffs and

Bob Boxwell had the only American Widgeons at Cove Point. Short-eared Owl has been a regular on the airfield on the Base for many years running and luckily, **Jim Swift** was able to spot one there this year as well. This is also the only location where Horned Larks were seen. Speaking of the Base, **Scott and Stephen Clark** found the only Red-throated Loon, Bonaparte's Gull, Merlin, Gray Catbirds and Fox Sparrows of the day at that location as well.

On a final note, thanks to **Scott and Stephen Clark**, we added a new type of birding effort...2 hours and 8.6 miles by bicycle!

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