

The 35th Mount Horeb Area Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday 31 December 2023. Although it was a relatively quiet birding day, with intermittent light to moderate snowfall all day, we counted 6905 individual birds of 56 species. We now have 35 years of continuous data, with an average of 54 species annually recorded over the last 15 years (high years 2012, 2013, and 2017 with 59 species each of those years).

In 2023, 20 field parties of 45 people found a low of 5 species, high of 32, for an average of 19 species per field party. 87.25 hours and 462.25 miles were driven and walked in 2023. 5 hours were spent owling. We had 12 feeder counts, and 17 feeder watchers found 29 species of 649 birds over 9 hours. We have tremendous area coverage and birder dedication. **Thank you all!**

The weather data we provide to the National Audubon Society reflects when we have less than ideal birding conditions. As this is a "point in time" bird count, we do our best with the weather conditions. I could not find a narrative when we had snow all day (reviewing 2009 through 2022 narratives), so if any of you remember such a year, please let me know! Our 35 year continuous data set is invaluable for finding trends and making comparisons. **Thank you all for being a part of this valuable effort. The 2023 Mount Horeb CBC summary sheet is attached.**

We worked hard to find birds on the 2023 Count, and while most counters said it was a slow day, we had some very good finds! A meadowlark (!), 2 long eared and 1 short-eared owls were found on various The Prairie Enthusiast lands! Thank you for the grassland habitat management Rich Henderson and others! 30 Eastern bluebirds total were counted in 2023, while we usually find 7 to 15 annually. 2013 was the last year when we had 30 bluebirds. Every species we found on Count Day was also seen during our Count Week 7 day time period.

On the 2023 Count, our highest number bird was the beloved dark-eyed junco at 1168! Our next highest number bird was the European starling at 943, followed by the American crow at 553. Several feeder watchers mentioned patrolling resident Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawks were keeping their feeder bird numbers low. Two species were seen only at feeders, 1 chipping sparrow and 6 white-crowned sparrows. A unique feeder species was a southern flying squirrel who loves the berry and seed suet cakes! Although it does fly, we did not include it with our total count numbers (thanks Caroline and Frank!).

We had 18 unique or low in number species including those mentioned elsewhere along with common goldeneye, great blue heron, yellow-bellied sapsucker, Northern shrike, brown creeper, winter wren, golden-crowned kinglet, and song sparrow. Although we had some snow cover on Count Day, open and agricultural lands associated bird numbers were low, with 275 horned larks, 1 lapland longspur, and no snow buntings found.

We found only 6 different raptor species. Bald eagle numbers were consistent with the last few years (11), while red-tailed (34) and rough-legged hawks (2), and kestrels (11) were all low in number. Apparently raptors do not like flying during snow squalls! Although most of us were daytime birding, we still found Eastern screech (2), great horned (3), barred (3), long eared (2) and short-eared owls (1).

Woodpeckers as a group were well represented by red-headed (39!), red-bellied (79), yellow-bellied sapsucker (1), downy (177), hairy (55), pileated (16) and Northern flicker (7). Woodland management is essential for red-headed woodpecker habitat. Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell have been doing intensive oak woodland management for years. In 2022, they burned a record amount of oak woodland acreage in the spring, and 2023 was a very good autumn mast (acorn) year. They had their highest ever count of “property” red-headed woodpeckers at 31 adult and immature birds! Thank you Pat and Ken!

Count Day 2024 will be held on Sunday 29 December 2024, the traditional Sunday after Christmas. We will resume our after-count potlucks, more information in December 2024!

Many thanks to Peter Gorman for continued Google territory mapping wizardry! My sincere thanks to EVERYONE for their Mount Horeb CBC involvement. Thank you to the new counters, and to those who took extra or new territories. This would not happen without you! As always, check my data compilation and let me know any errors. Please contact me if you have any questions or suggestions for continued improvement. Please pass this summary along to others I may have missed, and let others know about the count. More birders are always welcome!

All things change. Here's hoping 2024 brings you and yours health and happiness. Happy New Year, stay warm, keep the feeders stocked, and Good Birding everybody! Kerry Beheler 105 Oak Tree Drive Mt Horeb 53572 608-437-6938

We must remain vigilant to protect the birds and their habitats. Please visit the National Audubon Society for current information about birds and climate change, link here <http://climate.audubon.org/>

Another National Audubon initiative is Climate Watch. Please see the link below and participate as you deem best.
<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/climate-watch>