

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT—1969

ELOISE F. POTTER

Northern finches seem to like southern hospitality. In addition to record or near-record numbers of Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, and Pine Siskins, the 1969 Christmas Bird Count lists 55 House Finches (53 at Rocky Mount), 2 Common Redpolls (Bodie-Pea Island), 485 Red Crossbills (in 10 of 28 count areas from mountains to coast, but mostly W of fall line), 2 White-winged Crossbills (Smokies), 1 Oregon Junco (Winston-Salem), and 20 Snow Buntings (Morehead City). Along with the influx of northern finches came an unprecedented number of Red-breasted Nuthatches (417, compared to 176 in 1968 Christmas count) as well as many Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets.

The present count is also marked by an interesting assortment of stragglers including 1 Common Teal, Bodie-Pea Island; 1 Whip-poor-will, Wilmington; 1 Wood Thrush, Caldwell County; 1 Swainson's Thrush, Charleston; 13 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, five localities; 1 Wilson's Warbler, Hilton Head Island; and 2 Blue Grosbeaks, Chapel Hill. Details of these and other noteworthy sightings will be found in the Compilers' Comments.

Count-day weather conditions were generally pleasant for the time of year except in western North Carolina where ice and snow undoubtedly curtailed coverage in several localities. The 367 field observers in 130 parties spent over 1,000 party-hours traveling approximately 5,000 miles in 28 count areas. The total of 206 species tallied falls only nine below the 1965 record of 215 species. Wilmington led the five coastal counts with 154 species, and Greensboro led the inland counts with 94. The total number of individuals (nearly 900,000) is considerably higher than in recent years because of a large blackbird roost in the Raleigh area.

COMPILERS' COMMENTS

BODIE-PEA ISLAND, N.C.: The adult male Common Teal (LO, PS, GW) was carefully studied with a 30X scope while in a raft of 100 or so Green-winged Teal. The total of 94 American Avocets may well be a record for the area in winter. The Common Redpolls (GSG, RHP) were seen at close range in good light. These along with the 24 Evening Grosbeaks, 393 Pine Siskins, and 14 Red Crossbills (JC, HL, RW) indicate an unusual concentration of northern finches in the area. The 7 Ipswich Sparrows are a record for the species in North Carolina on a count.—Paul W. Sykes Jr.

MOREHEAD CITY, N.C.: Thirty Knots were seen at Atlantic Beach 1 January by JF III and C.J. Spears. The high number of Laughing Gulls was due to the early count date. Two Ground Doves (JF III, BS, TW) had been present at Ft. Macon since 14 November. The 20 Snow Buntings (BS, TU) were on Elijah Lump, NW of Ft. Macon.—John Fussell III

WILMINGTON, N.C.: Female Whip-poor-will (LD et al.) was perched in a pine tree at Airlie Gardens. Several previous winter records not on count day. Parula Warbler (BD, FN) was at Airlie; Prairie Warbler (JP) was at Carolina Beach.—Dot Earle

CHARLESTON, S.C.: Whistling Swan (EAC et al.) is uncommon, but records are increasing. Swainson's Thrush (RB, ELB) was apparently a very late straggler. American Oystercatchers were apparently over twice as abundant as on prior counts; estimate carefully checked by EAC, PM, AMW. Bobolinks (RB, ELB) were one male and four females; previously recorded to 28 December.—E.B. Chamberlain

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C.: The rare sighting of a Wilson's Warbler (ML) was confirmed on 1 January by Caroline Newhall. The bird was with kinglets, chickadees,

and White-throated Sparrows in roadside low brush beside a water-filled ditch. The Painted Bunting (Billie Hack party) was two or three weeks later than stragglers usually hang around island feeders. The White-crowned Sparrow (RFW) was a mature bird.
-Robert F. Whitney

BEAUFORT COUNTY, N.C.: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (EB) at same feeder since early fall.--Geraldine Cox

PAMLICO COUNTY, N.C.: Lincoln's Sparrow had been at feeder since 23 December.--Geraldine Cox

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C.: The 53 House Finches (BD, JB, SB, LD, JLT) were in Rocky Mount near the library feeding on sweet gum balls in company with American Goldfinches. For the past month small numbers of House Finches have visited local feeders, but the large flock was a surprise. Mrs. Davis is familiar with the species.--John L. Thompson

SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.: Common Merganser (HL, EL) was a female. Spotted Sandpiper (JHC) in winter plumage was seen in flight; two found in same area after count. Red Crossbills (HL) were in pines at Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve, and one at bird bath in town.--J.H. Carter III

AIKEN, S.C.: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (Knighton party).--William Post and Tom Rial

HENDERSON, N.C.: Eight House Finches were seen during the count period, adding a new species for the area.--Herbert E. Huggins

RALEIGH, N.C.: Red Crossbills (HL, EL, RT, ET, GT) were at Umstead Park and Lake Johnson. Bewick's Wren (DLW) was near out buildings of a Raleigh home situated on a large wooded lot. The Common Grackles and Brown-headed Cowbirds were in a roost.
-David L. Wray

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.: The total of 81 species exceeds the Christmas Count record of 77 set in 1966 count. Noteworthy finds were a Common Goldeneye (DB), two Turkeys (AWM, SL, JOP), a Yellow-breasted Chat (EW), two Blue Grosbeaks (JOP), and 28 Red Crossbills (several parties). Identification of the Blue Grosbeaks was firmly established by close studies before, during, and after count day by several competent observers.--Robert P. Teulings

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.: House Finches (RS) have been visiting feeder since 20 December; two males carefully observed and photographed. Oregon Junco (RS) has returned to feeder for third year. -C. Royce Hough III

IREDELL COUNTY, N.C.: Red Crossbills are first record for county.--Mark Simpson Jr.

CHARLOTTE, N.C.: A brown-plumaged House Finch (JRN et al.) has been at the Norwood feeder since 6 December. The Red Crossbills (JRN, WS, et al.) have been almost daily visitors at the Norwood bird bath since 12 December, with 3 males and 5 females at bath at one time on count day. Another small flock was feeding in pine trees, and Smith saw a flock watering with siskins. The count of Rusty Blackbirds (WS) was unusually large for area, but no nearby roost indicated.--Joseph R. Norwood

PIEDMONT, S.C.: Redhead (MSA, CRG) was a first sighting for area.--Carl R. Garrison

ANDERSON, S.C.: Semipalmated Sandpipers (AMT et al.) were at Lake Hartwell feeding with Killdeer and Common Snipe. They are seen regularly here during migration, but have not been found on a previous Christmas count.--Adair M. Tedards

ELKIN-RONDA, N.C.: Red Crossbills (LH, FM, JT) are first record for area.--Lin Hendren

CALDWELL COUNTY, N.C.: Due to inclement weather with 6 to 8 inches of snow on ground, most birding was done in own yards. Unusual sightings were a Wood Thrush (Manchesters) and a Common Grackle (HM), the latter a lame bird.--Helen Myers

BUNCOMBE COUNTY, N.C.: This is the same count area formerly reported as "Swannanoa." Screech Owl was in a roosting box in Ruiz yard. Snipe (GGM) and large flock of Rusty Blackbirds and cowbirds were on Warren Wilson College grounds.--Robert C. Ruiz

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, N.C.-TENN.: Drizzle or light rain all day. Snow on ground varying from 4 inches in lower elevations to 22 inches in higher elevations.--Richard C. Zani

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