

2018 Spring Migration Counts in North Carolina

Marilyn Westphal

P.O. Box 1427

Hendersonville, NC 28793

mjwestph@ret.unca.edu

Twenty-two count areas provided data for the 2018 Spring Count, two more than the previous year and back up to previous high levels. The Grandfather Mountain Count resumed after poor weather prevented its completion last year. Watauga County also joined with a very successful trial count. Total species (239) for the North Carolina Spring Count was slightly lower than average for the past few years, but identical to 2017. Total individual birds (82,629) was the lowest since 2010, although the number of participants (478) and total team-hours (1367.89) were above average. Birds per team hour (60.4) were well below average. In other words, it took more effort to find fewer birds than in previous years.

Some of the most uncommon species found (usually in just one count area, or in a few cases two areas, included: King Rail on the Chapel Hill count, Virginia Rail on the Mecklenburg count, White-rumped Sandpiper on the Henderson count, Mississippi Kite on the Southern Pines count, Olive-sided Flycatcher on the Hanging Rock count, Black-capped Chickadee on the Balsam Mountains count, Warbling Vireo on the Hanging Rock and Forsyth counts, Marsh Wren on the Brunswick count, Gray-cheeked Thrush on the Mecklenburg and Greensboro counts, Lark Sparrow on the Southern Pines count, Seaside Sparrow on the Brunswick count, Bay-breasted Warbler on the Forsyth count, Orange-crowned Warbler on the Greensboro count, Golden-winged Warbler on the Hanging Rock and Rockingham counts, Red Crossbill on the Balsam Mountains and Black Mountains counts, and Dickcissel on the Iredell count.

The most common and widespread species (overall total individuals exceeding 1000 and at least some found on every count) include, in order of abundance from highest to lowest: Northern Cardinal, American Crow, American Robin, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Dove, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Towhee, American Goldfinch, Carolina Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Blue Jay, Chimney Swift, and Indigo Bunting. Most abundant birds in the mountains were American Robin, Eastern Towhee, American Crow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Red-eyed Vireo. Most abundant birds in the Piedmont were American Crow, Carolina Wren, Canada Goose, Tufted Titmouse, and American Robin. Most abundant birds on the coast were Royal Tern, Short-billed Dowitcher, Black Skimmer, Laughing Gull, and Dunlin.

Details of individual counts including names of compilers and participants as well as count highlights and a list of species found exclusively on each count follow.

Mountains

Transylvania County – Count date May 7th, 120 species, 5116 individuals, 28 participants, 89.10 party-hours. Elevation ranges from 2100 to 5600 ft.

Weather: Temperature lower 50's to lower 70's Fahrenheit and partly cloudy

Compiler: Michael Plauché (captainbluegill@gmail.com)

Participants: Marvin Barg, Michele Barg, Nancy Cowall, Bruce Cox, David Dolittle, Ray Dunkelberg, George Dunkelberg, Robert Emmott, Deane Freudenberg, Mary Freudenberg, Elizabeth Galloway, Kathleen George, Gary Harris, Kathy Harris, Richard Jackson, Mike Judd, Nora Murdock, Janie Owens, Michael Plauché, Frank Porter, Barbara Reynolds, Marcus Simpson, Bill Seibenheller, Norma Siebenheller, Martine Stolk, Charlie Threatte, Linda Threatte, and Marilyn Westphal.

Exclusives: none

Notes: It was a great day. We might have had better luck with a few non-breeding migrants (swallows, non-breeding warblers, shorebirds) if the count had been a little earlier, but we got the *Empidonax* flycatchers, which we might have missed had the count been earlier.

Michael Plauché

Pisgah Ridge, Great Balsam and Plott Balsam Mountains IBA – Count dates spanned from May 18-22 with teams selecting one of those days to do their section, 80 species, 2938 individuals, 23 participants in 11 parties, 66.82 party-hours. Elevation ranges for this count run from 3500 to 6100 feet.

Weather: Variable over the count period with a couple of good sunny and clear days, but as always some windy and rainy conditions.

Compiler: Marilyn Westphal (mjwestph@ret.unca.edu)

Participants: Tim Carstens, Nancy Casey, Doug Johnston, Robert Emmott, Shannon Fair, Tom Flagg, Steve Frohock, Robert Johnson, Stacy Johnson, Gail Lankford, Charlie Lankford, Mark McNeil, Nora Murdock, Naomi Otterness, Michael Plauché, Catherine Reid, Russell Roe, Steve Semanchuk, Mark Simpson, Lou Weber, Marilyn Westphal, Connie Wulcovicz and Stan Wulcovicz

Exclusives: Black-capped Chickadee

Notes: Total species and total individual bird number were average for the 12 years of this count although effort (team hours) was slightly lower than average. May was a very wet month in the mountains, and that may have delayed nesting activity for many species. Prairie Warbler made a first time appearance on this count. No other unusual species were found, but Peregrine Falcons were once again attempting to nest at Devil's Courthouse, and swallows and Pine Siskins reappeared after being absent the previous year on the count.

The top ten most common species found were mostly the typical ones, except that Golden-crowned Kinglet numbers declined greatly taking this species completely out of the top ten with Red-eyed Vireo taking its place. The top ten were once again led by Chestnut-sided Warbler (247), and Dark-eyed Junco (246) followed by Eastern Towhee (222), Blue-headed Vireo (173), Black-throated Green Warbler (170), American Robin (137), Canada Warbler (121), Veery (116), Red-eyed Vireo (115), and Black-throated Blue Warbler (107).

As always, all of the singing chickadees between Black Balsam and Richland Balsam were singing the Black-capped song, and this time were listed as Black-capped although it is possible they are hybrids. Yellow-rumped Warblers were once again present along Black Balsam Road and may again be attempting to nest there.

Thanks again to all the count participants, especially for working hard to try to fit in a dry day for the count. Wet days at these elevations usually mean heavy fog, so finding a drier day is important.

Marilyn Westphal

Henderson County – Count date period from May 16th to May 23rd (teams select which date to do their count), 114 species, 2560 individuals, 19 participants in eight areas, 36.30 party-hours.

Weather: Variable, heavy rain early in count period.

Compiler: Jim Neal (jlbjneal@gmail.com)

Participants: Vickie Burke, Bob Butler, Doug Carle, Muriel Carle, Barrie Cliff, Paulette Cliff, Liz Fitts, Wayne Forsythe, Mike Judd, Barbara Neal, Jim Neal, Carol Palmer, Cherie Pittillo, Michael Plauché, Mark Simpson, Aaron Steed, Martine Stolk, Linda Wallace, and Marilyn Westphal

Exclusives: White-rumped Sandpiper

Notes: The 2018 Spring Migration Count for Henderson County, NC was conducted over an 8-day period from May 16-23. Nineteen people counted in eight areas within the county and found 114 species and 2560 individual birds. The 114 species is above the midpoint with a low of 95 species in 2015 and a high of 120 species in 2006. The 2560 total birds are below the midpoint between a low of 1612 in 2014 and a high of 3904 in 2012.

There were only four species with 100 or more birds. The European Starling at 122 was first followed by Eastern Towhee at 114, Song Sparrow at 102 and Short-billed Dowitcher at 100.

It rained every day of the count, which affected the results both positively and negatively. The positive result was that the torrential rain on the first day caused more shorebirds to stop at Hooper Lane and produced five new species for the spring migration count: Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Forster's Tern, White-rumped Sandpiper and Red Knot. Red Knots were also a first for Henderson County.

The negative impact was that flooding prevented counting certain parts of some areas and two areas had record low counts of species and individual birds for the 21 years of records. In spite of the weather conditions, the overall results were about average and we got our normal 20 species of warblers. Other really good species found included Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Acadian Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo and Grasshopper Sparrow.

I want to thank all those who braved the weather conditions to help with the count for an excellent job.

Jim Neal

Buncombe County – Count dates ran May 11-14 with each group selecting a day to count their section, 108 species, 4578 individuals, 28 participants in nine parties, 65.45 party-hours.

Weather: No data

Compiler: Tom Tribble (tntribble@gmail.com)

Participants: Miles Buddy, Seth Buddy, Tom Bush, Nancy Casey, Robert Emmott, G Greenburg, K. Hillegas, Doug Johnston, K Kelly, Gail Lankford, Herman Lankford, D. Liberatori, Nora Murdock, Janie Owens, Liz Payne, Jim Poling, Kitti Reynolds, Russell Roe, Steve Semanchuk, Mark Simpson, Liz Skiles, Tom Tribble, C. Walsh, Marilyn Westphal, Jay Wherley, and Steve Yurkovich

Exclusives: Cerulean Warbler

Notes: Some comparisons from the last few years include:

2014 – 120 species, 5421 individuals

2015 – 112 species, 4902 individuals

2016 – 109 species, 4913 individuals

2017 – 113 species, 4024 individuals

2018 – 108 species, 4578 individuals

No unusual species were found, although one Cape May Warbler was reported, which is the first time in recent years. Also there were no Bobolinks reported for the first time in five years.

Tom Tribble

Black Mountains IBA – Count period ran from May 25th-31st with teams selecting one of those days to complete their section, 56 species, 1941 individuals, 18 participants in 11 parties with some teams covering a second section on a different day, 51.10 party-hours.

Weather: May was a very wet month, so finding a suitable day to do the count was a challenge. Elevation range for this count is 3000 to 6684 feet with most of the count area above 4000 feet. This count has been conducted since 2006 with 2008 missed because of road closures.

Compiler: Marilyn Westphal (mjwestph@ret.unca.edu)

Participants: Eric Andmundson, Robert Emmott, Jamie Harrelson, Doug Johnston, Don Kautz, Bob Knight, Charlie Lankford, Gail Lankford, Nora Murdock, Michael Plauché, Barbara Reynolds, Steve Semanchuk, Mark Simpson, Debbie Segal, Alan Shapiro, Liz Skiles, Tom Tribble, Marilyn Westphal

Exclusives: none

Notes: Weather is always an issue in spring in the Black Mountains as fog and wind are constant problems, and May 2018 was a particularly wet month, but every team managed to complete their section nevertheless. Although participation was good, fewer species and fewer individuals than average were found. Most notable misses were Turkey Vulture and Brown Thrasher, and no potentially-breeding Swainson's Thrushes, Yellow-rumped Warblers, or Least Flycatchers were found as they have been in previous years. The small population of Swainson's Thrushes that were located in this area for almost a decade has been absent the last couple of years. The population may not have been large enough to sustain itself. Least Flycatchers always occur only irregularly in the area. Also unusual was the lack of any raptors other than Broad-winged Hawk. No nocturnal birding occurred, so no owls were found.

Much of the area covered in this count is high elevation spruce/fir habitat and the most frequently found species are those common to that habitat. This year, as usual, the top ten species were largely dominated by spruce/fir specialists and included Dark-eyed Junco (244), Black-throated Green Warbler (190), Golden-crowned Kinglet (152), Blue-headed Vireo (135), Blackburnian Warbler (94), Eastern Towhee (94), Red-breasted Nuthatch (81), Black-throated Blue Warbler (80), Canada Warbler (75), and Veery (73). Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins, species with widely varying populations from one year to the next, were both present only in very low numbers in 2018.

Many thanks once again to all the participants. This count requires some significant hiking over sometimes steep and/or rocky trails, so their efforts are always greatly appreciated.

Marilyn Westphal

Grandfather Mountain – Count date May 25th, 75 species, 1085 individuals, nine participants in five parties, 24.00 party-hours.

Weather: No data

Compiler: Amy Renfranz (amy@grandfather.com)

Participants: Robin Diaz, Debi Campbell, Gina Diggs, Steve Dowland, Kendell Juell, Guy McGrane, Amy Renfranz, Judi Sawyer, and Chrissy Verdream

Exclusives: none

Notes: none

Watauga County – Count date May 5th, 115 species, 1741 individuals, 18 participants, 45.00 party-hours.

Weather: No data

Compiler: Guy McGrane (badgerboy@wilkes.net)

Participants: Alicia Baur, Meredith Boothe, Anita Clemmer, Martha Cutler, Steve Dowlan, Bill Dunson, Margaret Dunson, Elizabeth Faison, Pat Geiger, Merrill Lynch, Guy McGrane, Janet Paulette, Richard Paulette, Will Pratt, Pat Rusch, Beverly Saltonstall, Debbie Shetterly and Jimmie Shetterly

Exclusives: none

Notes: High Country Audubon Society completed this trial run for a Spring Count covering the whole of Watauga County this year. With 19 participants doing 45 party hours of birding, including a couple hours owling, 1741 birds and 115 species were found, 120 including four count week birds and a probably uncountable Mute Swan.

Good finds were a Sora at Brookshire Park, a Northern Saw-whet Owl above Sims pond at Price Park, a late Red-breasted Merganser at Price Lake, and a late White-crowned Sparrow at Brookshire Park.

Birds missed that we can usually find in the right habitat this time of year were Hermit Thrush, Vesper Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Rock Pigeon, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Count week birds missed on count day were White-eyed Vireo, Hooded Merganser, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Sharp-shinned Hawk. If interest remains we will continue this count in future years.

Guy McGrane

Hanging Rock State Park IBA – Count date May 9th, 93 species 832 individuals, nine participants in five parties, 17.00 party-hours. Elevation range 1200-2400 feet.

Weather: no data

Compiler: Jean Chamberlain (jchamberlain1@windstream.net)

Participants: Jesse Anderson, Jean Chamberlain, Kerry Eckhardt, Don Kautz, Virginia Perry, Jeremy Reiskind, David Shumate, Cara Woods and Tony Woods

Exclusives: Bufflehead, Olive-sided Flycatcher

Notes: none

Piedmont

Iredell County – Count date May 6th, 109 species, 2657 individuals, 12 participants in four parties and one feeder watcher, 25.50 party-hours. Weather: Sunny, temperature ranged from 59-73°F

Count circle is centered on the South Yadkin River Bridge on Chipley Ford Road in northern Iredell County.

Compiler: Ron Underwood (rongto@gmail.com)

Participants: Debbie Birnley, Evie Caldwell, Cynthia Dickerson, Bill English, Jack Greene, Larry Marlin, Caroline Martin, Cheri Seli, Jason Thiele, Garnet Underwood, Ron Underwood and Mark Whitaker.

Exclusives: American Black Duck, Dickcissel

Notes: none

Mecklenberg County – Count date May 5th, 125 species, 6896 individuals, 34 participants, 105.20 party-hours.

Weather: no data

Compiler: Jeff Lemons (birdsallot@gmail.com)

Participants: Jill Baim, Ron Clark, Wayne Covington, Jennifer Daggy, Bill Duston, Jan Fowler, Jim Guyton, Chris Hanna, John Hanna, Greg Hays, Christy Hill, Matt Janson, Dennis Kent, Malia Kline, Ken Kneidel, Dennis Lankford, Jeff Lemons, Joclyn MacLaughlin, Pat MacLaughlin, Kevin Metcalf, Roger Moyer, Martina Nordstrand, Jill Palmer, Taylor Piephoff, Lucy Quintilliano, Barry Rowan, Tammy Sanders, Tom Sanders, John Scavetto, David Schroder, Don Seriff, Steve Tracy, Rob VanEpps, and Judy Walker

Exclusives: Virginia Rail

Notes: none

Pilot Mountain State Park – Count date May 2nd, 107 species, 1265 individuals, nine participants, 26.00 party-hours. Surry County - Pilot Mountain is the count center.

Weather: Temperature 48-83°F, light winds, clear in the morning, increasing clouds in the afternoon

Compiler: Jesse Anderson (jesse.anderson@ncparks.gov)

Participants: Jesse Anderson, Brian Bockhahn, Jean Chamberlain, Kerry Eckhart, Nathan Gatto, Daniel Jackson, Don Kautz, Don Lendle and James Williams

Exclusives: none

Notes: none

Forsyth County – Count date May 5th, 127 species, 4750 individuals, 40 participants in 12 teams, 110.50 party-hours.

Weather: Temperature 62-77°F

Compiler: Nathan Gatto (ndgatto72@gmail.com)

Participants: Ga Baliga, Mary Franklin Blackburn, Malcolm Brown, Tommy Castleman, Harvey Clodfelter, David Collins, Mike Conway, Carol Cunningham, David Disher, Susan Disher, Cynthia Donaldson, Kerry Eckhardt, Greg Gatto, Kate Gatto, Nathan Gatto, Sarah Gatto, Bill Gifford, Lucy Gifford, John Haire, Roper Halverson, Elaine Hammond, John Hammond, Wendy Hawkins, Royce Hough, Jim Martin, Craig McCleary, Jane McCleary, Heather Moir, Ron Virginia Perry, Jeremy Reiskind, Rob Rogers, Lee Salisbury, Bill Spencer, Philip Stewart, Chuck Thompson, Cindy Thompson, Katherine Thorington, Gray Tuttle, Kay Tuttle, and Jay Wilhelmi

Exclusives: Ring-necked Duck, American Coot, Bay-breasted Warbler

Notes: We had a great Spring Bird Count last month! Our teams were able to locate 127 species, which is slightly better than the count average of 124 species. As a whole, I felt that this was a fairly slow spring and this count helped confirm my suspicions. We only recorded 4750 individuals, down from the average of 5444. It could just take one flock of European Starlings or Red-winged Blackbirds to completely change the average!

It's fascinating to think about the best birds of the count, and this year we had a lot of contenders. Ring-necked Duck, Semipalmated Plover, Bay-breasted Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, and multiple Bobolink were some of the best birds of the count. We did miss a few birds that were picked up during the count week: Willow Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Wilson's Snipe, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Common Nighthawk, and Eastern Whip-poor-will. Overall we had a great count. I hope that next year we add a few new faces to the count teams.

Nathan Gatto

Rockingham County – Count date May 1st, 118 species, 2385 individuals, seven participants in three parties, 43.50 party-hours.

Weather: Mostly clear skies and moderate winds, temperature 57-76°F

Compiler: Brian Bockhahn (birdranger248@gmail.com)

Participants: Penny Barham, Brian Bockhahn, Becky Loyocano, M Miller, D Pennebaker, M Wall and Matt Wangerin

Exclusives: Barn Owl

Notes: The SIXTH Rockingham County Spring Bird Count was an overall record breaker! The count was held on Tuesday, May 1, 2018 under clear skies and wide ranging temperatures from 39-82°. Seven observers in five parties tallied a record 118 species (average 109 and previous high 116) and 2385 birds (average 1757 and previous high 2255). Totals were led by 128 Northern Cardinals and 111 Red-eyed Vireos. Two additional birds were seen during count week: Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Blackpoll Warbler.

First count records were many: a Barn Owl was heard well and recorded in the northern territory; maybe our park neighbors were right with their reports a few years

back! Horned Lark was a little more expected along Mayo River Road, as was our long awaited first Chestnut-sided Warbler, such foothills habitat; I thought they'd be more regular! Amazing was a photographed Golden-winged Warbler, only the second record for the park with just one early bio blitz sighting. A flock of ten Bobolink was seen in the Dan River/Airport region and a lone male Baltimore Oriole flew over the Mayo River near the beach.

Other goodies include second records of Red-headed Woodpecker, three parties with Lesser Yellowlegs, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-winged and Tennessee Warbler for our 24 warbler count total!

Misses included Wood Duck (second miss), Coopers Hawk (first miss), Great Horned Owl (second miss) and Palm Warbler (third miss).

Many thanks to everyone who volunteered to count!

Brian Bockhahn

Greensboro – Count date April 28th, 126 species, 7276 individuals, 39 participants, 108.50 party-hours.

Weather: Pleasant day, temperature 48-76°F, skies sunny to partly cloudy, wind light at 10-20mph from the southwest. In a spring notable for its wet weather, there was no precipitation.

Compiler: Elizabeth Link (elzlink@yahoo.com)

Participants: Carolyn Allen, Bruce Billings, Bill Bowman, Diana Bowman, Dennis Burnette, Lynn Burnette, Sue Cole, Scott DePue, Jim Eldrett, Lynne Gray, Amy Hanson, Mike Howard, Carolyn Hunt, Todd Kilb, Elizabeth Link, Henry Link, Clarence Mattocks, Linda Melendez, Lyn McCoy, Lauren McLaughlin, Jean Murdick, Roberta Newton, Lane Oldham, Sandy Redden, Stuart Redden, Danny Royster, Wallace Sills, Lou Skrabec, Jim Strickland, Tripto Suwal, Emily Talbert, Andrew Thornton, Emily Tyler, Ann VanSant, Marty Wall, Matt Wangarin, Stella Wear, Tom Wear, and Melissa Whitmire

Exclusives: Orange-crowned Warbler

Notes: The 2018 count was good in many respects, compared to the counts of the last 20 years. Thirty-nine birders took part in the count, well over our average of 30. They put in 108.5 hours counting, above our average of 95.75 hours, and we also had 1.5 hours of owling.

Our total of 126 species of birds was right at our average of 125, and we had six count week species. The number of individual birds counted was slightly below average: 7276 individuals were counted this year, and our average is 7307.

I have been using only the last 20 years of count data to determine averages, as I feel that it is more representative of current development and environmental conditions in the count circle. However, sometimes it is interesting to look at the over 50 years of count data that we have available for our count.

For instance, one of the highlights of our count was the first Orange-crowned Warbler since 1967, found by Melissa Whitmire. We also had two Blue-winged Warblers, a number matched in eight of the last 51 years and exceeded only twice. We also had 22 other warbler species, a nice tally when, for many years, our warbler species didn't hit 20. We had 22 Black-and-white Warblers, 59 Northern Parula, and six Worm-eating Warblers, all well above our average, and each are numbers that have been

exceeded in only one other year since 1967.

Lingering winter waterfowl of interest included a single Common Loon, and a Red-breasted Merganser. A Greater Scaup that showed up on count week was only the second time that we've had one in the count period – the first time was on count day last year.

While numbers of several warblers were well below our 20-year average, such as the Yellow Warbler (none on count day), Yellow-breasted Chat, and American Redstart, the numbers do not seem to represent a trend over that time.

Elizabeth Link

Southern Pines – Count date May 6th, 114 species, 3046 individuals, 22 participants in nine teams, 87.20 party-hours.

Weather: Temperature 64-87°F, wind calm – 10mph from W-WSW, mostly to partly cloudy, no rain

Compiler: Susan Campbell (susan@ncaves.com)

Participants: Rex Badgett, Doreen Blanchette, Carol Bowman, Jay Carter, Bob Ganis, Tina Ganis, Mike Greene, Tom Howard, Alicia Jackson, Charlie Jones, Linda Jones, Marjorie Ludwig, Jeff Marcus, David McCloy, Carolyn McDermott, Jon Rouse, Bruce Sorrie, Rick Studenmund, Michelle Wilcox, Nancy Williamson, Darryl Young and Shelley Young.

Exclusives: Pectoral Sandpiper, Mississippi Kite, Lark Sparrow

Notes: This year's count was definitely affected by having fewer participants as both species count and abundance were down. The weather forecast was for rain, but that did not transpire, so field conditions were pretty good.

Although only 114 species were encountered, there were some interesting sightings. Birds of note included Anhinga, Pectoral Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plover, as well as yellowlegs. Shorebird presence was surely a result of the lakebed habitat at Woodlake. Also, we had a nice pair of Mississippi Kites that were establishing a breeding territory adjacent to Woodlake at the time of the count.

Susan Campbell

Chapel Hill – Count date May 13th, 111 species, 6508 individuals, 37 field observers and one feeder watcher, 96.55 party hours.

Weather: Sunny and hot, temperature 67- 93°F, wind variable at 3-9mph, dry

Compiler: Will Cook (cwcook@duke.edu)

Participants: David Anderson, Vern Bothwell, Gail Boyarsky, Norm Budnitz, John Cantrell, Jim Capel, Will Cook, Maria de Bruyn, Kenny Dinnon, Joe Donahue, Tom Driscoll, Kent Fiala, Judith Foushee, Jill Froning, Bob Gardiner, Steve Graves, Clare Gyorke, Gene Kingsley, David Murdock, Don Pelly, Jelmer Poelstra, Judy Murray, Elaine Norwood, Joe Norwood, Margaret Scott, Roger Shaw, David Smith, Judy Smith, Steve Stevens, Paul Taille, Shelley Theye, Ginger Travis, Margaret Wainwright, Sue Wolff, and Bruce Young

Exclusives: King Rail

Notes: The 2018 Chapel Hill spring count on Sunday, May 13, 2018, was on the same date as last year's count, but what a difference! Last year's count was spectacular, one of

the best ever with 130 species, while this year's 111 species was our lowest in four decades. The weather made a huge difference. Last year's count had perfect weather: calm, cool, cloudy. This year's was sunny and hot, with the high of 93°F tying the record high for this date, more like a mid-July day than a mid-spring day; the birding was also reminiscent of mid-July. The extreme heat made both the birds and the birders lethargic, so many teams put in less time than usual.

This year's species total of 111 is 11 below the 10-year average of 122. This is the lowest since 1974, before the filling of Jordan Lake, when we had 109 species. The total number of birds, 6508, is well below the average of 8289. Effort on the count was also quite low, with 96.55 party hours (average 121.80). However the number of birds per party hour, 67.40, is surprisingly close to the average of 65.70. Perhaps the low count wasn't because the birds were lying low from the heat after all, but more instead the birders!

The star of this year's count was a Peregrine Falcon at Maple View Farm, seen flying north over Dairyland Road by Roger Shaw. This is only the second for the count; the first was way back in 1965. Roger also had a Grasshopper Sparrow there -- normally not notable, but they are getting more difficult to find in recent years. Other goodies included Hooded Mergansers still breeding at Sandy Creek Park in Durham (Kent Fiala), a Great Egret at Jordan Lake (Bruce Young), and a King Rail at University Lake (heard by Ginger Travis from her kayak).

We set one record high this year, unexpected considering the low number of party hours: Acadian Flycatcher (107 beats the old record of 88 set in 2006, average 64). Yellow-billed Cuckoos were also found in unusually high numbers (40 is the highest since 2000, average 15).

The big miss this year was White-throated Sparrow, the first miss of this lingering winter bird in the more than 60 year history of the Chapel Hill count. We did have it in count week, though. Many other species were remarkably scarce this year: Canada Goose (82 is lowest since 1990, average 199), Wood Duck (15 is lowest since 1990, average 35), Red-tailed Hawk (12, average 22), Rock Pigeon (7, average 21), Eastern Kingbird (12 is lowest since 1973, average 23), Purple Martin (10 is lowest since 1974, average 52), Tree Swallow (3 is lowest since 1998, average 23), American Robin (130 is lowest since 1975, average 245), Ovenbird (78, average 107), Prothonotary Warbler (14, average 35), Common Yellowthroat (50 is lowest since 1969, average 107), Common Grackle (96 is lowest since 1969, average 187), and Orchard Oriole (7 is lowest since 1995, average 18). Total number of warblers (505, average 792) is the lowest since 1996.

Team honors: Will Cook's team, covering Mason Farm as well as the SW Durham sewage plant, recorded 77 species, edging past the team of Shelley Theye and Jill Froning with 75. Tom Driscoll got the highest individual count with 765.

Charles W. "Will" Cook

Jordan Lake – Count date May 5th, 112 species, 6982 individuals, 50 participants in 21 parties, 105.81 party-hours. Weather: Mild with temperatures ranging from 63°F in the morning to 76°F in the afternoon. Winds calm and skies overcast in the morning to partly cloudy in the afternoon.

Compiler: Norm Budnitz (nbudnitz@gmail.com)

Participants: Patsy Bailey, Barbara Beaman, Eliabeth Bishop, Todd Bishop, Brian Bockhahn, Hillary Broder, Steve Buczynski, Norm Budnitz, Sebastian Burgess, Chris Canfield, Jim Capel, Cal Chelette, Carol Chelette, Barbara Coffman, Patrick Coin, Tom Driscoll, Russell Herman, Loren Hintz, Karen Hogan, Bo Howes, Elizabeth Keating, Gene Kingsley, Theresa Korab, Laura Lipps, Susan Lyons, Kerry MacPherson, Trish MacPherson, Jennifer Maher, Beth Mancuso, Marty McClelland, Steve McMurray, Kyle Mills, Robin Moran, Mark Owens, Rick Payne, Don Pelly, Doug Pratt, Susan Pratt, Tommy Richey, Roger Shaw, Josh Southern, Sterling Southern, Jenny Stanley, Chris Tomazic, Ginger Travis, Andy Upshaw, Margaret Vimmerstedt, Fleeta Wilkinson, Emma Wright and Joe Zellers.

Exclusives: Ruddy Duck

Notes: Fifty observers in 21 parties participated (our 10-year averages are 45 and 21, respectively). We tallied 6982 individual birds (average 8008) and 112 species (average 120) in 106 party hours (average 124).

Although we recorded all the usual suspects with no notable missed species, we found very few waterfowl (ducks) and very few passage migrants—neotropical migrants that pass through our area but don't stop to breed here. For example, we had the usual cast of our breeding warblers—Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, etc.—but no Blackpolls, Bay-breasted, or Cape May Warblers. It's hard to say if there is any significance to that conservation-wise, or whether it was just a matter of timing—that we simply counted on a day when those birds were not on the move through our area. I prefer to think it was the latter; I worry that it might have been the former.

We did have a couple of new record high counts. We reported 86 White-eyed Vireos (our previous high was 83 in 1979) and 202 Summer Tanagers (189 in 2003). And we almost tied an old record with 79 Eastern Wood-Pewees (80 in 2015).

Brian Bockhahn found a couple of notable species from Vista Point: One Ruddy Duck and two Herring Gulls.

Again this year there was plenty of competition in the area with two bicycle events and a motorcycle rally. The first Sunday in May is a popular time to get out into open spaces.

Sebastian Burgess, Tom Driscoll, Elizabeth Keating, Don Pelly, and Susan Pratt, working Hank's Chapel and Gum Springs Roads, reported 81 species of birds, while Patsy Bailey and Gene Kingsley found 77 species in the area on the east side of the Jordan Lake Dam.

Norm Budnitz

Durham – Count date April 29th, 111 species, 2585 individuals, 12 participants in 7 parties, 39.00 party-hours. Weather: Clear skies, light winds, temperature 49°-62°F.

Compiler: Brian Bockhahn (birdranger248@gmail.com)

Participants: Brian Bockhahn, Steve Buczynski, Norm Budnitz, Bryce Fleming, Elizabeth Keating, Gene Kingsley, Thomas Krakauer, Roger Shaw, Bill Webster, Bruce Young and two others.

Exclusives: none

Notes: Twelve observers in seven parties tallied 111 species (average 111) and 2585 total

birds (average 4006) led by 152 Yellow-rumped Warbler, 139 Northern Cardinal and 129 Double-crested Cormorant.

Highlights include single Pied-billed Grebe at Brickhouse Road; three adult plumage Bonaparte's Gull at Hickory Hill; a Hermit Thrush seen well on the Mountains to Sea Trail; two parties with Chestnut-sided Warbler and two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks.

Misses include Northern Bobwhite, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Blue-headed Vireo and Cedar Waxwing!

Many thanks to everyone who volunteered to count!

Brian Bockhahn

Falls Lake – Count date April 25th, 113 species, 3132 individuals, 10 participants in 7 parties, 32.35 party-hours Weather: Cloudy with mild temperature 60-64°F

Compiler: Brian Bockhahn (birdranger248@gmail.com)

Participants: Herb Amyx, Pat Amyx, Brian Bockhahn, Beth Bishop, Todd Bishop, Norm Budnitz, Amy Corbally, A Sencartier, Josh Southern and Patty Tice.

Exclusives: none

Notes: The fifteenth Falls Lake Spring Bird Count was held on April 25, 2018 with cloudy skies and mild temperatures ranging from 60-64°. Ten observers in 7 parties tallied 113 species (average 113) and 3132 total birds (average 3902).

Most numerous birds were again Cliff Swallow at 316, followed distantly by 177 Yellow-rumped Warblers and 131 Northern Cardinals. First records included: not a surprise with the recent spring sightings, there was a single Lesser Black-backed Gull off Sandling Beach.

Other goodies included our second Blackpoll Warbler at Beaverdam Lake north end; which also had a male and female Hooded Merganser as our third record; our second record Greater Black-backed Gull showed up at Sandling Beach with the other five species of gulls and one tern species.

Misses included Solitary Sandpiper for the fifth time; Eastern Screech Owl (sixth miss); Great Horned Owl (fourth miss); Whip-poor-will (second miss) and Chuck-wills-widow (third miss); Song Sparrow (second miss).

Many thanks to everyone who volunteered to count!

Brian Bockhahn

Kerr Lake – Count date April 24th, 108 species, 2938 individuals, 16 participants in eight parties, 44.60 party-hours.

Weather: Cloudy, rain in the morning, temperatures (58°-61°F)

Compiler: Brian Bockhahn (birdranger248@gmail.com)

Participants: Jeff Blalock, Brian Bockhahn, Ann Brice, Adam D'Onofrio, Jackie Evrard, Mark Evrard, Bryce Fleming, Paul Glass, Bill Lindemuth, Joyce Lindemuth, Fred Lobdell, Carol Mauzey, J Mills, Clyde Smith, David Spears and Evan Spears

Exclusives: Blue-winged Teal, Redhead, Wilson's Snipe

Notes: The fifteenth Kerr Lake Spring Bird Count was held on April 24, 2018 under very cloudy skies with rain all morning and mild temperatures. Despite the rain a record 16 observers in eight parties tallied 108 species (average 118) and 2938 birds (average 3882) led by perennial leaders 227 Black Vultures, 185 Yellow-rumped Warblers and 179 Double-crested Cormorants.

New to the spring checklist were a single male Redhead loafing around below the dam, stretched its wings a few times seemingly uninjured but running late! Other goodies included a third record of Laughing Gull reported by three parties at Satterwhite, Bullocksville and Palmer Point, likely a shared sighting; third record of Chestnut-sided Warbler at Bullocksville; third record of Dark-eyed Juncos at County Line; fourth record Blue-winged Teal and Wilson's Snipe at Dick Cross.

Misses included Sharp-shinned Hawk (fourth miss); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (fourth miss); Great Horned Owl (third miss); Whip-poor-will (second miss); White-breasted Nuthatch (first miss); Yellow Warbler (first miss). Not all birds are waterproof!

Many thanks to everyone who volunteered to count!

Brian Bockhahn

Raven Rock State Park – Count date April 28th, 111 species, 4,078 individuals, 20 participants in 12 teams, 80.91 party-hours.

Weather: Temperature - 48-80°F; wind SW at 0-7mph; water open, AM sunny, PM partly cloudy. Count circle center at junction of NC210 and SR 1434

Compiler: Erik R. Thomas (erthomas@ncsu.edu)

Participants: John Bartlett, Steve Buscynski, Charles Byrd, Lisa Cook, David DuMond, Michael Fisk, Molly Fullwood, Paul Hart, Tom Howard, Prudence Mainor, Tim McGreal, Jeff Mielke, Henry Rease, Kevin Rease, Mitch Rease, Mary Stevens, Sarah Stevens, Erik Thomas, April Wagner and Amber Williams

Exclusives: none

Notes: Our total of 111 species equaled last years' count. Our biggest misses were Belted Kingfisher and Anhinga. Among the highlights were a Blue-headed Vireo by Paul Hart, Sarah Stevens, and Lisa Cook; two Swainson's Warblers by Mitch, Kevin, and Henry Reese; and two Yellow Warblers by John Bartlett. We also had good counts of owls and nightjars.

Erik R. Thomas

Coast

Brunswick County – Count date April 21st, 156 species, 6619 individuals, 19 field observers and 1 feeder watcher, 66.50 party-hours. Weather: Partly cloudy, wind NE to E at 5-10mph, temperature 40-67°F.

Compiler: Dave Weesner (david.weesner@yahoo.com) and Sam Cooper (dmcooper2@juno.net)

Participants: Jamie Adams, Lynn Eria Beegle, Kathleen Bowman, Sam Cooper, George Harrington, Joy Hosier, Doug Hughes, Amanda Kiel, Sherry Lane, Maxine McCullar, Mary Lynn Meister, Ann Orsillo, Stacey Sayeth, Harry Sell, Deborah Shaw, Hugh Shaw, Jeri Smart, Bruce Smithson, Dave Weesner, Carson Wood.

Exclusives: Gadwall, American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup, Black Scoter, Clapper Rail, Common Gallinule, American Oystercatcher, Wilson's Plover, Piping Plover, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, Willet, Least Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Common Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Black Skimmer, Wood Stork, Northern Gannet, Brown Pelican, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron,

White Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Marsh Wren, Seaside Sparrow, Boat-tailed Grackle, Painted Bunting

Notes: The 2018 spring count was conducted on 21 April and yielded 156 species, 6620 individuals from the effort of 20 participants. Twenty observers in 8 groups concentrated on some of the birding hotspots, including the beaches of Sunset, Ocean Isle, Oak Island, Bald Head, the southern portion of Fort Fisher, the Green Swamp, Southport area, Orton Pond, Brunswick Nature Park, EV Henwood, and Indian Creek by boat (the only area covered by boat). Eagle Island and areas associated with the old Orton Plantation property were not surveyed due to access restrictions. This year's effort, coverage, and species count was similar to last year, and was the second spring count conducted since the 1990s.

Dave Weesner and Sam Cooper

Appendix

To view the Appendix detailing species identified on each count, click in the box below: