

# localnews

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LIVING

# Warm welcome for bird count

## Mild weather contributes to record numbers in annual Peterborough count

## Counting up the birds

### Peterborough CBC Results

The first number is the number counted this year, while the number in parenthesis is the average number over the past 10 years. NR stands for "new record," and ER stands for "equals record."

Great blue heron 1 (0.8), Canada goose 1935 (710), American wigeon 1 ER (0.2), mallard 806 (738), common goldeneye 42 (60), bufflehead 3 (0.6), hooded merganser 4 (3), common merganser 6 (18), northern harrier 1 (1.2), sharp-shinned hawk 2 (3), Cooper's hawk 6 NR (3.5), Goshawk 1 (0.6), red-tailed hawk 47 (39), American kestrel 3 (3), Merlin 1 (1.2), ruffed grouse 6 (8), wild turkey 169 (75), Wilson's snipe 1 ER (0.3), ring-billed gull 306 NR (131), herring gull 221 (325), glaucous gull 1 (1.5), great black-backed gull 2 (8), rock pigeon 1402 (1007), mourning dove 312 (633), eastern screech owl 2 ER (0.7), great horned owl 7 (5), belted kingfisher 2 (1.2), red-bellied woodpecker 7 NR (1.2), downy woodpecker 42 (47), hairy woodpecker 29 (36), northern flicker 5 ER (2), pileated woodpecker 5 (6), blue jay 302 (304), American crow 691 NR (419), common raven 1 (1.2), black-capped chickadee 1746 (1759), red-breasted nuthatch 23 (20), white-breasted nuthatch 58 (59), brown creeper 4 (5), golden-crowned kinglet 4 (8), American robin 750 NR (235), cedar waxwing 737 NR (195), northern shrike 13 (7), European starling 3400 NR (1559), yellow-rumped warbler 1 (0.1), northern cardinal 53 (73), American tree sparrow 162 (301), chipping sparrow 1 (0.1), song sparrow 1 (0.7), white-throated sparrow 3 (3), dark-eyed junco 370 NR (224), snow bunting 2 (284), red-winged blackbird 13 NR (2.6), purple finch 2 (7), house finch 36 (138), pine siskin 151 (41), American goldfinch 870 (480), house sparrow 228 (295).

**Total birds: 15,015 NR (10,388)**  
**Total species: 58 (54)**

### Petroglyphs CBC Results

Bald eagle 6 (5), ruffed grouse 12 (25), wild turkey 43 (10), herring gull 1 (0.2), rock pigeon 49 (59), mourning dove 2 (23), barred owl 1 (3), downy woodpecker 11 (23), hairy woodpecker 28 (45), pileated woodpecker 5 (14), blue jay 21 (305), American crow 9 (5), common raven 138 (99), black-capped chickadee 514 (978), red-breasted nuthatch 35 (140), white-breasted nuthatch 21 (77), brown creeper 3 (18), golden-crowned kinglet 34 (25), bohemian waxwing 40 (15), northern shrike 2 (1), European starling 49 (39), American tree sparrow 8 (26), dark-eyed junco 4 (7), purple finch 1 (30), red crossbill 32 (9), white-winged crossbill 35 (20), common redpoll 1 (165), (1), pine siskin 167 (22), American goldfinch 428 (142).

**Total birds: 1,701 (2,455)**  
**Total species: 29 (33)**

Between mid-December and early January, birders from across North, Central and South America took a day away from the holiday season excess to spend a day in the fresh air, taking the pulse of local bird populations. Dating all the way back to 1900, Christmas bird counts represent the biggest organized birding event in the world and a holiday tradition for over 50,000 birders each year. They first began over 100 years ago from a desire to count birds rather than shoot them. In doing so, they effectively gave birth to North America's modern conservation movement. The results help organizations such as Bird Studies Canada and the National Audubon Society in the U.S. to prioritize bird conservation actions.



WIKIMEDIA

Many of the bald eagles spotted during local Christmas bird counts are immature, like the one pictured above. Among the 58 species and record 15,015 birds spotted during this year's Peterborough count were (right, top to bottom, all photos by Karl Egressy) the mature Cooper's hawk, immature Cooper's hawk and gray jay. A record six Cooper's hawks were recorded.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

We have two local counts, both of which are organized by Tony Bigg of Lakefield. One count is centred in Peterborough and the other in Petroglyphs Provincial Park. They both cover a circle 24 kilometres in diameter and take one day each to complete. Working in small groups and covering the circle by car, foot and sometimes even snowshoe or ski, birders work from dawn to dusk to do their best to count all of the birds within the circle on the selected day. The Peterborough count, which took place December 18, usually produces about 50 species and 9,000 or so individual birds. The Petroglyph count, however, averages only 33 species and about 2,500 birds. This year, it was held on January 2.

Once again this year, the Peterborough count had the good fortune of excellent weather conditions. This made seeing and hearing the birds relatively easy. The number of species seen (58) was higher than usual number, while the number of individual birds tallied (15,015) was actually a record. These high numbers were largely due to the mild weather which meant that most water bodies were free of ice. This, in turn, meant that numerous ducks, geese and gulls were still in the area on the day of the count. An abundance of wild food such as river-bank grape also convinced record numbers of American robins and cedar waxwings to hang around.

Although no new birds for the count were recorded, six species turned up in record high numbers. They were Cooper's hawk (6), ring-billed gull (306), red-bellied woodpecker (7), American crow (691), American robin (750), cedar waxwing (737), European starling (3400), dark-eyed junco (370) and red-winged blackbird (13). One bird we missed on the day of the count was the bald eagle. It was probably a matter of not being in the right place at the right time, since three adult eagles were seen in the Lakefield area on January 1st. Eagles have successfully nested on Lake Katchewanooka for each of the past eight years except one. According to a lakeside resident, the birds are already present at the nest site every day and are adding material to the nest. Eagles also appear to be preparing to nest on Stony Lake for the first time.

The record number of Cooper's hawks is also an interesting story. Although it is

usually thought of as a forest bird, this crow-sized hawk is now increasingly common in human-altered habitats and even cities. The Cooper's hawk declined significantly during the middle part of the 20th century as a result of pesticides such as DDT. It was even classified as being at risk in many areas of the continent. However, a ban on DDT imposed in the early 1970s and positive changes in public attitudes towards raptors have helped the bird's population to rebound significantly. At the same time, the Cooper's hawk has been able to move into urban areas where it takes advantage of the abundance of prey species such as mourning doves and starlings. It has also been able to adapt to nesting in cities, as long as small pockets of relatively dense wooded areas are present. For example, Cooper's hawks have nested in Jackson Park in recent years. These birds can sometimes be surprisingly tame such as the one who landed in a nearby tree while I was shovelling snow in my driveway a couple of weeks ago. It sat and watched me for at least five minutes before flying off. Like all hawks of the genus Accipiter, Cooper's hawks have a distinctive "flap-flap-glide" way of flying which makes them relatively easy to identify, even at a distance. That being said, the smaller sharp-shinned hawk is very similar in appearance, so caution must be exercised to distinguish between the two species. The Cooper's is the more common bird in Peterborough,

however, at least in winter.

As for the Petroglyph count, only 29 species were found this year. This is four species below the 10 year average. The total of individual birds was also lower than normal with only 1701 birds tallied this year, compared to an average of 2455. No new species or record numbers were recorded. There were also low numbers of common birds such as black-capped chickadees and white-breasted nuthatches. Much of the blame for the poor results falls squarely on the shoulders of the weather. Blustery winds and snow squalls made viewing conditions difficult for much of the day. I should also add that the Petroglyph count circle is mostly forest which means that there is very little habitat diversity, hence less bird diversity. There are also relatively few houses which, in turn, means fewer bird feeders. Some participants also remarked that the number of houses with active, seed-stocked feeders seemed to be lower than usual this year. There was speculation among birders elsewhere in the province, too, as to whether the state of the economy has resulted in fewer people feeding the birds.

Despite the rather low numbers of species and individual birds, there were still some interesting findings. Six bald eagles were tallied which is about average for the count. Northern Peterborough County is a traditional wintering area for eagles, mostly because of the large deer population which means a source of food for the eagles

### Join the annual backyard bird count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will take place from Friday, Feb.17 to Monday, Feb. 20. Simply count the birds you see over a 15 minute period - or longer if you wish - in one place, and report your results on line. Go to [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/) for all the details. Last year, Peterborough observers submitted 70 checklists which was the third highest in Ontario. Who knows, maybe this year Peterborough could take the number one spot!

when a deer dies. There was also a good selection of winter finches, albeit in low numbers. Red and white-winged crossbills, pine siskins, American goldfinches and a lone purple finch and common redpoll were all recorded. One species that we almost always used to find in the past that was absent once again this year was the gray jay, also known as the whisky-jack. There is some research to suggest that gray jays, who are dependent for winter survival and nesting success on supplies of stored food, may be suffering from the effects of climate change and the increasingly mild winters. In other words, mild spells may be causing perishable stored food to go bad. This, in turn, may be contributing to lower reproductive success.