

Bird count finds 35 species

On Dec. 19, the Bancroft Field Naturalists surveying the area by vehicle and on foot, found 35 different species totalling 1,845 birds. Data from 10 feeder watchers are included.

The mild weather, thanks to El Nino meant that our waterways were mostly ice-free, providing good waterfowl viewing. We tallied an unprecedented 330, including common merganser, hooded merganser, common goldeneye, bufflehead, mallard and Canada goose. All the waterfowl species counts were record "high" for our count area.

As usual black-capped chickadee was the most abundant songbird at 294. Other high counts were rock pigeon 239, common raven 198, American goldfinch 161.

Raptors included bald eagle, three. red-tailed hawk, two.

Several bird watchers were asking "Where are the Blue Jays?" We counted 60, which is fewer than usual. Ron Pittaway with The Ontario Field Ornithologist has provided a probable explanation. He noted that large numbers of Blue Jays were seen migrating along the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, on the way south.

These large movements are linked to the size of tree nut crops. Acorn crops were spotty, beechnut crops failed in most areas, and hazelnut crops were average. Many species of birds will migrate to find a better food supply. Our count data are added to those of hundreds of other counts across the continent to provide a picture of the status of winter bird populations. This is a co-operative effort of Bird Studies Canada and the National Audubon Society.

Bruce Collins, count compiler