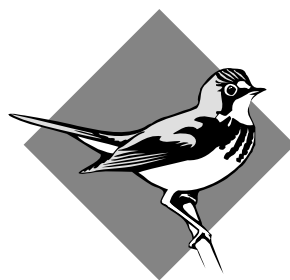


# Christmas Bird Count Canada: 2002-2003

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It was back to reality this year for Canadian Christmas counters. After the-winter-that-never-was in 2001-2002, snow and ice returned to most of the Canadian landscape, especially in the east, and the bird counts showed the effects. Western Canada generally escaped the early onset of winter, except for some strong Pacific storms that lashed the coast. The overall species and individual counts were both down. The number of birds tallied dropped from 3.7 million to 3.3 million, while the species total dropped from 299 to 291.

Nonetheless, it was yet another year of growth for Canadian counts, the count total rising to 334, a gain of 24 from last year. As usual, these figures include counts from Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, a French *département* off the coast of Newfoundland. The big gains were in Saskatchewan (seven more counts this year), British Columbia (six), and New Brunswick (five). I would like to thank Nature Saskatchewan in particular for its efforts to ensure that count results in its province were submitted. Somewhat surprisingly, the number of field



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observers increased (7221 to 7796) while the number of feeder-watchers dropped (4046 to 3889). Table 1 summarizes the counts by province.

Ladner again reported the highest species total in the country with 136, well down from last year's record of 152. Traditional rival Victoria was close behind with 134. In other provincial rivalries, Edmonton was again nipped by Calgary (63 and 64 species respectively), while in Newfoundland and Labrador there was a tie between Cape Race and St. John's, each with 61 species. In the territories north of 60 there were four counts with 18 species each—Haines Junction, Whitehorse, Marsh Lake-Yukon River, and Fort Simpson.

As can be seen in Table 2, there has not been a radical change in the numbers of most birds counted. Some of the larger changes, e.g. the increases in Glaucous-winged Gull, American Wigeon, and Dunlin numbers, are entirely the result of one single good count, in this case Ladner, British Columbia. The huge decrease in Long-tailed Duck numbers is probably the result of widespread freezing on the Great Lakes. Common Redpolls plummeted to background levels, with only 5602 being reported as compared to 96,395 last year and 5835 two years ago.

Another way to look at bird count results is in the distribution of species. Table 3 gives the top 15 species in

**Table 1. Provincial and territorial summaries for the 103rd Christmas Bird Count.**

Province/Territory	Counts	Field observers	Feeder-watchers	Birds	Species	Highest species total and count
British Columbia	70	2036	451	1,151,622	218	136, Ladner
Alberta	38	1027	874	168,369	121	64, Calgary
Saskatchewan	19	263	66	60,326	95	46, Saskatoon
Manitoba	18	270	147	64,880	81	42, Winnipeg
Ontario	103	2615	1721	1,375,908	175	109, Kingston
Québec	29	625	108	196,444	121	73, Québec
New Brunswick	10	194	54	63,810	113	73, Grand Manan
Prince Edward Island	3	48	4	25,686	84	63, East Point
Nova Scotia	20	460	382	220,278	167	110, Halifax-Dartmouth
Newfoundland and Labrador	13	140	49	50,735	106	61, Cape Race, St. John's
Yukon	5	47	28	3109	21	18, Haines Jct., Marsh Lake, Whitehorse
Northwest Territories	3	33	4	3504	25	18, Fort Simpson
Nunavut	1	2	0	87	1	1, Rankin Inlet
Saint-Pierre et Miquelon	2	36	1	11,835	71	55, St.-Pierre et Miquelon Is.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>7796</b>	<b>3889</b>	<b>3,396,593</b>	<b>291</b>	

**Table 2. The top 15 bird species by total number on the 103rd Christmas Bird Count in Canada, with a comparison of results from the 102nd count.**

Species	Total in 103rd Count	Total in 102nd Count	Percent change
European Starling	445,741	412,908	8.0%
Canada Goose	267,320	236,760	12.9%
American Crow	249,382	246,627	1.1%
Mallard	222,468	220,214	1.0%
Rock Dove	138,770	137,259	1.1%
House Sparrow	134,638	142,345	-5.4%
Glaucous-winged Gull	120,582	100,746	19.7%
Black-capped Chickadee	112,361	123,571	-9.1%
Dunlin	99,885	71,852	39.0%
Herring Gull	98,361	117,855	-16.5%
American Wigeon	75,970	62,789	21.0%
Greater Scaup	65,134	64,580	0.9%
Long-tailed Duck	56,346	186,460	-69.8%
Mourning Dove	55,888	49,222	13.5%
Northwestern Crow	54,649	45,314	20.6%

**Table 3. The most widespread species on Canadian Christmas Counts, as measured by the number of counts on which they were reported.**

Rank 103rd	Rank 102nd	Species	Number of counts
1	1	Black-capped Chickadee	303
2	4	Downy Woodpecker	298
3	5	Hairy Woodpecker	293
4	8	Common Raven	282
5	7	European Starling	280
6	9	House Sparrow	268
7	10	Rock Dove	259
8	6	Red-breasted Nuthatch	252
9	12	Blue Jay	244
10	2	Dark-eyed Junco	237
11	13	American Crow	233
12	14	Mallard	229
13	17	Ruffed Grouse	223
14	16	Bald Eagle	214
15	25	Golden-crowned Kinglet	214

Canada based on the number of counts from which they were reported. In this case, Black-capped Chickadee remained on top as the most widely distributed bird where counts are done in Canada. Dark-eyed Junco dropped from second place to tenth this year, perhaps because cooler temperatures in eastern Canada forced more to move south (that species was actually more widespread than usual on the prairies). And last year's third-place species, Common Redpoll, dropped out of sight to 47th place, presumably staying north this year, away

from the more southerly birders. Another northern forest finch, the Pine Grosbeak, similarly moved from 11th down to 35th. One of the most interesting placings was a species that just missed making it onto the table; American Robin ranked 16th in distribution, being reported from 212 counts—not a particularly good harbinger of spring, even in Canada. Robins also ranked a respectable 17th in overall numbers with 45,524 seen, although almost a quarter of them were on the Victoria, British Columbia, count.

Most compilers commented that northern owls were rare or absent. The highly nomadic Northern Hawk Owl epitomizes this group, and it was strikingly absent from counts across the country—indeed only one was reported, from Mountain Chutes, Ontario. A total of 107 Snowy Owls were seen on 39 counts, down from 212 on 66 counts last year. As usual, Great Gray reports were even scarcer; 11 were seen on 7 counts (24 on 10 counts last year).

Unusual species were concentrated on the coasts. Of the 42 species seen on only one count, 17 were in British Columbia and 14 in Nova Scotia. This year's "most unique count" award goes to Cape Sable Island, Nova Scotia, which tallied six species reported nowhere else in the country. Two reports that stand out are the Greater Shearwaters at Brier Island, Nova Scotia, and the Bay-breasted Warbler at Cape Sable Island, both new to the Canadian CBC list. The Eurasian Collared-Dove, continuing its expansion across North America, was reported on two counts in Saskatchewan: Eastend and Swift Current. Collared-doves have been seen on other CBCs before in Canada, but this was the first time the reports have fit clearly into this pattern of range expansion. A Say's Phoebe at Jemseg, New Brunswick, was definitely on the wrong side of the continent, while a Hooded Warbler at Duncan, British Columbia, was completely lost, but surprisingly not new to Christmas counts in Canada.



**This Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) on the Vernon, British Columbia, Christmas Bird Count provided a first provincial CBC record of this Eurasian gull. Photo/Don Cecile**