The 126th Christmas Bird Count in Hawai'i

By Thane K. Pratt, CBC Regional Editor – Hawai'i

The Christmas Bird Count 126 for Hawaii and the NW Islands saw some significant changes. Two compilers have stepped down after many years of dedicated service: Jonathan Plissner for the Midway Circle and Sonny Gamponia for four Maui County circles. New compilers for the region are: Juan Zuluaga (Waimea Circle, Kauai has been vacant for a few years), Jay Penniman (Iao Circle on Maui and the Lanai City Circle), Chris Warren (Haleakala Circle, Maui), and Martin Frye (Hana Circle, Maui); the new compiler for the Midway Circle TBD. Welcome to you all! This report also marks the conclusion of my 25-year stint (not the ornithological term ;-) as CBC editor for the two regions, Hawaii & Northwest Chain Islands and the Pacific Islands. Starting with the CBC 127, these regions will be reviewed separately by new editors: Chris Warren (Hawaii and NW Chain Is.) and Paul Radley (Pacific Islands: Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Samoa, etc.). Many thanks from me to everyone involved in the Christmas Bird Counts for our regions--it's been a pleasure! And best wishes for the years to come.

Now, back to birds and the CBC 126 results for this past season! Unlike previous years, this report covers only Hawaii and the NW Chain; the Pacific Island counts will appear separately, written by Paul Radley. Participation on Christmas Bird Count 126 was generally good for Hawai`i, with all active count circles successfully conducted, apart from the very wet aftermath to storms on Oahu. Among the tremendous numbers of seabirds tallied on Midway Atoll, White Terns stood out this year with a record high number of 347--presumably quite a sight as these crystalline white birds swarmed against the brilliant blue sky! The iconic White-tailed Tropicbirds of Kauai scored a high count of 30 on the Kapaa Circle. Expanded coverage along the coast of the Haleakala Circle, Maui provided opportunities to view seabirds, especially boobies on an offshore islet: 5 Masked Booby, 505 Red-footed Booby, and a mixed colony of the recently split Cocos and Brown Boobies (28 and 9 birds, respectively), all species new for this particular circle.

Highlights for waterfowl include the astonishing count of 692 Laysan Duck on the Midway Circle, a confiding native teal that masses around tiny fresh-water pools during the day while waiting to spread out across the atoll to feed at night. Midway also reported high counts for migratory Northern Pintail (32) and Bufflehead (4). Actually, it was a good year for Bufflehead statewide, with 4 on Waipio Circle, Oahu; 3 on the Honolulu Circle; and lastly 3 on the Hilo Circle, Big Island. Kauai continues to turn in high counts for Nene (Hawaiian Goose), with 363 on the Lihue Circle this year, but there were also high counts from Molokai Island (3); Maui, with 19 from the Iao Circle; and the Big Island, with 44 from the Volcano Circle. Three adult Snow Geese joined ranks with the resident Nene at Princeville, Kapaa Circle.

Shorebirds and Gulls of note included a Common Snipe (not the expected Wilson's) and Slaty-backed Gull as firsts on Midway, a first Bristle-thighed Curlew for Waipio Circle, and high counts for Sharp-tailed Sandpiper of 5 for Kapa`a and 4 for Waipio.

As for native passerines, the big news is the introduction of Laysan Finch to Midway Atoll. Last July, a hundred birds were release on Eastern Island, where 8 of them were spotted by CBC counters. Originally widespread in the Hawaiian Islands, this finch's population collapsed after the arrival people approximately 800 years ago, and the species ultimately survived only on Laysan Island. Midway offers the bird an additional, second home.

As for non-native species, new high counts were reported this year too, as you'd expect. The Rose-ring Parakeet, a familiar species on Kauai and Oahu islands, is typically seen as a few birds at a time, so it's difficult to get an overall impression of the population size. Well, impressive it is: this CBC's roost-count on the Lihue Circle, Kauai tallied a staggering total of 13,995 birds! The Kalij Pheasant, another species that's more common than it appears to be, also supplied new high counts this year, with 8 reported from the Waipio Circle, Oahu and 76 from the Volcano Circle, Big Island.