The 126th Christmas Bird Count in the Pacific Islands: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam

By Paul Radley, CBC Regional Editor – Pacific Islands

With the usual amendable weather, participation for Christmas Bird Count 126 was good in the Mariana Islands as a whole, with all circles counted and reported, and a nice turnout of 46 participants on Saipan. Although no surprise or standout species were reported from any Mariana count circles this year, those in the Commonwealth (Saipan, Tinian, and Rota) yielded some record high numbers for some species; likely the result of good coverage owing to solid counter turnout on all islands. For seabirds, Saipan turned in a high count of 50 White-tailed Tropicbirds and Rota a record high of 36 Red-tailed Tropicbirds. On the shorebird front, counts on both Saipan and Tinian yielded record highs for overwintering Pacific Golden-Plovers, 784 and 242, respectively. Tinian also reported six migrant Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, which is both a high count and only the second time this species has been recorded on this island during a Christmas Bird Count. This record is notable given the island's general lack of suitable shallow freshwater marshes or exposed mudflats that are preferred by the species. For native landbirds, Saipan turned in record high counts of 515 Mariana Swiftlets and 683 Micronesian Starlings, while Rota yielded record highs of four species; 51 White-throated Ground Doves, 89 Mariana Fruit Doves, 193 Mariana Kingfishers, and 116 Rufous Fantails. Also reported for Saipan were high counts of two common feral species; 96 Red Junglefowl and 32 Rock Doves.

Although neither circle on Guam produced high counts of any species, they did yield at least one notable low count; the Dededo circle reported only seven overwintering Pacific Golden-Plovers. For reference, this circle counted a record 1,224 individuals of this species during 109th Christmas Bird Count. The only other notable low count is from the Southern Guam circle where only two migrant Northern Pintails were reported, which represents the second lowest count of the species during the 41-year history of this circle.