The 122\textsuperscript{nd} Christmas Bird Count in Texas

Brent Ortego

Bat Falcon was new for U.S. CBCs at Santa Ana NWR. Photo: Troy Hibbits/Christmas Bird Count
Limpkin, Bat Falcon, and Social Flycatcher, each new to Texas Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), were the Headliners of 378 species reported during the season. Uncommon to rare species (see Rarities) were found throughout the State which produced the expected excitement at area CBCs, but there was an overlying somber question asked by many. Where have all the birds gone? We went to our traditional “Hot Spots” during the CBCs expecting to find a diverse assemblage of species but found few. The woodlands were quiet, the grasslands were still and the wetlands lightly populated. The Population Trends Section will discuss the highs and lows of bird populations.

SPECIES TALLIES

Matagorda County led the State and Nation with 230 species and Freeport was 2nd in Texas with 195. Guadalupe River Delta had 192, Jackson-Calhoun Counties, and Corpus Christi 181, San Bernard 167, Galveston 164, Laguna Atascosa NWR 161, West End Galveston Island 157, Coastal Tip 156, Corpus Christi (Flour Bluff) 152, and Weslaco 150.

RARITIES

The five species which were only found in the Davis Mountains count circle (exclusives) was the most for the State. Montezuma Quail (10; # years reported in past decade), Golden Eagle (10), Western Screech-Owl (8) and Cassin’s Finch (6) were expected. The Cassin’s Kingbird reported by Linda Hedges and Jackie Poole was not. Although, one was photographed five days before the CBC.
Cassin’s Kingbird has been reported six previous times in a Texas CBC with the most recent 24 years ago. Photo: Sheridan Coffey/Christmas Bird Count.

El Paso had the only Pacific Loon (9), Mew Gull (3), Lewis’s Woodpecker (6), and Blue Grosbeak (1).
Mew Gull (now Short-billed Gull) at El Paso has almost become expected with three reports in the last decade. Photo: John Groves/Christmas Bird Count

Blue Grosbeak has only been reported on a Texas CBC once during the past decade. Photo: Oscar Johnson/Christmas Bird Count.

Brazoria had the only Hammond’s Flycatcher (4) and Dickcissel (9).
Hammond’s Flycatcher is becoming more regular on eastern CBCs. Photo: Kyle O’Haver/Christmas Bird Count

Freeport had the only Bell’s Vireo (2), American Redstart (7), and Black-throated Blue Warbler (1). One landowner found the “Special” feeder recipe and attracted the BTBW and a bonus Cape May Warbler (1).
Second report of Black-throated Blue Warbler in past decade was on the Freeport CBC. Photo: Michael Lawrence/Christmas Bird Count

Granger had the only Fork-tailed Flycatcher (3) and Cliff Swallow (1). The Fork-tailed Flycatcher has increased in recent years with three CBC reports. Cliff Swallows are extremely rare in winter as evidenced by only one report in the past decade. Guadalupe River Delta had the only Purple Gallinule (7) and Little Gull (6). This was the first report of the gallinule for this CBC despite having extensive freshwater marshes.
The Little Gull is Rarely Found Near the Gulf Coast. Photo: Hank Arnold/Christmas Bird Count

Matagorda County had the only Swainson’s Hawk (9) and Painted Bunting (9). Both species occasionally linger with it not being rare for the Painted Bunting to over winter.

Swainson’s Hawk occasionally lingers in migration. Photo: Kevin Ebert/Christmas Bird Count.
Port Aransas had the only **Brown Booby** (8) and **Wood Thrush** (5). These two species had contrasting trends. The **boobies** had increased from zero two decades ago to reports during eight years in this past decade, and the **Wood Thrush** has declined from reports during nine years two decades ago to five years this past decade.  

**Spring Creek** had the only **Broad-billed Hummingbird** (7) and **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** (10). The scarcity of Texas Red-cockaded Woodpecker reports (one) reports demonstrates the lack of CBC coverage of National Forest lands because they all contain this species and are open to the public.

![Broad-billed Hummingbird](image_url)

*Broad-billed Hummingbird is rare during any season in eastern Texas.* Photo: Clifford Salawage/Christmas Bird Count

**Attwater’s Prairie-Chicken NWR** reported one **Greater Prairie-Chicken** (9). Phew! **Balmorhea** had the first **Eurasian Wigeon** on count day in 14 years. **Buffalo Bayou’s Greater Pewee** (6) returned for another winter.
A *Scott’s Oriole* (6) has taken a liking to a residence at *Boerne* and has stayed year-round for at least two years.
The rare occurrence of a **Social Flycatcher (0)** at **Brownsville** stimulated the restarting of an abandoned CBC. The Social was first reported in November and has been sought out daily by birders through February. The individual was documented during the CBC but not photographed by CBC participants.
Social Flycatcher at Brownsville became 1st CBC record. Photo: Brent Ortego

The Limpkin (0) became a new resident of the Brazos Bend State Park area last summer when the species found a large population of exotic apple snails to its liking.
Limpkin is a new Species for Texas CBCs at Brazos Bend SP. Photo: Sandy & Rich Jespersen/Christmas Bird Count

Chisos Mountain was able to locate Mexican Jay (10) in its high elevation habitats. Coastal Tip tallied large numbers of birds at its location in the Rio Grande River Delta, but only one individual qualified as an exclusive - the Tennessee Warbler (5).
Tennessee Warbler was barely in the U.S. at Coastal Tip. Photo: Bill Beaty/Christmas Bird Count

Falcon Dam found a Morelet’s Seedeater (10). Guadalupe Mountains NP was able to locate the elusive Pygmy Nuthatch (2) in its high elevation habitats. Jackson – Calhoun Counties documented the only Rose-breasted Grosbeak (6). Lubbock County had the only Ring-necked Pheasant (7).

Muleshoe NWR High Plains habitats are good for longspurs. They had the only Lapland Longspurs (10).
Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Jackson – Calhoun Counties. Photo: Harry Forbes/Christmas Bird Count

The Bat Falcon (0) was first reported in early December at Santa Ana NWR and was rediscovered for the CBC. This made it a 1st for Texas CBCs. It was initially challenging to locate, but it soon developed consistent daily movement patterns allowing thousands of birders to view the species through February.
Bat Falcon at Santa Ana NWR was the first Texas CBC record. Photo: Raul Garza/Christmas Bird Count

San Bernard NWR had the only Black-headed Grosbeak (6). The airboat crew at Sea Rim State Park was able to locate one Yellow Rail (10). White-winged Scoters (8) seem to be getting harder to find and we were fortunate to receive a report of one at West End Galveston Island.

COUNT WEEK

National Audubon Society Compiler Resources mentions “Count week (cw) birds serve as a place holder for that species on your checklist in a given season. They are not at all a part of your official census data for that season's day.” With this being said, it is still good to know what you missed during count day.
I encourage scouting. It does help locate species for the CBC and manage your time/birder resources. It is a sick feeling when you miss a species you know was there. However, it is the worst feeling when a really rare species is found the day after your count that you did not have a clue was present.

**Count Week** species were Red-throated Loon (8) at Lake Tawakoni, Mountain Plover (10) at Granger, *Chaetura* swift (0) at Guadalupe River Delta, White-throated Swift (10) at El Paso, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (10) at Laguna Atascosa NWR, Golden-crowned Warbler (2) at Weslaco and Baltimore Oriole (9) at Harlingen.

**MISSED**

I always do a self-evaluation at the end of a CBC. Did I miss species or were they just not there? Looking at how many species on the count which were represented by one individual provides an index to the likelihood you Missed species. Texas CBCs this season individually averaged 14% of their species tally being represented by one bird and 8% state-wide.

Twelve species which were reported in Texas in at least six of the last 10 CBC seasons but were not found during the 122nd were Mountain Plover and Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet which were present for 10 of the 11 seasons; Red-throated Loon, Allen’s Hummingbird, Caliope Hummingbird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, and Baltimore Oriole who were present in eight of the 11 seasons; Wilson’s Plover who was present in seven of the 11 seasons, and Broad-winged Hawk, Lesser Nighthawk, Juniper Titmouse, and Louisiana Waterthrush who were present in six of the 11 seasons.

**THE COUNT SEASON**

The 122nd Season started on Tuesday 14 December with eight CBCs being conducted and ran for 23 days through Wednesday 5 January for a total of 113 CBCs (most for Texas). Saturdays the 18th and the 1st
were the busiest days with 23 and seven CBCs, respectively. The 22nd – 25th and 5 January were not used to conduct CBCs.

WEATHER

Texas rain dancers, holders of weather charms and focused wishes to the Weather Makers were not as effective this year. Weather during the counts hampered 62% of the CBCs (fog, rain, <32 - >80°F, wind 21’mph). One-half of the bad weather occurred during the 1st weekend of the CBC season. Freezing temps occurred on 15% with the 16 degrees at Muleshoe and White River being the coldest. Temps >80 occurred on 12% with 90 being highest at Harlingen. Fog occurred on 12% of the counts and rain on 25% of the CBCs. The moisture was generally welcome except when it occurred on your CBC. Winds 20+ mph occurred on 21% of the counts with the strongest at 55 mph at Turkey Creek. The worst weather was likely experienced by the Turkey Creek CBC for the 2nd year in a row. They had a major frontal passage in the afternoon which included fog and light rain in the morning followed by heavy rain in the afternoon.

EFFORT

Total CBCs - 113 (most CBCs), birder-days – 2863 (280 above last season and 9th highest), party-hours – 7543 (400 below last season and the 11th highest for Texas), and party-miles – 26,047 (6th highest).

Even though we set a record for the most CBCs, this season ranked 11th in total party-hours which was about 4% below the average for the last 10 years. Compilers were mostly successful at surveying the same areas, but it appears birders went home earlier than past seasons which might have been weather related.
My wife and I managed to participate in seven counts in a row during the first week. It was a great experience on the Coast being able to participate in many of the CBCs with the highest species numbers. We recommend you try it.

NEW COUNTS

Texas keeps adding and dropping CBCs as birder interest shifts in the State. Texas added Lake Houston - Humble as the newest CBC this season, and Brownsville was restarted.

Hueco Tanks, La Sal Vieja, Lake Meredith – East, and Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area CBCs were inactive. The compiler for Hueco Tanks indicated he was planning to conduct the CBC next season, and a birder expressed interest in restarting the Richland Creek WMA CBC.

SPECIAL ASPECTS

At the end of each CBC report, there is a section labeled “SPECIAL ASPECTS”. The compiler is provided this space to discuss issues related to their CBC. I read every one at least once.

Compilers from 53 of the 113 CBCs provided some comments/information in the Special Aspects Section. The main topic was how weather (wind/rain/fog/URI) negatively or positively affected the results. Twenty-eight percent of the responding compilers mentioned conditions were warmer than normal and this may have slowed southern migration. NOAA agreed about the heat and reported December of 2021 was the warmest in 130 years. One-fourth of the compilers indicated that bird numbers were much lower than normal. Twenty percent mentioned that Covid was still affecting access to property, transportation, and number of participants, and 18% complained that birder participation was lower than normal.
WEATHER EVENTS (outside of the CBC season)

Several weather events were thought to have influenced bird numbers during the CBC season. The 13-17 February 2021 North American Winter Storm Uri was a major winter and ice storm that created subfreezing conditions for five days that had widespread human and natural resource impacts across the United States. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Master Naturalists Program requested citizen scientists to report wildlife mortalities on INaturalist (a global website hosted by the California Academy of Sciences and co-funded by National Geographic; Louie Bond. 2022. Snowmageddon. Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine Jan/Feb) to help monitor the magnitude of the impact. This resulted in reports of over 800 bird mortalities from 117 avian species (https://inaturalist.org/projects/winter-storm-uri-wildlife-deaths). Thirteen of the 20 species making up at least 1% of the reports were shown to have had their lowest CBC tallies during the last 10 seasons in the 122nd CBC. Eastern Bluebird and American Robin were the most frequently reported species, and each represented 10% of the mortalities. The extent of the mortality from this storm was widespread.

The drought of 2020 continued into the 2021 spring with dry conditions throughout Texas. It started raining in May with over 20 inches of rain for the month and 60 inches for the year recorded along the Central Coast. Several rivers were in flood stage for months creating very turbid conditions in tidal marshes which reduced food production. Wading birds inland responded to the above average rain by initiating new colonies in June and extending nesting into September. Texas had the unusual condition of being drought free by the end of August but started drying out as the year progressed. Two-thirds of the State ended up experiencing drought conditions again during the CBC season.
The Prairie Pothole Region of the United States and Canada experienced extreme drought during the breeding season and many waterfowl and grassland dependent wildlife which migrate to Texas likely experienced poor reproduction.

**POPULATION TRENDS (Where Have All the Birds Gone?)**

[Population trend section will compare number of individuals of a species tallied this season and adjusted for effort to the tallies from the last 10-years in Texas. Population changes indicated will be for those reports which deviated by more than one standard deviation from that species 10-year average unless otherwise indicated. Percent decreasing is underrepresented because missed birds are not part of the %]
decreased. National avian trend data for > 50 years can be found at

https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone

Table 1. Percentage of species increasing or decreasing by CBC season in Texas.

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Texas CBCs this season had the highest rate of declining species out of the last 14 years and have had five years in a row where declining species out-numbered increasing species. Ninety-one species (24%) were at their lowest level for the decade.
The main cause of these declines for 34% of the species is not known at this time. It is known that winter storm URI did kill birds over a large area and drought over the Central Flyway reduced reproduction of some species. Temperatures were above average (warmest December in 130 years) and coupled with ample food to the north some species may not have needed to migrate south in normal numbers by the start of the CBC season. We had some lousy weather during key days (major cold front arrival during first weekend (is an example) of the CBC season when many counts were conducted.

However, remember that despite 34% of species declining, 66% of the species were at normal or higher population levels.

**Waterfowl:** seven species increasing, 10 decreasing and 17 stable. The occurrence of both species of whistling-ducks in above average numbers were indicative of the warm temperatures.
Both whistling-duck species were at Matagorda County. Photo: Lisa & Li/Christmas Bird Count.

Most waterfowl migrated south to the Coast later than normal. **Mottled Duck** (1265; # for season), **Cinnamon Teal** (29), **Redhead** (32,572), **Hooded** (840) and **Common mergansers** (148), and **Ruddy Ducks** (4675) were reported at their lowest level for the decade. Several hunting guides cancelled bookings because of the scarcity of ducks. A combination of unseasonably warm temperatures and lower food supplies in the south, and open water and high food availability in the northern states are thought to have influenced low numbers in Texas.
Waterfowl migrated south later than normal. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

Upland Game Birds: three species decreasing and four stable. Plain Chachalaca (110) and Scaled Quail (113) were at their lowest level for the decade.

Loons thru Spoonbill: 10 species decreasing and 22 stable. Pied-billed (3707) and Eared Grebes (273), Double-crested Cormorant (43,807), Great Blue Heron (4657), and Black-crowned Night-Heron (837) were at their lowest levels for the decade. Heavy rains in May appeared to stimulate development of new inland colonies. However, as soon as nesting finished birds left the area.
Eared Grebe numbers have been below average during the last five years. Photo: Kristie Tobin/Christmas Bird Count

**Diurnal Raptors**: three species increasing, five decreasing and 15 stable. **White-tailed Kite** (180), **Golden Eagle** (1), **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (184), and **White-tailed Hawk** (208) were at their lowest level for the decade. In contrast, **Bald Eagles** were at their highest level (406).
Matagorda County consistently reports high numbers of White-tailed Hawks. Photo: Dora Ann Ortego/Christmas Bird Count.

Gallinules – Cranes: two species increasing, two decreasing and eight stable. Yellow Rail (1) and Whooping Crane (88 at 7 locations) were at their lowest level for the decade. American Coot (76,303) numbers were near average despite reports of mortality during URI. However, they arrived on the Coast much later in the fall than normal.
Whooping Cranes were reported at eight CBCs. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

Shorebirds: Over 124,000 shorebirds were reported this season. Two species were increasing, 10 decreasing and 16 stable. This was a little better than last year when half of the species were declining.

Coastal Tip, Matagorda County, Jackson-Calhoun Counties, and Port Aransas each in order of
abundance had at least 10,000 shorebirds. **American Avocet** (6044), **American Oystercatcher** (86), **Snowy Plover** (272), **Killdeer** (7312), **Spotted Sandpiper** (438), **Willet** (3046), and **Wilson’s Snipe** (828) were at their lowest level for the decade.

Shorebirds at Coastal Tip numbered >37,000 which was the highest # counted in Texas this season.

**Photo: Justin LeClaire/Christmas Bird Count**

**Jaegers – Skimmer:** This group of species had the highest percentage (37%) of species increasing. Seven increased, two decreased and 10 were stable. **Jaegers** (8) and **Iceland Gull** (3) were at their highest level for the decade. **Black Skimmer** (1036) was the only species in this group which was at its lowest level.
Despite historic Texas CBC Black Skimmer tallies stabilizing in recent decades, they were reported at their lowest level this season. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count. Graph: National Audubon Society

**Pigeons – Ani:** six species decreasing and three stable. **Inca Dove** (668), **Common Ground-Dove** (95), **White-tipped Dove** (60) and **Greater Roadrunner** (71) were at their lowest level for the decade. These low numbers are not a one-time dip because of conditions this year. It is a continuation of several years of low numbers.
Only 14 Groove-billed Anis were reported this season. Photo: Bob Friedrichs/Christmas Bird Count

**Owls – Nighthars**: one species increasing, three decreasing, and five stable. The **Great Horned Owl** (308) was the only species in this group at its lowest level for the decade. Barn (82) and Barred (208) were also declining.
Swifts – Hummingbirds: one species decreased and six were stable. The **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** (17) was the only species of this group at its lowest level for the decade. However, it is difficult to accurately track the *Archilochus* and *Selasphorus* species which over winter without the compilers consistently providing documentation of their CBC sightings. The species of these two genera are difficult to distinguish. No swifts were reported on count day. A **White-throated Swift** was at El Paso during CW and a *Chaetura* swift was reported at Victoria during CW.
Matagorda County has one of the highest concentrations of the Crested Caracara. Photo: Brandy Falise/Christmas Bird Count

**Kingfishers – Woodpeckers**: nine species decreasing and seven stable. **Ringed** (29) and **Green kingfishers** (72), **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** (1521), **Red-bellied Woodpecker** (3034), **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (493), and **Downy** (1248) and **Pileated woodpeckers** (497) were at their lowest level for the decade.
The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker declined the most in its species group. We only tallied 42% of its decade’s average. Photo: Mikael Behrens/Christmas Bird Count
Green Kingfisher Was at a Record Low # this season. Photo: Jennifer Wilson & Woody

Woodrow/Christmas Bird Count

Parakeet - Flycatchers: four species increasing, five decreasing, and 10 stable. Black (69) and Eastern phoebes (3520), Vermilion (208) and Ash-throated flycatchers (9), Great Kiskadee (799) and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (19; 27% of 10-yr avg) were at their lowest level for the decade.
The Eastern Phoebe is an abundant popular species that virtually disappeared after URI. It ranked 13th most frequently reported as dead (2% of total birds) due to the storm. We only found 47% of its 10-year average during the CBCs. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

Shrikes – Vireos: three species increasing, one decreasing, and three stable. The Loggerhead Shrike (1789) was the only species of this group at its lowest level for the decade. This is the eighth year in a row of declining numbers, and a history of over 50 years of a general decline.
The Northern Shrike (3), Bell’s Vireo (1) and Plumbeous Vireo (3) were at record high levels for the decade.

Northern Shrike were found at 3 locations. Photo: Charlie Amos, Christmas Bird Count

Corvids: two species decreasing and seven stable. The Blue Jay (4676) was the only species of this group at its lowest level for the decade. Finding jays is frustrating at the Guadalupe River Delta south of Victoria. The CBC is at the edge of the ranges of Blue and Green jays. Both species roam areas outside of their breeding range during winter increasing our odds (?) of finding them at the southern end of a forested river bottom. We found both species five times over the last decade, only one twice and neither three times.
Horned Lark – Swallows: one species increasing, three decreasing, and two stable. Northern Rough-winged (91) and Tree Swallows (1454) were at their lowest levels for the decade. I was afraid that URI killed most of the wintering Cave Swallows which tend to roost in old swallow nests during winter and have been known to die during weeklong freeze events. CBCs reported 150 in most of the State and 350 at San Antonio alleviating some of my concerns.

Chickadees – Kinglets: five species increasing, seven decreasing, and 12 stable. Brown-headed Nuthatch (120) was reported at its highest level for the decade, and Verdin (133), and Winter (99) and
Cactus wrens (65) were at their lowest levels. Most Blue-gray Gnatcatchers disappeared after URI and there was concern that these small birds did not survive the freeze. Low numbers were reported in fall leading up to the CBCs, but their tally of 2345 was normal.

Twelve Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in one photo at Brazoria was a large group. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count
Bluebirds – Mockingbird: eight species declining and seven stable. Eastern Bluebird (3186), Hermit Thrush (356), American Robin (8831), Curve-billed (165) and Long-billed thrashers (228), and Northern Mockingbird (5704) were at their lowest levels for the decade. The Eastern Bluebird was reported at 42% of its average in the last decade, the Long-billed Thrasher 66% and the Northern Mockingbird 47%. The Hermit Thrush was at the lowest level of the group. It only was reported at 25% of its average.

The Hermit Thrush was only reported at 25% of its average from the past decade. Photo: Mikael Behrens/Christmas Bird Count
Eastern Bluebird mortality due to winter storm Uri was likely most frequently discussed with me because the birds died in nest box roosts where they could be found. Mortality of other species was more difficult to document. Photo: Andrew Hamlett/Christmas Bird Count

**Starling – Longspurs**: one species increasing, five species decreasing, and three stable. **Sprague’s Pipit** (38; 32% of average) and **Cedar Waxwing** (5647; 42% of average) were at their lowest levels for the decade.
Sprague’s Pipit abundance prior to this season. Graph: National Audubon Society

Sprague’s Pipit CBC tallies have declined from the 1960’s until mid-1990s where they appeared to have leveled off. We posted a record high tally for the decade during the 121st season. This season’s low tally follows winter storm URI and Severe-Extreme Drought in the breeding grounds.

Warblers: Texas reported 22 species of warblers. Freeport was the top warbler CBC with 15. Matagorda County had 14 species and Guadalupe River Delta 13. Six species were reported increasing, six decreasing, and 10 stable. Orange-crowned Warbler (47% of average), Common Yellowthroat (70%), and Palm (60%) and Yellow-rumped warblers (45%) were at their lowest levels for the decade.
Prairie Warbler was Reported on four CBCs where one is the Average. Photo: Melissa Crookshank/Christmas Bird Count

Cape May Warbler was mentioned earlier at Freeport. A 2nd one was found by Randy Pinkston at Bell County. Yellow-throated Warblers (41) were more common than normal, and Wilson’s Warbler (143) was 75% above average with the species being reported on 27 CBCs.

Only a few Henslow’s Sparrows are reported each season. Photo: Stuart Marcus/Christmas Bird Count

Seedeater – Towhee: The top CBCs for this grouping of species were the Davis Mountains and Westcave Preserve with 19 species each, and Balcones Canyonlands and Matagorda County with 17 species each.
One species tally increased, 19 decreased, and 12 were stable this decade in this group of species. Sparrow populations have been trending downward for four years. Cassin’s (9), Grasshopper (132), LeConte’s (179), Seaside (79), Olive (126), Chipping (10,170), Field (1523), and Lark sparrows (398), and Harris’s (769), Sagebrush (2), Vesper (1861), Savannah (10,862) and Song sparrows (1992), plus Canyon Towhee (100), Rufous-crowned Sparrow (116), and Eastern Towhee (115) for a total of 53% of the species from this group were at their lowest levels for the decade.

![Green-tailed Towhee](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

This Green-tailed Towhee was a surprise during this poor year for sparrows. Photo: Robyn Savage/Christmas Bird Count.

The Nelson’s Sparrow which is a migrant from the north was the only sparrow species increasing. The Seaside Sparrow which is typically found in similar habitat as a year-round resident was reported at its lowest level.
The Nelson’s Sparrow was the only sparrow with an above average tally. Photo: Dora Ann Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

The Savannah Sparrow was the most abundant sparrow this season. It is one of three species along with the Sandhill Crane and Eastern Meadowlark I use to describe the Coastal Prairie in Texas during winter. It is normally not unusual to flush groups of dozens when you drive down a country road. A dozen was a large number this season.

Tanagers – Dickcissel: two species increasing, one decreasing, and eight stable. Pyrrhuloxia (330) was the only species of this group that was at its lowest level for the decade.
A Rare Sighting of a Western Tanager was at Nacogdoches. Photo: Liam Wolff/Christmas Bird Count

Meadowlarks – Orioles: one species increasing, seven decreasing, and seven stable. Western (1460) and Eastern meadowlarks (4956), Rusty Blackbird (34), Common (16,007), Boat-tailed (4747), and Great-tailed grackles (96,913), and Altamira Oriole (47) were at their lowest levels for the decade.

The Scott’s Oriole is rare in Texas during winter. Photo: Dick Park/Christmas Bird Count
House Finch – House Sparrow: three species declining and four species stable. House Finch (3312) was the only species of this group which was at its lowest level for the decade.

MOST COMMON BIRDS

Eleven species occurred on at least 100 of the 113 CBCs in. The Northern Mockingbird occurred on 110. Red-tailed Hawk, Mourning Dove, and Northern Cardinal occurred on 109. Great Blue Heron occurred on 107, Red-winged Blackbird 103, Pied-billed Grebe 101, and Killdeer, Eurasian Collared Dove, Belted Kingfisher, and European Starling on 100 CBCs.

PHOTOGRAPHS

There was a 32% decline of photographs (328) received to document 192 species. I used 40 of these photos from 23 CBCs in this report. I encourage compilers to submit photos of birds reported on their CBC. I need more photos for documenting unusual species. I also use photos of common species like Loggerhead Shrike, Eastern Bluebird, and Sprague’s Pipit to help tell the story of population trends of many species that are not rare.

We reported this season on 91 species which were at their lowest population level in the decade. Will they continue to decline or recover? Join us during the next CBC Season to help find out.