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During CBC-115, 771 field birders and 168 feeder watchers surveyed 32 CBC circles in Montana, for a cumulative total of 142 bird species. Five additional species were seen just during count week (Osprey, Great Black-backed Gull, Barred Owl, Chipping Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak). One new species was added to the cumulative MT count day and count week CBC list (Great Black-backed Gull). One circle had just 1 participant (Fritz Prellwitz in Little Rocky Mountains), while Missoula broke records with 93 field participants. The 4 next closest circles numbered field counters in the 40s (Billings, Bozeman Helena, Kalispell), so they have a way to go to catch up. In spite of fewer participants, Stevensville tallied the most species (87), with its historic rival Bigfork close behind (86). Missoula was the only other count to break 80, with 83. Other counts with at least 70 were Hamilton (77), Kalispell (74) and Eureka (72).

Canada goose was the most numerous species in the state (83,857), and usually the most numerous for each circle. However, 3 counts had none on count day—Big Hole, Little Rocky Mountains, and McNeil Slough—while Bowdoin and Upper Swan Valley each had none except during count week. Mallards were the second most numerous species (28,429), and were present on all circles but 3—Big Hole, Little Rocky Mountains, and Upper Swan Valley; totals ranged from 2 (Musselshell) to 8,218 at Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge. Common Goldeneye were widespread as well, totaling 4,147 from 27 circles. Twelve documented Cackling Geese were reported from 2 circles, continuing similar numbers since CBC-112. The rarest waterfowl were both from Bigfork—not a surprise with the combination of many skilled observers and good access to Flathead and other lakes there. They found 1 each Red-breasted Merganser and Pacific Loon (with a photo and rare bird report). This is the 3rd CBC Pacific Loon, after CBC95 (also from Bigfork), and a count week bird from Glacier National Park during 2004.

Wild Turkey totaled 2,424, reported from 18 circles. California Quail numbered 979, with most (757) from Stevensville (Hamilton had the remainder). Quail numbers have been steadily rising since CBC-105, and peaked at 1,291 during CBC-113.

Bald Eagle was the most widespread species, helping to demonstrate its continued recovery since the banning of DDT. The bird was recorded on 31 of 32 circles, absent only from the Little Rocky Mountains site. Bald Eagle absence there is likely a result of only 1 observer for the circle, or perhaps less habitat (large rivers) is available there than is available at other sites. For context, Bald Eagles have been reported from the Little Rocky Mountains circle on 7 of 24 previous counts.

There were slightly more Red-tailed (680) than Rough-Legged (655) Hawks, recorded from 24 and 27 circles respectively. There were 37 Harlan's Hawks, which were counted from 8 circles. This was close to the average (40) for the past 5 years.

Rare raptors included 1 Ferruginous Hawk at Lewistown and 1 Osprey reported during count week (and throughout December) in Bigfork. There were 7 previous Osprey CBC records for the state. One Gyrfalcon (from Ninepipe) and 1 Peregrine Falcon (Bozeman) were reported, while 36 Prairie Falcons from 19 circles and 54 Merlins from 16 circles were reported. American Kestrel totaled 78, reported from 14 circles.

The rarest passerine was a Brambling on the Stevensville count. This would be the 8th state record if accepted by the Montana Bird Records Committee (Records Committee), although surprisingly, the species had been recorded during count week (Dec 1993) for CBC-94. The Stevensville bird was well documented on count day and was likely the same individual photographed earlier in December at the nearby MPG Ranch.

Missoula had a count week Rose-breasted Grosbeak (photos on eBird), which stayed in a yard through at least 18 January 2015. The only other recent winter record for this species was 30 Dec 1977 (CBC 78) at Ennis.

Stevensville had the only American Pipit, the 8th CBC record (photo available). A Great Falls Northern Mockingbird was the 9th CBC record (photos available). Billings had the only Yellow-rumped Warbler (3), which makes 16 records there since CBC 90.

Fort Peck had the only American White Pelican, and Billings had the only Double-crested Cormorant.

Four counts had Spotted Towhee (Bigfork, Missoula, Stevensville, Troy), for a total 7 individuals. Bozeman had the only White-throated Sparrow (1). Two Swamp Sparrows, 1 each from Bigfork and Ninepipe were the 6th and 7th state records since CBC-91.

Kalispell had the only Yellow-headed Blackbird (1), the 7th CBC state record since 2000. Three circles (Ennis, Missoula, Stevensville) reported a total of 5 Rusty Blackbirds. Ennis also had the only Common Grackles (4).

Yellow-shafted Flicker (1) was reported from only 1 circle (Bowdoin). Red-shafted Flickers totaled 467, but 1,070 Northern Flickers were not identified to subspecies. One Black-backed Woodpecker was reported from 1 circle (West Yellowstone), while 3 American Three-toed Woodpeckers were found, 1 each on Big Hole, Bozeman, and Missoula. While fires and beetle-affected forests occur throughout the state, the habitat does not always occur in our count circles.

Virginia Rails totaled 9, reported from 4 circles (Ennis, Missoula, Stevensville, Three Forks, and a count week bird from Bozeman). One Sandhill Crane was reported from Hamilton, which was the 11th year it has been reported for the state since CBC-94 (including a count week bird during CBC-108).

Six gull species were recorded, including numerous Ring-billed, California, and Herring Gulls, and 1 each Mew Gull (from Eureka) and Iceland Gull (Fort Peck). The prize for most rare gull was at Fort Peck with a count week Great Black-backed Gull. The bird was found from 23 December 2014 through 19 January 2015, but alas, not on count day. This species has never been reported on a CBC for the state, and this would be the 4th state record if accepted by the Records Committee.

Eurasian Collared-dove totaled 4,158, reported from 24 circles. Their totals have leveled out for the last 3 CBCs, all near 4,140. Mourning Dove totaled 857. Except for CBC-112, which totaled 586, their numbers have remained over 1,000 during 11 of the last 12 CBCs, so no clear decreases are evident for the species in spite of increases in Eurasian Collared-dove.

Barred Owl was only recorded during count week. There were 3 Snowy Owls, the same as last year but down from high numbers during CBC-112 (15) and CBC-113 (11). There were 2 Great Gray and 3 Northern Saw-whet Owls (about average for both), 3 Western Screech Owls (above the past average of 1), but 16 Northern Pygmy Owls (above the recent average of 11).

Compilers generally reported average weather conditions and little wind, which helped provide good viewing conditions. Thanks to all of the compilers who round-up and organize the field observers, and then capture all of their data—including effort—for the Montana CBC-115. We couldn't do it without you!



American Pipit, Stevensville, MT CBC, 27 Dec 2014, Eric Fevold photo



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 21 Dec 2014, Missoula, MT, Sally Hickman photo.



Rusty Blackbird, Stevensville, MT CBC, 27 Dec 2014, Tom Forwood photo



Great Black-backed Gull, Fort Peck, MT, 23 Dec 2014, Chuck Carlson photo



Northern Mockingbird, Great Falls, MT CBC, found 14 Dec and photographed 15 Dec 2014, Liz Larcom



Pacific Loon, Bigfork CBC, 20 Dec 2014, Dan Casey photo