

NATURALLY: Christmas Bird Count 2022 continues 30-Year Event

- By Margaret Higbee Special to the Gazette
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The Townsend's Solitaire is an elegant, wide-eyed songbird of mountain forests. Their drab gray plumage gets a lift from subtly beautiful buffy wing patches and a white eyering.

Submitted photo

Last Dec. 26 dawned cold and windy at only 5 degrees with a 2-inch snow cover and an overcast sky. The high for the day was 20 degrees.

Thirty field birders spent 39.2 hours hiking 25.31 miles while road birders drove 40 hours logging 399 miles. Our owling team drove 21 miles. Twenty-one feeder watchers at 18 locations spent 49.75 hours counting birds. This year we tallied the highest number of species since 2012 and the highest number of individuals since 2016.

Lee Carnahan took three trips to Two Lick Reservoir to count the water birds; he listed two loons and the diving ducks along with the four pied-billed grebes.

In the southwestern sector, Dan and Marcy Cunkelman spotted the only eastern towhee and three northern harriers while additional harriers were found by Tom Simmons working in the northeastern corner of the circle; and Mike Weible at State Game Land 276 where he found yet another sapsucker. Mike also noted a Wilson's snipe at the Windy Ridge Industrial Site.

Two highlights for Pat Johner were hearing and seeing common loons at Two Lick Reservoir and finding a white-crowned sparrow.

At the Waterworks Conservation Area, Sue Dickson spotted the winter wren, managing to record it on Merlin; she also sighted two great blue herons.

Bob Ramsey added to our sparrow counts with the additions of field, American tree, white-throated, savannah, and song sparrows as well as dark-eyed juncos. Alice and Robert Stitt added more juncos and field sparrows.

On Yellow Creek's north shore, Mark Strittmatter spotted a ruby-crowned kinglet with its crown exposed. Also part of the north shore crew, John Taylor writes, "... one American black duck that flushed from the open water downstream from the dam, and two woodies that we saw in flight over the woods downstream from the dam, were a long overdue reward to the crew for the many miserable hikes to the dam in previous CBCs that yielded exactly zero birds."

Two days later, John returned to the park in the late afternoon to attempt to locate an unidentified wren the group had seen on count day. He had no luck, but added a count week bird when he spotted six sandhill cranes passing overhead.

On Yellow Creek Lake's south shore, hiking from Grandpa's Cove to the dam, Michele and Rich Carlson added a sapsucker, three brown creepers, and a winter wren. After hiking in the morning, Roger and I picked up 12-year-old Noah and his dad, Warren, who accompanied us as we covered territory from our home at the edge of the circle to Two Mile Run.

After many stops, we retraced our route along Dark Hollow when suddenly from the backseat, Noah exclaimed, "I see a *big* bird! It's an owl!" He was very excited, so Roger cautiously backed up; perched no more than 10 feet from the road was yet another life bird for Noah — a gorgeous barred owl peering down at us! Great find, Noah!

To view the actual counts, visit

https://toddbirdclub.org/newsletters/Todd_Nuthatch_2023_January.pdf, page 7.

The author's note on the bird count history: Prior to 1900, outdoorsmen would go out on Christmas day and shoot as many animals and birds as possible. They called it a Christmas Side Hunt. On Christmas 1900, conservationist and ornithologist Frank M. Chapman proposed a Christmas Bird Census to replace the side hunt. He encouraged people to go out to count birds,

not kill them. This has morphed into the current day Christmas Bird Count (CBC), now sponsored by the Audubon Society.

The annual CBC takes place on one day between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. In 1983 Todd Bird Club members organized its first CBC in Indiana. Roger drew the map using Second and Grandview in Indiana as the center of the 15-mile-diameter circle as we wanted to include most of Yellow Creek State Park as well as our own home. Our first count was held on Dec. 31, 1983, with 49 observers. After several years, members decided to hold the count the day after Christmas. Anyone may participate by identifying and counting birds at your feeder if you live within the circle or by joining one of our field parties. If you wish to participate in 2023 or need more information, please contact Roger or me (bcoriole@windstream.net, 724-354-3493 or 412-309-3538 — Roger's cell). We welcome new birders, too.

The number and variety of birds, as well as the number of observers, have changed over the years. Numbers of birds are significantly lower; in fact 2.9 billion birds — 30 percent of the North American population — have been lost since 1970. For more information, visit <https://www.3billionbirds.org/>.

Members who participated in that first count as well as the 2022 count include Pat Andrascik, Gary Ferrence, Roger Higbee, Pat Johner, Mark Strittmatter, John Taylor, and me.

The Naturally columns are brought to you each month by The Indiana Gazette and Friends of White's Woods to showcase the wonders of nature in our area.