



North American Migration Count

Spring 2012

Chuck Gates
Oregon NAMC Coordinator

Twice annually, the state of Oregon participates in the North American Migration Count which is sponsored and administered by the East Cascades Audubon Society (ECAS). The state is divided up by counties and a county coordinator is assigned to each. That coordinator arranges for volunteers and establishes routes. Volunteers then enter the field and count as many individual birds as possible in the amount of time they have to commit. Counts are done as "Regular" counts which usually include walking or driving routes, "Owling" which typically involves going out at night, "Stationary" which involves staying in one place for an extended period of time, or "Feeder Watch" which is pretty self-descriptive.

County coordinators collect data on numbers, time, mileage, and weather. They then send that data to the State Coordinator. The numbers are then entered into a database that is going into its 16th year. It's hoped that this database will be used by future and present researchers to determine presence and absence as well as some trends related to bird migration.

2012 was markedly different from the previous year. In 2011, this compiler and many of my compatriots were lamenting the weather and questioning the sanity of sampling bird populations under such inclement conditions. All of us felt redeemed in 2012 as the weather was pleasant throughout most of the state. Most of the count feedback was as bright and shiny as the weather.

Volunteers counted in 31 of Oregon's 36 counties. No surveys were completed in Gilliam, Hood River, Sherman, Wallowa, or Umatilla counties. The prospects of covering every county in Oregon are looking up as both Gilliam and Wallowa counties were scheduled to be surveyed this season but, due to

scheduling conflicts and personal dilemmas, were unable to successfully field a team. We may very well get every county covered, to some extent, next season.

In an effort to get better data and to report an accurate volunteer number to the IRS, the East Cascades Audubon Society, for the first time, collected the names of every volunteer that participated in the count. In the past, some volunteers were counted multiple times if they participated in multiple counts and almost everyone was counted twice since they participated in both the spring and fall counts. This is no longer an issue. The accurate participation level for the Spring NAMC was 295 volunteers who formed 187 teams.

A major event in the history of the Oregon NAMC occurred in February 2012. In the past, any effort to extract information from past NAMC data was greatly hindered by the fact that, for the first 10 years or so, most of the data was contained in hand-written documents. The ECAS completed a commitment made some time ago to convert this data into a searchable database format. Now the entire data set can be accessed and searched via an Excel spreadsheet. Ron Halvorsen was contracted to convert the data and to set up the spreadsheet to include pivot tables and other aides in data retrieval. This data is now available to anyone who would like to view it.

That comes to an average of just over 9 volunteers per county and an average of almost 6 teams in each county. Deschutes County completely dominated all other counties in the volunteer department. With 56 participants, they had more than twice as many participants as any other county (See Table 6 for other participation data.) Clackamas County was on the other end of the spectrum with a single surveyor covering that very diverse county.

Short-eared Owl. Photo by Steve Parsons.

A huge supplement to the inclusive nature of this report was provided by a pelagic team that consisted of Jeff Gilligan, Owen Schmidt, Gerard Lillie, Tom Crabtree, Sheran Wright, Jan Leonard of Half Moon Bay Cal, and Judy Meredith. This team took advantage of an opportunity to board a cruise ship that traversed the entire state offshore providing pelagic results for each county. This was especially important for Clatsop County as no other data was recorded for that county.

RESULTS

This spring migration count produced a total of 304 species (293 species were reported in 2011, 273 species in 2010 and 298 were tallied in 2009). The total number of individuals came to a respectable 194,241. This compares with ~214,000 last year and ~175,000 in 2010.

Below you will see a summary of the most distinct birds seen on this count. Some of these are state rarities, others are unusual for this season, and still others are unusual in some other way.

Water birds in general are heavy migrators and many were seen moving through our state. Jackson and Columbia counties both produced inland GREATER SCAUP reports. A probable nesting pair of HARLEQUIN DUCKS was located in the mountains of eastern Marion County while another was found on the Lincoln County coast. Lane County produced 2 LONG-TAILED DUCKS on its coast. Lane County managed to pull off the rare feat of tallying both AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS and BROWN PELICANS on the same day within their county borders. SNOWY EGRETS were spotted in Klamath and Harney counties. Three GREEN HERONS in Klamath County were the only reports of this species east of the Cascades. It was exciting to see 11 YELLOW RAILS tallied on the Klamath count since this species rarely makes our spring count.

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER is another species that is often missed but Curry County came through with a single bird. Linn County saw the only LESSER YELLOWLEGS and the State's only SOLITARY SANDPIPER was seen in Columbia County. MARBLED GODWITS showed up in Tillamook while the only RUDDY TURNSTONES were two birds from Lincoln County. RED KNOTS showed up in Lane and Tillamook counties and a pair of rare spring PECTORAL SANDPIPERS were seen in Jackson County. Six HEERMAN'S GULLS were seen on the south coast and a late GLAUCOUS GULL was in Lincoln County. Curry produced the only BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE on the count.

Many interesting ocean bird sightings occurred. A total of 24 BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS were joined

by a single LAYSAN ALBATROSS; the latter being seen off the coast of Coos County. A lone NORTHERN FULMAR was tallied in Douglas County's offshore waters. Both PINK-FOOTED and SOOTY SHEARWATERS were seen offshore. Decent numbers of FORK-TAILED and LEACH'S STORM-PETRELS were also about and were joined by one ASHY STORM-PETREL off the coast of Curry County. Pelagic RED PHALAROPES were abundant but single sightings of SOUTH POLAR SKUA and POMARINE JAEGER were a nice surprise. Forty-two MARBLED MURRELET, 29 CASSIN'S AUKLETS, and 90 RHINOCEROS AUKLETS were state totals for these species. Seven TUFTED PUFFINS were joined by 6 HORNED PUFFINS.

Probably the most exciting discoveries of the whole count came from the ocean excursion team. Off the coast of Lincoln County, the team discovered what may turn out to be a CRESTED AUKLET. Photos were taken and are currently under analysis. This Alaskan nester should have been in the open waters of the Bering Sea instead of off the coast of Lincoln County.

In coastal Lane County waters, pelagic surveyors observed a shearwater that had all the field marks of a Newell's Shearwater. Further research is necessary to confirm the bird's identity. If the research bears this out, the sighting would be submitted to the OBRC, and, if accepted, would constitute only the second North American record of that form. This subspecies of the Townsend's Shearwater is normally found in warmer seas off the coast of Hawaii. Neither of these species is on the official state list and, should they be accepted as valid sightings, both would constitute state firsts.

Though generally secretive, male game birds are often conspicuous with their spring courtship rituals. Many of the following results are of amorous displaying males. Single GRAY PARTRIDGES were seen on both the Baker and Wasco NAMCs. SOOTY GROUSE were tallied in nearly 1/3 of counties surveyed (10/32). MOUNTAIN QUAIL matched the grouse number (also 10/32). WILD TURKEYS were located in 12 counties and there were 7 counties that failed to record a single CALIFORNIA QUAIL (mostly the coastal counties). The only GREATER SAGE GROUSE record for the state came from a report of 17 birds east of Bend. EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE numbers may be leveling off as the 704 birds reported state-wide this year was the same as last year (24 counties this year compared to 25 last).

Twenty-six raptor species were located during the count. WHITE-TAILED KITES continue to be elusive during the count period (individual birds were seen in Douglas and Tillamook counties). A total of 8 NORTHERN GOSHAWKS were found in Oregon's forested regions and 21 RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS were located but none were from eastern counties.

Eight counties observed SWAINSON HAWKS. As expected, all were from eastern counties. Save for an individual in Baker County and 2 in Harney, all the FERRUGINOUS HAWK tallies came from the 3 Central Oregon counties. A late MERLIN showed up in Lincoln County while the state total for PEREGRINE FALCONS reached 13 (All from west of the Cascades.) FLAMMULATED OWLS were located in Klamath and Deschutes counties. BARRED OWLS were tallied in Columbia, Douglas, and Lane counties. Single BURROWING OWLS were in Baker and Harney counties and the lone SPOTTED OWL report came from the Douglas count. SHORT-EARED OWLS were seen in Morrow, Crook, and Harney counties while Polk, Klamath and Deschutes were the only counties to report a NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL.

Near passerines are a group that includes the swifts, nightjars, hummingbirds, and woodpeckers among other orders. As their name suggests, they are often considered close relatives of the passerines. COMMON NIGHTHAWKS usually arrive a couple of weeks after this migration count so a single bird from Baker County was noteworthy. Crook, Harney, and Wheeler counties all noted the presence of COMMON POORWILL.

A lone BLACK SWIFT flew by a crew on the Curry County count. All 19 ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRDS that made the count came from Curry County as is expected. Am. Three-toed Woodpeckers certainly nest in Oregon but none were located during the count (A family group was located two weeks later in Deschutes County during the Dean Hale Woodpecker Festival outside of Sisters.) Three-toed was the only Oregon woodpecker not tallied on the state count. A BLUE JAY that wintered near Sisters in Deschutes County

was present on count day and PINYON JAY reports were restricted to Crook and Deschutes counties.

Owing to their highly migratory nature, passerines are often well represented on highlight summaries such as this. OAK TITMOUSE reports were restricted to the southern Oregon counties of Klamath, Josephine, and Jackson. The same 3 counties produced the only BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER sightings of the count. A GRAY CATBIRD report came in from Baker County while the count's only NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD was seen in Klamath County.

An AMERICAN REDSTART was seen in Columbia County and CALIFORNIA TOWHEES turned up in expected locations in Jackson and Josephine counties. SAGE SPARROWS abundant but highly localized in Deschutes and Crook counties. BLACK-THROATED SPARROWS made a good showing this season with birds being located in Curry, Klamath, and Multnomah counties. The only GRASSHOPPER SPARROW report came in from Douglas County.

Two WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS in Deschutes County were quite late for this species which is unusual at any time of the year. LAPLAND LONGSPURS are equally as rare on this count so an individual in Curry County was a highlight of that count. Early BOBOLINKS were spotted in Harney and Baker counties. TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS were noted in their historic haunts in Crook and Klamath counties but 150 individuals in Morrow County were out of the ordinary.

Holding true to the principle of healthy skepticism, 11 COMMON REDPOLLS were not included in the final tally for this count but the observers, who were familiar with this species, were almost positive that these birds were present. June records for this species in Oregon are very rare.

Data from the 2012 Spring NAMC

Table 1 – Most Abundant Species

Common Murre	38192	European Starling	5493	American Robin	3196
White-faced Ibis	9823	Wilson's Phalarope	5492	Western Gull	2678
Cliff Swallow	7891	Brewer's Blackbird	5149	American Robin	3196
Red-winged Blackbird	7368	Western Sandpiper	4493	Barn Swallow	2492
American Coot	7285	Am. White Pelican	4208	Tree Swallow	2316
Canada Goose	6661	Eared Grebe	3748	Violet-green Swallow	2293

Table 2 – Species with only a single record

Laysan Albatross	Solitary Sandpiper	Spotted Owl	Gray Catbird
Northern Fulmar	Black-legged Kittiwake	Common Nighthawk	Northern Mockingbird
Newell's Shearwater	Glaucous Gull	Black Swift	American Redstart
Ashy Storm-Petrel	South Polar Skua	Willow Flycatcher	Grasshopper Sparrow
Merlin	Pomarine Jaeger	Blue Jay	Lapland Longspur
Pacific Golden-Plover	Crested Auklet		

Table 3 – Some Species Not Recorded This Season

Eurasian Wigeon	Upland Sandpiper	Ancient Murrelet	Red-eyed Vireo
Spruce Grouse	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Great Gray Owl	Juniper Titmouse
Dusky Grouse	Thayer’s Gull	Long-eared Owl	Veery
	Elegant Tern	Costa’s Hummingbird	Northern Waterthrush
Am. Golden Plover	Common Tern	N. 3-toed Woodpecker	Gray-Cr. Rosy-Finch
Snowy Plover	Arctic Tern	Cordilleran Flycatcher	Black Rosy-Finch

Table 4 – Most Prolific Counties (by individuals counted)

Harney	29031	Lake	11974	Baker	6402
Lincoln	26683	Douglas	9227	Lane	6363
Curry	23242	Tillamook	6629	Yamhill	6221
Deschutes	15825	Klamath	6495	Linn	5118

CONCLUSION

At the end of every season I have time to sit back and contemplate questions like: “How can we improve this count?” “Did I do everything I could to make this count great?” Is it really worth all this work?” “Should I do this again next year?” I have to confess that the answers to these questions are not positive every season. That said, I’m currently very enthused about the future of this project. We continue to increase coverage around the state and continue to bring into the fold counties that previously went uncounted. As long as we continue to drive toward the goal of state-wide coverage for the NAMC, I will remain confident that this effort is worth my time and the incredible amount of time several hundred others spend. Long live the NAMC!!!

You can join the hundreds of other citizen scientists who help with the North American Migration Count (see contact information below). Contact your local

Table 5 – Most Prolific Counties (by species counted)

Lane	184	Curry	158	Baker	135
Klamath	181	Crook	154	Lake	132
Deschutes	176	Harney	155	Lincoln	126
Douglas	170	Linn	137	Benton	122

Table 6 – Most Prolific Counties (by participants)

Deschutes	56	Curry	13	Douglas	11
Baker	27	Crook	13	Jackson	11
Yamhill	25	Benton	12	Jefferson	11
Lane	20	Tillamook	12	Linn & Polk	11

Table 7 – Most Prolific Counties (by species / participants*)

Douglas	15.46	Curry	12.15	Multnomah	9.72
Marion	13.44	Crook	11.85	Polk	9.72
Jackson	12.90	Benton	10.17	Lane	9.20
Linn	12.46	Jefferson	9.81	Coos	5.56

* Only counties with at least 9 participants

County Coordinator. Take it upon yourself to organize a count in a county without a County Coordinator. Offer to help with data collection and ease the burden on your local County Coordinator. Get out on one of the ‘birdiest’ weekends of the year and contribute to our knowledge of bird distribution in Oregon or simply count the birds in your yard and send in your data. Any and all contributions will help make the count more meaningful to Oregon birders.

The ECAS would like to thank all volunteers who contributed time, money, and sweat in order to gather migration data for this project. A special thank you goes to the county coordinators who collated all this data and, more than anyone, contributed to the overall success of this count.

If you would like to get involved with this count in the future, please go to the East Cascades Audubon Society’s website (<http://www.ecaudubon.org> and click the "Projects" tab) and contact the state NAMC coordinator. You won’t regret this amazing birding experience.