

Terre Haute's 56th Christmas Bird Count, Dec 19, 2015

By: Peter Scott

Dedication: We dedicate this year's count to the memory of **Betty Beron Munsee**, a longtime member of Wabash Valley Audubon who passed away earlier this month. Betty and her husband Dr. Jack Munsee (entomologist & ant expert) were mainstays of WVAS from the 1960's through 1990's. Jack was President multiple times. Although Betty was not a field birder, she loved Audubon (both Wabash Valley and Indiana Audubon Societies), served on the board, and continued to host countdown parties after Jack's death. Peter remembers her as one of the impressive women who carried on lively conversation and enjoyed cocktails at Larry Bird's Boston Connection before monthly meetings. She endowed the Jack and Betty Beron Munsee Scholarship in Ecology, a 4-year scholarship which has benefited several undergraduates. WVAS recognized her with the James Mason Award as one of "Six from the Sixties", along with Ruth Erickson, Henry and Margaret Tamar, Pearl and Ken Eslinger. In Joe Dickson's photo at Olive Garden Restaurant, Betty is fourth from the left.



Weather on count day: Cold, windy, and clear; temperatures from 23 to 35 degrees F; winds averaged 7 to 9 mph most of day, and were mostly from northwest to southwest. The "feels like" on my phone was 15 F at dawn. No precipitation or snow cover; still water mostly open, except for very shallow small ponds, rivers ice free.

Count total: We found **86 species**, our highest total since 2005. We have averaged 83.5 species over the last 10 years, ranging from 75 to 91 species during that time.

Rarities included a first-ever **BLACK VULTURE**, species # 145 for the all-time TH CBC list, and **Merlin** and **Sandhill Crane** (3 previous records for each). Other good finds included **Redhead**, **Savannah** and **Chipping Sparrows**, and **Rusty Blackbird**. Twenty-eight species seen on count day were "non-annuals" by my yardstick: not recorded on all 10 most recent counts. The remaining 58 species have "perfect attendance" for the decade, though some take work to find. Missed species include three that we have seen on 6 of 10 previous counts -- Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet -- but nothing more common.

High counts (exceeding any in the previous 55 years) were established for **Common Grackle (26,027)**, **Turkey Vulture (50)**, and **Chipping Sparrow (6)**.

Press coverage: David Hughes and Jim Avelis from the **Terre Haute Tribune-Star** joined Joe Dickson at Dobbs Park in the morning. Jim also tracked down Denise Prothero, and David interviewed Peter at Moggers in the evening. Their article appeared Dec 20.



White-crowned Sparrow. Marty Jones

Waterfowl: We had 3 species of geese, 9 ducks, and no swans. **Greater White-fronted Geese** and a single **Snow Goose** were on the fenced pond at the former Pfizer property. The 859 **Canada Geese** were the fewest since 2003. Most ducks were at Hulman Street reservoir and JI Case Wetland at Hawthorn Park. Hulman Street produced **American Black Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Redhead, and Hooded Merganser**, JI Case had **Northern Shoveler and Gadwall**, a pond at St Mary of the Woods had **American Wigeon**, and **Mallards** were widespread. We had no access to Duke Energy ponds because of construction, and the large Davis Road lake was unproductive and difficult to observe due to traffic.

We had 37 **Wild Turkeys**. No Northern Bobwhites were seen nor any Ring-necked Pheasants, though both are present – pheasants (probably) on restricted private land in the north; bobwhite in local coveys here and there, nowhere predictable. We had the usual **Pied-billed Grebe** (11) and **Great Blue Heron** (13). In the “Almost” department, an *American Bittern* was photographed Dec 11 in a yard on Springhill Road, but Jim Sullivan’s best effort could not locate it on count day.



Black Vulture - S. Lima

Vultures, Hawks and Eagles: A record 50 **Turkey Vultures** were seen, most (34) by Nick Brown and Scott Bergeson west of St Mary of the Woods. Steve and Elise Lima observed two **BLACK VULTURES**, new for the count but not unexpected as this species gradually expands its range westward and northward. Two days later, the species was seen on the Turkey Run CBC for the first time (7 birds by 3 parties).

Five **Bald Eagles** were seen, 10 **Northern Harriers**, but only 3 **Cooper's Hawks**. The most common raptors were **Red-shouldered** (26) and **Red-tailed Hawks** (43). Katie Spicer's party had the only **Rough-legged Hawk**.

Shorebirds: A total of 21 **Killdeer**, which we have missed in 6 of the last 10 years, turned up in 4 sectors; Jim Sullivan found 9 in the former Pfizer area. No snipe were found.

Cranes: George Bakken had 3 **Sandhill Cranes** in Otter Creek Township, only the fourth count record but the second in 3 years. This should become a more regular species for us, with warm early winters delaying migration and big flocks wintering at Goose Pond and Ewing Bottoms, an hour or two from Terre Haute.

Repeated checks at Graham Grain paid off when 24 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** appeared after lunch, perching in tree tops west of First St. A few days later Steve Lima saw **75** here, the highest count yet for EUCD in Terre Haute on any date since its appearance in 2011.

Owls: The three usual species were found: **Eastern Screech**, **Great Horned**, and **Barred Owl**. *Short-eared Owls* were looked for at Hulman Airfield, but no luck; we get them about every third year.

Woodpeckers: A total of 13 **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were the most since 2005. The other 6 species were in average to lower-than-average numbers.

Falcons: The highlight was a **MERLIN** by raptor expert Steve Lima; the last record was 1996. Steve and Elise also tracked down a **Peregrine Falcon** roosting at Cromwell Dorm, ISU. Despite this summer's demolition of Statesman Towers, where they nested and loved to perch, the falcons haven't left town.

Passerines

The total of **14,128 American Crows**, though impressive, is probably an undercount of the number roosting in town. We made no special effort to count them; there are other species to look and listen for in the precious half-hours of first and last light, when the crow flight is most easily assessed. By the way, Terre Haute at last has another Indiana city to rival it for crow numbers: Bloomington. I heard a noon program on NPR concerning the crow situation there which sounded very familiar.



Brown Creeper. M Jones

A female **Red-breasted Nuthatch** responded to a recording of immature Baltimore Oriole chatter in the conifer grove by the Log Cabin chapel at St Mary of the Woods. Two **Winter Wrens** were lured from a log-pile in the Fourth Street river-bottoms with tape of song, just as last year. **Eastern Bluebirds** were down

relative to the last five years (31, versus 75 – 114). The Limas found 6 **Hermit Thrushes**, a species rarely found except on their territory near the former Dresser Wildlife Area. **European Starlings** were the second most numerous species at 15,616, another undercount.

It appeared that we had missed **Cedar Waxwing** until I talked with Joy Sacopulos and learned that her party found 12 in a crabapple tree in Woodridge subdivision. After lunch, the Limas returned to their Horned Lark area and listened until they heard a **Lapland Longspur**. Two parties each found a single **Yellow-rumped Warbler**.

Two of the rarer sparrow species were seen, including 6 **Chipping Sparrows**, two in the south and four on the ISU campus (a frequent wintering spot). Steve's photo shows 2 adults in subdued winter plumage, with rufous-tinged crown and clear breast. The second rarity was **Savannah Sparrow** (found



Chipping Sparrows, ISU. S Lima

4 of last 10

years), represented by a flock of 6 in the southwestern territory of Bonness, Brown, and Weber. Sightings of 1 **Fox Sparrow** and 2 **Swamp Sparrows** spared us “big misses” of species normally seen every year — thanks, Steve. Among the 676 Dark-eyed Juncos, one of the **Oregon Junco** race was spotted by Marty.

We had big numbers of **Red-winged Blackbirds (13,077)**, **Common Grackles (26,027** – missed last year), and **Brown-headed Cowbirds (2,449)**. Most Red-wings were south of Interstate 70, while most grackles and cowbirds were in southbound sunset flocks around Hulman Airfield. One such flock paused to feed near the new Meijer store, revealing 2 **Rusty Blackbirds** on its outer edge; another Rusty was found

by Marty Jones in the northwest. Carissa Lovett spotted the only **Eastern Meadowlarks** at Hulman Airfield. **Purple Finches** were seen in two places. The only **Pine Siskins** were at the Mitchell-Sobieski feeder.

Our totals were **86 species** and **76,618 individuals**, detailed on the next page. We had 31 observers in 14 field parties. A full breakdown of totals by party can be found on a separate Excel spreadsheet attachment, which contains **two worksheets**. The first is the 56-year history, and the second has party-by-party totals for 2015 and participant names.



Yellow-rumped Warbler. M. Jones

Complete list of species and individuals, with notable species and numbers in bold.

Gr. White-fronted Goose	53	Blue Jay	136	Participants,
Snow Goose	1	Am. Crow	14,128	& no. of TH CBC's done
Canada Goose	859	Horned Lark	21	Peggy Bailey, 2
Gadwall	54	Carolina Chickadee	194	David Bakken, 2
Am. Wigeon	5	Tufted Titmouse	166	George Bakken, 9
Am. Black Duck	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	Laura Bakken, 16
Mallard	194	White-breasted Nuthatch	79	Scott Bergeson, 1
N. Shoveler	32	Brown Creeper	11	Dick Bonness, 22
Redhead	1	Winter Wren	2	Michael Brown, 16
Ring-necked Duck	111	Carolina Wren	41	Nick Brown, 3
Lesser Scaup	4	Golden-crowned Kinglet	9	Jane Chestnut, 21
Hooded Merganser	13	Eastern Bluebird	31	Bill Cowen, 3
Wild Turkey	37	Hermit Thrush	6	Joe Dickson, 18
Pied-billed Grebe	11	Am. Robin	179	Diana Hews, 2
Great Blue Heron	13	N. Mockingbird	13	Marty Jones, 10
Turkey Vulture	50	European Starling	15,616	Elise Lima, 2
BLACK VULTURE	2	Cedar Waxwing	12	Steve Lima, 24
Bald Eagle	5	Lapland Longspur	1	Carissa Lovett, 5
N. Harrier	10	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	Ellen Lunsford, 4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Eastern Towhee	23	Bill Mitchell, 13
Cooper's Hawk	3	Am. Tree Sparrow	132	Margaret Moga, 16
Red-shouldered Hawk	25	Chipping Sparrow	6	Denise Prothero, 14
Red-tailed Hawk	43	Field Sparrow	7	Alex Sacopulos, 3
Rough-legged Hawk	1	Savannah Sparrow	6	Joy Sacopulos, 20
Sandhill Crane	3	Fox Sparrow	1	Michael Sacopulos, 22
Killdeer	21	Song Sparrow	57	Peter Scott, 20
Ring-billed Gull	76	Swamp Sparrow	2	Denise Sobieski, 13
Rock Pigeon	187	Fox Sparrow	1	Katie Spicer, 4
Eurasian Collared-Dove	24	White-throated Sparrow	131	Scott Spicer, 1
Mourning Dove	214	White-crowned Sparrow	64	Jim Sullivan, 7
Eastern Screech-Owl	2	Dark-eyed Junco	676	Margaret Tamar, 44
Great Horned Owl	1	N. Cardinal	375	Dan Weber, 22
Barred Owl	2	Red-winged Blackbird	13,077	Kathy Wklenski, 2
Belted Kingfisher	9	Eastern Meadowlark	12	
Red-headed Woodpecker	12	Rusty Blackbird	3	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	67	Common Grackle	26,027	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	13	Brown-headed Cowbird	2,499	
Downy Woodpecker	82	Purple Finch	4	
Hairy Woodpecker	12	House Finch	140	
N. Flicker	23	Pine Siskin	2	
Pileated Woodpecker	17	Am. Goldfinch	100	
Am. Kestrel	22	House Sparrow	345	
Merlin	1			
Peregrine Falcon	1	Total species	86	



Immature Red-shouldered Hawk. Marty Jones