

50th ANNUAL TOBERMORY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARY REPORT:

An Historical Perspective 1973 - 2022



December 2022

Introduction

On a snowy December day in 1973, citizen birders gathered for the first Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in the Tobermory area. This report commemorates the Tobermory CBC tradition, including the people who started it and continue to uphold it. First established in 1900, the CBC is the longest running, most widespread bird census in the Western Hemisphere. More than 50,000 bird enthusiasts now participate in over 2,000 counts each year. The data collected can describe multi-continent patterns in bird ecology and it has been referenced in hundreds of conservation and climate-based scientific papers. But the benefits of participating in the CBC are social, too! The annual CBC builds comradery and inspires seasoned and novice birders alike to cultivate a love for birds and birding! This

report summarizes Tobermory's 50th CBC findings and gives a retrospective look at the past 50 counts! It begins with words from the founder of Tobermory's CBC, Martin Parker. Enjoy, and happy birding!

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land on which the Tobermory CBC is undertaken is the Traditional Territory of the Anishinabek Nation: The People of the Three Fires known as Ojibway, Odawa, and Pottawatomie Nations. And further thanks is given to the Chippewas of Saugeen, and the Chippewas of Nawash, now known as the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, as the traditional keepers of this land.

Words from the Founder of Tobermory's Christmas Bird Count



The inaugural Tobermory CBC was organized by Martin Parker, a (then) staffperson at the Ministry of Natural Resources. Today, Martin is a seasoned birder whose reflections on the CBCs of yesteryear invoke nostalgia for deep snow: "In the early years, if one wanted to explore off-road areas, skis or snowshoes were required." But some aspects of the Tobermory CBC never change, including the time-honoured tradition of CBC festivities with fellow birders, as Martin notes: "One memorable feeder in the Johnsons Harbour area was the Middleton's. Over the years, they became friends and opened their door when my party and I arrived. The Middletons prepared a summary of birds coming to their feeders and reviewed their birding

highlights from the fall season. They then provided hot drinks and a tray of Christmas treats!" He fondly remembers many CBC highlights: "On one count, while walking on Johnsons Harbour Road, I encountered a Ruffed Grouse who flew across the road very quickly, and right behind it was a Northern Goshawk! I'm not sure if the Grouse escaped!" Reflecting on these and many other CBC memories, Martin gives a big thank you to Bruce Peninsula National Park staff who continue to coordinate the Tobermory CBC: "With the stresses that our climate and natural systems are facing, it's more important than ever that long-term monitoring initiatives like the CBC continue to give citizens opportunities to contribute knowledge about the status of birds." Thank-you, Martin, for your love for birds and your dedication to the Tobermory Christmas Bird Count!



Ruffed Grouse/*Bonasa umbellus*

2022 Christmas Bird Count Summary

On December 14, 2022, from sunrise to sundown, 33 participants explored the Tobermory CBC area in search of all birds that could be found. Participants travelled over 300 km of the area and observed 47 species and 1187 individual birds. The total species seen is seven higher than the average, while the total number of individuals is lower than the average by 418 birds. Tobermory CBC observation highlights include:

- a new high record of 41 Canada Geese and 6 American Black Ducks;
- the 2nd observation of Trumpeter or Tundra Swan, Green-wing Teal, and Merlin; and
- the least amount of Black-capped Chickadees since 1978.



American Black Duck/*Anas rubripes*



Tundra Swan/*Cygnus columbianus*



Merlin/*Falco columbarius*

Highlights from 50 Christmas Bird Counts, 1973 - 2022

Greatest Hits

Birds (in taxonomic order) who have been seen only once over the last 50 CBCs:

- TRUMPETER OR
- TUNDRA SWAN
- MUTE SWAN
- NORTHERN PINTAIL
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL
- CANVASBACK
- GOLDEN EAGLE
- NORTHERN HARRIER
- ICELAND GULL



Barred Owl/*Strix varia*
Photo credit: Philip Brown

- LESSER BLACK-BILLED GULL
- BARRED OWL
- BOREAL OWL
- TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE
- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER
- LINCOLN'S SPARROW
- HARRIS' SPARROW
- INDIGO BUNTING
- RUSTY BLACKBIRD



Rusty Blackbird/*Euphagus carolinus* Photo credit: Mark Stensaas

Classics

Birds (in taxonomic order) who have been seen reliably every year over the last 50 CBCs:

- COMMON GOLDENEYE
- RUFFED GROUSE
- HERRING GULL
- DOWNY WOODPECKER
- HAIRY WOODPECKER
- COMMON RAVEN
- BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE
- GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET



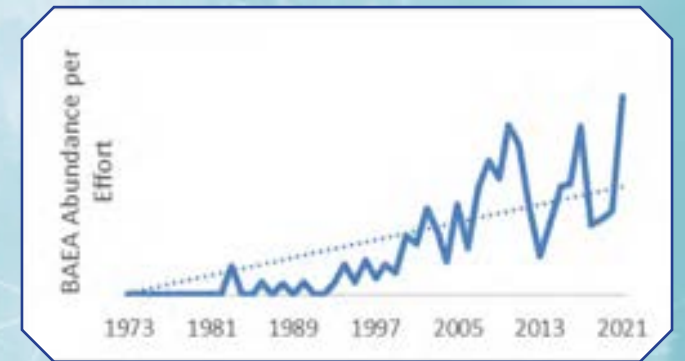
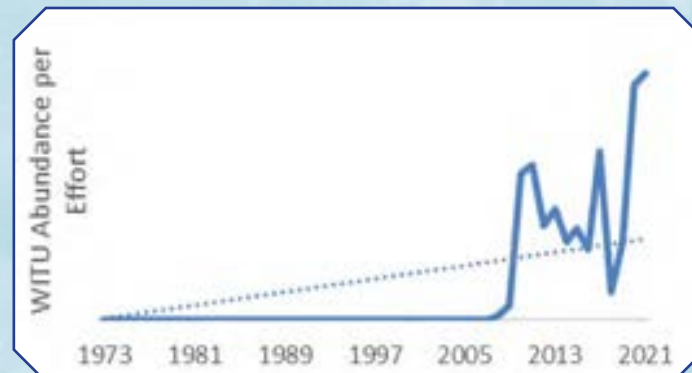
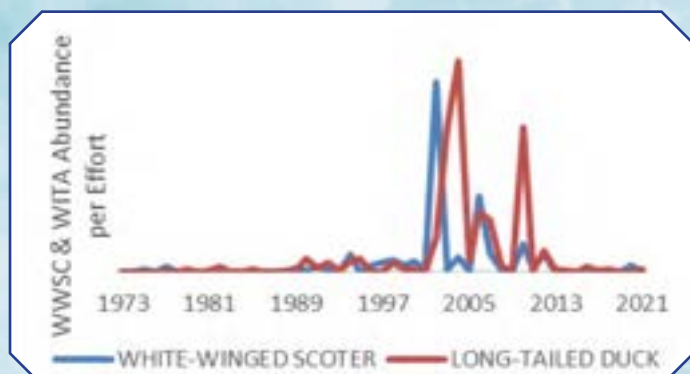
Downy Woodpecker
Dryobates pubescens

Ecological Trends

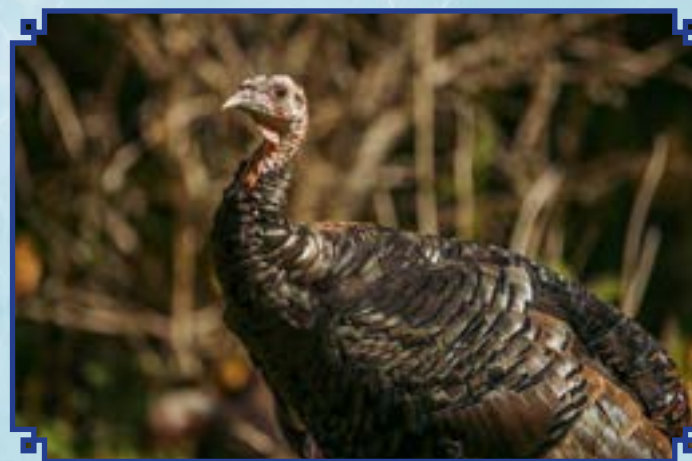
Long-tailed Duck (LTDU) & White-winged Scoter (WWSC): Although weather and ice conditions largely determine the presence of LTDU and WWSC, colonization of invasive zebra and quagga mussels (mollusks are a key food source for these ducks) may have played a positive role in the early to mid-2000s for these species. The peak densities of these mussels align with peak observations of LTDU and WWSC during this same time period (see below graph).

Wild Turkey (WITU): Increasing numbers of WITU on the Tobermory count parallel other Ontario counts, largely influenced by land use and more suitable climatic conditions (see below graph). Warming winters favour further range expansion. Given the species' large size and flocking nature in winter, the CBC may be one of the better approaches for monitoring changes in population and distribution.

Bald Eagle (BAEA): Once a provincial species at risk, the recovery of BAEA is a conservation success story (see below graph). The upward trend mirrors the continent-wide recovery of the species following the phasing out of pesticides such as DDT.



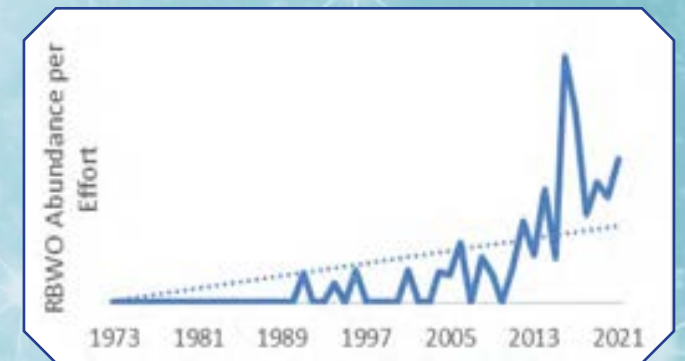
Long-tailed Duck/*Clangula hyemalis* Photo credit: Jean Iron



Wild Turkey/*Meleagris gallopavo* Photo credit: Mark Olsen

Note: All y-axis values are statistically arbitrary in this context and are a value of total bird species per year divided by the total annual effort values. These values are calculated in this manner to help reduce search effort bias in the trends.

Red-bellied Woodpecker (RBWO): Once a rarity in the north Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula, RBWO range continues to expand northwards in the province. Climate change and a prolific number of emerald ash borer larvae appear to have contributed to this species' range expansion and population increase. See below graph.



Legacy Participants

We celebrate and thank all the volunteers who have contributed 10+ years of attendance to the Tobermory CBC: Bill and Judy Caulfeild-Browne, Mac Campbell, Cindy Cartwright, Floyd Deiter, Tony and Tracy Edwards, Dave Fidler, John Francis, Bob Gray, Cavan Harpur, John Haselmayer, Joe Johnson, Nels Maher, Ethan Meleg, John Miles, Doug Miller, Tom Murray, Martin Parker, Scott Parker, Darrel Parsons, Dave Schaus, Rod Steinacher, Dave Tannahill, Willy Waterton, Mark Wiercinski, Don and Margie Wilkes, and Tom Williamson.

Legacy Supporters

We give a big thank you to the individuals and organizations whose generous support has made a significant positive impact on the Tobermory CBC: Audrey Armstrong, Jennifer Barratt Parker, Marilyn Handley, Stan McLellan, and Friends of the Bruce District Parks, among others!



Indigo Bunting/
Passerina cyanea



Black-capped Chickadee/
Poecile atricapillus



Common Goldeneye/
Bucephala clangula

50th Tobermory Christmas Bird Count Teams!



Team 1 - Tobermory area (right to left): Laura Beaton-Williamson, Judy Caulfield-Browne, Tricia Robins, and (off camera) Bill Caulfield-Brown (team lead)



Team 2 - Cape Hurd, Hay Bay area (left to right): Owen Glendon, Margaret Glendon, Maureen Laporte, and (off camera) Rod Steinacher (team lead)



Team 3 - Warner Bay/Eagle Harbour (back to front left): Scott Parker, Sean Liipere, Gillian Ceaser (team lead), Pat Sein, Rod Sein, and Ethan Parker



(Above) Rod Steinacher, Team 2



Team 4 - Dorcas Bay Road/Johnsons Harbour (front to back left): Martha Allen, Carrie Bennett, Spencer Bennett, Michael Butler, Martin Parker (team lead and founder of Tobermory CBC), and Kathy Parker



(Above) Photo credit: Arni Stinissen, ARNIWORKS PHOTOGRAPHY
Bohemian Waxwing/*Bombycilla garrulus*

Team 5 - Emmett and Crane Lake Roads (left to right): Zane Shantz, Owen Cutfield, and Tyler Miller (team lead)

50th Tobermory Christmas Bird Count Teams!



Team 6 - Cyprus - Grotto (right to left): Madeline Sanagan, Kaley Munk, Jan Pugsley, and Andrew Keaveney as team lead, and Tanya Markvart (off camera)



Team 7 - Cyprus North/Driftwood Cove (from left to right): Don Wilkes, Gwenda Wilkes, Ethan Meleg, and (off camera) Arni Stinnissen (team lead)

Additional Resources for Bird Lovers!

Climate Change: There are many more bird species other than the RBWO and WITU that are affected by climate change. For more information on how bird species ranges have and are expected to change, and for other climate change topics, see these resources:

- [eBird's Status and Trend app](#) This resource demonstrates the power and value of citizen scientists.
- A [scientific paper](#), "Projected changes in bird assemblages due to climate change in a Canadian system of protected areas", authored in part by Scott Parker and Cavan Harpur.
- [Parks Canada](#) website, articles (Birds and climate change: can they stay or will they go?) and videos.

Invasive Species: In parallel with climate change, invasive species have dynamically changed many bird species' populations and ecosystems. For more information on invasive forest pests like emerald ash borer or aquatic invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels, see these resources:

- [Invasive Species Centre](#)
- Contact Bruce Peninsula National Park and Fathom Five National Marine Park (bruce-fathomfive@pc.gc.ca) to learn how you can participate in invasive species education, prevention and management.



Boreal Owl impression by Andrew Keaveney.



Spencer Bennett with Black-capped Chickadee in hand.