

## BOWKAN BIRDERS NEWSLETTER

### 2023 CHRISTMAS SPECIES POST COUNT ANALYSIS



Background: The “BowKan Birders” is an informal group of local naturalists who share an interest in our natural environment. Twice each year, last full weekend of May and the Christmas/New Year period, they conduct species counts of birds and mammals, and in May include flowering plants. As of now, we have a data bank of 32 Christmas Counts and 31 Spring (end May) Counts.

The University of Calgary (UofC) Biogeoscience Institute (BGI) Kananaskis Country has assumed sponsorship for the BowKan Birder’s Species Counts. They are housing data from previous and future counts on their website. The data, upcoming events and other information can be accessed here: <https://research.ucalgary.ca/biogeoscience-institute/community-outreach/bowkan-birds>.

Weather: The weather this fall and early winter can best be described as very mild. There was only a few centimeters of snow on the ground, temperatures varied between morning lows of -3 to day highs of +3 degrees Celsius, light Chinook winds with occasional gusts to about 30 kph and scattered to broken cloud cover throughout the count-week. All-in-all this made for pleasant winter conditions for outdoor activities.



23PC270071: American Dipper, Griffith Creek, 27 Dec 2023

Overall Bird Numbers: The 533 individual birds counted on this Christmas Count falls in line with counts since 2021 inclusive (2021-545, 2022-470 & 2023-533). All have been consistently well below our 32 year average of 1229 birds. In the past, high numbers largely depended on spotting birds that spend their winters in large flocks, such as, Bohemian Waxwings, Snow Buntings, and several Finch species. On this count we tallied a slightly below average 119 Bohemian Waxwings (134 average) but no Snow Buntings (average 148), only 24 Pine Grosbeaks (average 66) and, unusually, no finches including the usually present Red and White-winged Crossbills, Common Redpolls, and Pine Siskins. Also, our count of 32 species is below our 32

Christmas Count average of 34. However, it is in the same ‘ballpark’ as 2021 with 33 species and 2022 with 31. We can only ask ‘Is this a new normal?’. Future counts are needed to answer this question.

Avian Highlights: Every count, even low counts, have highlights and this count was not an exception and they are as follows:

- A. The 12 species seen on every previous count were again represented albeit in lower numbers.
- B. A very brief sighting of Cooper’s Hawk harassing a Bald Eagle (along with a Raven) was seen in the Lac des Arc area. This species has only been reported on one previous Christmas Count (2007).
- C. A Gyrfalcon was spotted in the Yamnuska Natural Area. Again, this species is rare here but not unheard of. It was reported on three previous counts (2003, 2005 & 2006). The observer did not have a chance to photograph this bird but he did provide the information for a detailed rare bird report.

D. The same observer as above also spotted a Black-backed Woodpecker in his area. This is also a rare bird here but not unheard of. Sightings of this bird was included in our 1998, 2013, 2018, & 2021 Christmas Counts. This time the observer had the opportunity to photograph the bird and it is included here.



P1580755: Black-backed Woodpecker, Yamnuska Natural Area, 30 Dec 2023, photo by Blake Wies

E. Prior to the 2020 Christmas Count, Trumpeter Swans were seen only twice (1995 and 2004 counts). Since then this species has been seen on all counts except the 2022 Christmas Count.



DEC 26 SWAN AT GAP 055-C: Trumpeter Swans landing on Gap Lake, 26 Dec 2023, Photo By Paul Kalra

Mammals: Mammal wise, our observers reported sightings of one coyote, five Mule Deer, three White-tailed Deer, 42 Bighorn Sheep, one Snowshoe Hare, one Common Muskrat and 23 Red Squirrels. In addition, fresh tracks in snow revealing the presence of Wolves, a Fox, a Lynx, mice and voles were reported.

Photographs: I strive to use photos from as many participants as possible that are pertinent to our count and area. Thankfully, I am able to include two interesting submissions.

After-count Potluck. BGI hosted the after-count potluck get-together. We wish to thank attendees for the delicious meal spread and we enjoyed the fellowship of fellow BowKan participants.

Final Thoughts: The count whether high or low is significant and adds to the data of the recorded knowledge of our area. Our next count is our annual Spring Species Count always scheduled for the last full weekend in May. This year the dates are Saturday and Sunday, 25 and 26 May, 2024, plus and minus three days for extras. Please mark your calendars and reserve time for this our next outdoor event. In the meantime, I thank all our BowKan supporters for their efforts.

Cliff Hansen  
Coordinator, BowKan Birders



23PC300216: Muskrat, BVWPP, east of Deadman's Flats, 30 Dec 2023



23PC300036: Bald Eagle over Lac des Arcs Campground, 30 Dec 23

**A summary of our Christmas 2023 count conducted on 30 December, 2023, follows:**

**Count Day (CD) Format:** Species count/Average of 32 counts (Percent of Counts seen)

**Note:** Star (\*) Marks Birds on 100% of Counts  
(Includes Count-week sightings)

1. Trumpeter Swan:	22/2 (16%)
2. American Widgeon:	2/<1 (6%)
3. Mallard:	48/42 (97%)
4. Bufflehead:	1/<1 (13%)
5. Common Goldeneye:	6/18 (97%)
6. *Bald Eagle:	1/1 (100%)
7. Cooper's Hawk:	1/<1 (<1%)
8. Gyrfalcon:	1/<1 (9%)
9. Ruffed Grouse:	2/3 (88%)
10. Spruce Grouse:	1/<1 (31%)
Gull Species	2
11. *Downy Woodpecker:	5/8 (100%)
12. *Hairy Woodpecker:	4/6 (100%)
13. Three-toed Woodpecker:	6/2 (59%)
14. Black-backed Woodpecker:	1/>1 (16%)
15. Northern Shrike:	1/<1 (28%)
16. *Canada Jay:	9/20 (100%)
17. Clarke's Nutcracker:	2/4 (84%)
18. *Black-billed Magpie:	18/40 (100%)
19. American Crow	8/5 (84%)
20. *Common Raven:	52/93 (100%)
21. *Black-capped Chickadee:	30/95 (100%)
22. *Mountain Chickadee:	44/78 (100%)
23. *Boreal Chickadee:	3/23 (100%)
Chickadee Species:	36
24. *Red-breasted Nuthatch:	11/31 (100%)
25. White-breasted Nuthatch:	1/4 (81%)
26. Brown Creeper	1/1 (44%)
27. *American Dipper:	4/21 (100%)
28. Bohemian Waxwing:	119/134 (94%)
29. Chipping Sparrow:	3/<1 (3%)
30. Dark-eyed Junco:	4/10 (72%)
31. Pine Grosbeak:	24/66 (91%)
32. House Sparrow	60/28 (84%)

Total Birds/Average: 533/1224  
Total Species/Average: 32/34

**Christmas 2022 Mammal Count:**

1. Coyote:	1
2. Mule Deer	5
3. White-tailed Deer	3
4. Bighorn Sheep:	42
5. Snowshoe Hare	1
6. Red Squirrel:	23
7. Common Muskrat	1

Plus fresh tracks in snow of Wolves, Fox, Cougar, Pine Marten, Mice and Voles.



23PC300426: A pair of Pine Grosbeaks, Dead  
Man's Flats, 30 Dec 2023