

Cambridge CBC 2022

The 46th Cambridge Christmas Bird Count (CBC), was held on December 18, 2022 in the Cambridge area of Waterloo Region.

The Cambridge CBC has run annually since 1977. The count area is centred on Branchton, and includes a large section of the Grand River Valley from north of Paris to just south of Blair on the north west and Puslinch Lake to the north east. The area is a mix of residential, upland, and riparian forest, agricultural land and some open river. Typically we find 60 to 70 species and observe 10,000 to 20,000 individual birds. The count always takes place the first Sunday of the count period set by the Audubon Society.

The early hours of the count this year proved to be amenable for owling with only a light wind in most areas. As the sun rose, the day started cloudy with good visibility and light to moderate westerly winds which strengthened as the day progressed. Before lunch a light snow began that continued for the rest of the day. There were relatively mild temperatures of -0 to -8°C but it felt colder at times if you were exposed to the winds that gusted to 35 kilometres per hour. The water on many ponds and lakes was open, as well as any moving water like Cedar creek and the Grand River.

This year we had forty one participants, covering the count area in small groups. Our volunteers spent over 128 hours in the field, drove 802 kilometres, hiked just over 145 kilometres and found 11,580 individuals of 69 different species. While the number of volunteers was down slightly the effort overall was comparable to previous years.

High and low counts:

Many observers commented that there appeared to be fewer birds this year. That was also my experience and the numbers seem to agree. Most species had lower than average numbers except for Canada Geese, Mallard, and Rock Pigeon that had higher than normal numbers (though nothing exceptional). The average number of total birds between 1977 and 2022 is 13,972. Total number of birds observed this year was lower than the average at 11,580.

This year, the only high count bird species, which is defined as the highest number of individuals of a species ever recorded on this count, were three Barred Owls. The owls were observed by Brett Fried in Area 3 at Pinehurst Conservation Area. Barred Owls are infrequently observed in the Cambridge area but in the last few years Pinehurst appears to be a fairly consistent location to spot them.

Low counts this year included Cedar Waxwings and House Sparrows. Not a single Cedar waxwing was observed anywhere in the count circle this year. Cedar Waxwings have only been missed once before, in 2019. I'm curious to hear opinions on the availability of fruit this winter in Waterloo Region as I've noticed a near complete absence of Hawthorn this year. Declining numbers of House Sparrows have been observed in many areas in North America and Cambridge is no exception. I've attached a graph at the end of this report illustrating their decline on the Cambridge CBC. While the decline of a non-native, urban bird species may not represent a crisis for biodiversity it is a curious trend given the overall expansion of urban areas in the count circle.

New species to the count:

We added two new species to the count this year, Double-crested Cormorant and Redhead Duck!

Five Cormorants were observed flying south in Area 7, near the African Lion Safari by Lucas Liu, who is a new volunteer for the count this year. Lucas described their flight pattern, shape and size perfectly. Great work Lucas!!

The Redhead was observed in Area 1A by Todd Hagedorn near the rowing club in Cambridge. Todd got some nice photos and it's a beautiful bird! Be sure to check out the photos below. Thanks Todd!

Notable birds:

As always, there were a few notable birds including a Pied-billed Grebe, Field Sparrow, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Red-shouldered Hawk and a Tufted Titmouse.

A pair of Tufted Titmouse have somewhat reliably been observed at the Dickson Wilderness area (Area 1) for a while now this year so it was wonderful to have this species turn up on count day! This is only the seventh time we have had one on the Cambridge CBC. Ellen Horak, a new volunteer for the count, found the bird. Thank you Ellen! I've heard speculation that this species might be increasing its range northward (much like the Carolina Wren), certainly this is a bird worth watching for going forward.

Brett Fried found a Red-shouldered Hawk on Brant-Waterloo Road east of Spragues Road (Area 2). This has been a semi-regular spot to find the species over the years, though the last Cambridge CBC report to record the bird is from 2011. This species was designated as

'Special Concern' in Ontario until 2006 and, while its populations are now growing across its range, the species remains rare for the Cambridge CBC.

Lucas Liu found a Field Sparrow at the corner of Kirkwall and Safari Roads in Area 7. He first noticed the birds *seeep* call and hung about long enough to get visual confirmation of this distinctive sparrow. Field Sparrows are a real treat to find on the Cambridge CBC, only six other records for this bird are in the counts history.

It was on a gravel bank along the Grand River in Glen Morris (Area 4) that Paul Eagles, his wife Catherine, son Ryan and grandson Jasper found a Killdeer. While it is an unmistakable bird, it must have been a real surprise to find. Killdeer have only been found five times in the last 46 years (last observed in 2015).

A Pied-billed Grebe has not been observed on the Cambridge count since 2009 and has only been seen three other times since 1977. Virgil Martin first spotted this rare bird two weeks before the count in Area 3 and saw it again on count day. There is a good chance it is still around. Look for it on the Grand River south of Footbridge Road.

Area 3 had a second excellent bird turn up this year, a Wilson's Snipe! This bird is exceptionally rare for the Cambridge CBC, last seen in 1982, and only twice in the whole count history. The Snipe was found by Dawn Miles along the Grand River just north of Maple Manor Road. Awesome bird Dawn!!!

Volunteers:

I am really grateful to everyone who takes time out of their busy holiday season to volunteer on this count. The Cambridge Christmas Bird Count circle is in a significant area, tucked up at the northern end of the Carolinian eco-zone. As climate change progresses I expect we will see some very interesting changes making your observations an important record of how this issue impacts local wildlife.

Thank you to all of the volunteers this year! In particular, Richard Baxter, an ecologist with the Grand River Conservation Authority, has stepped forward to become the new leader for Area 7. Helping organise the birding and working with new volunteers are important to keeping the count alive and I appreciate the extra effort tremendously. This year Richard dug deep for the count as his car battery died in the early hours of the morning while Owling!

I also want to thank Matt Dill for taking on both halves of Area 6 this year as Ken Dance was not able to participate.

I would also like to welcome and give a special thank you to all the new volunteers to the count: Lucas Liu, Annie Li, Ellen and Jerry Horak, Stewart MacDonald, Reuven Martin, John Adams, and Jeff Leader! Great to have you all join us.

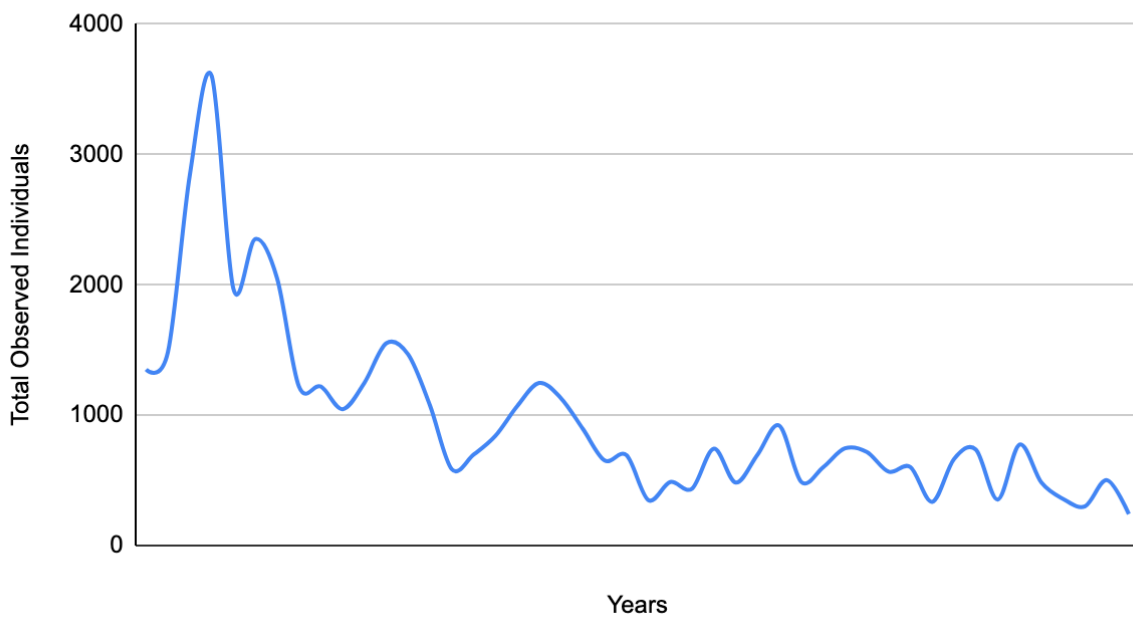
Finally, I'd like to share that Marco and Donna DeBruin have decided to step away from the count. They have been longtime supporters of the count, volunteering since before I took over the count in 2007! Both are wonderful birders and lovely people that have been great friends who I will miss. I expect to still see them at Waterloo Region Nature meetings but will miss their experience and kind advice on the Cambridge Christmas Bird Count. Best wishes and thank you both!

Thank you all!

Please find below a brief summary of the birds observed this year. If you would like to see a historic comparison please follow [this link](#). If you think I have missed anything please email me directly at levicmoore1@gmail.com.

Cambridge CBC Compiler,
Levi Moore

CCBC: House Sparrow 1977 to Present



Redhead - Photo by Todd Hagedorn, 2022.