

Westcliffe Christmas Bird Count - December 20, 2009

Disappointment seemed to rule the day at the annual Westcliffe Christmas Bird Count held on Sunday, December 20. Seldom does one hear a bird watcher complain about spending a day in the field, but the expected bounty of birds was not realized. The 11 year average of species found on this count is 45. But this year, the group of 10 participants found only 34 different species, in spite of driving 204 miles in their cars. The total of individual birds was also way below average. For every team and each locale, the report was the same--"where are all the birds?" Dave Silverman, who has participated on this count every year since the 80's, speculated that perhaps the severe cold that plagued the valley just a week earlier might have moved the resident birds to a lower elevation, though this is far from a scientific theory. Nevertheless, the day was beautiful, the temperatures mild, and being outdoors in the Wet Mountain Valley is always enjoyable.

The 2009-2010 Christmas Bird Count event marks the 108th year since this tradition was organized on a national level, and carried out locally, from Central America to Canada by small groups like the Westcliffe group. The official window for the Christmas bird count runs for about a 2 week period over the Christmas and New Year holidays. The results of the hundreds of counts conducted during this time frame are compiled and published each year, and the information is used to determine how well or how badly resident bird populations are doing. The results also play an important part in determining which species end up on the Audubon Annual Watch List and Common Birds in Decline publications.

The species seen on count day include: Mallard, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, American Kestrel, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Northern Shrike, Stellar's Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Mountain Chickadee, Bushtit, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pygmy Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, American Dipper, Townsend's Solitaire, European Starling, American Pipit, Song Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, House Finch, House Sparrow.

Jane Pedersen, Compiler