

Las Cruces CBC 2021/2022

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(NOTE: The numbers for birds below are from the preliminary tally I have done so far. Actual figures may change with the final tally.)

Thanks to you, our sixty—yes, sixty!—observers and team leaders, our 46th Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count was a resounding success! Note that I did not say an unqualified success, as the weather certainly could have been better. I won't complain, though, because many of you can remember, along with me at least one year when the weather was horrendously worse! So, all things taken together, it was a successful CBC. And, after all, any day when you can get out, go birding, have fun with friends, and even some of you see life birds, well, in my book that's a successful day!

Now for some numbers. As I mentioned, sixty people took part this year. I haven't gone back and counted, but I think that might be a record number of participants. If not, I'll bet it's pretty close to it. On behalf of MVAS, I want to thank each and every one of you for your time and effort.

We talk about birds and the distances they fly during migration. At times, we even see some of those long distance feathered travelers on our CBCs. This year, three CBC participants, who while not feathered, certainly traveled considerable distances to take part in the Count. Martine Dumont and Normand Legault joined us from their home in St. Albert, Alberta, a distance of 3,065 kilometers or 1,915 miles to be part of the Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count. Zeke Cornell from Bow NH was the third long distance birder to join our ranks for the CBC. He came 2,500 miles or a slight bit over 4,023 kilometers. A special thank you to all three of you for your contributions to our CBC.

Speaking of traveling, three other people who joined us again for the CBC also hit the road to be with us for this citizen science event. Sonja Mendoza drove from her home in Socorro, as she has for several years, to lead the Jornada South team. Tim Wallace and Christine Clayton came down from Albuquerque to visit her parents and while here participated for the second time. A hearty thank-you to all three of you for your efforts.

As for numbers and *birds*, we tallied 89 species for this CBC. In addition, we had 6 sp entries (birds that the observer couldn't identify any more than "I know it was a raven, or sparrow, or bluebird, etc.") and 3 or 4 cw or "count week" birds seen during the period from Wednesday the 15th through Tuesday the 21st. This brings our total number of birds to over 90, which isn't anything to sniff or sneeze at.

It was no surprise that the one species seen most often was White-winged Dove. It was also not a surprise to see their numbers down. I doubt that we will hit the 10,000 mark in that category.

Although it's not certain that any of us would have predicted their rank order, the list of top10 species in our count contains no surprises. Here they are:

At number 10 with 510 individuals seen is **House Sparrow**
At number 9 with 581 individual birds counted is **White-crowned Sparrow**
Coming in at number 8 with 673 seen is **European Starling**
Coming in 7th with 920 counted is **Mourning Dove**
The sixth most abundant species with 932 is **House Finch**
Topping 1,000 and in 5th with 1,203 individuals is **Rock Pigeon**
At number 4 with 1469 seen is **Great-tailed Grackle**

In third place (drum roll, please!) with 2,639 is**Brewer's Blackbird**

At number 2 (drums and fanfare!) with 2,997 is**American Crow**

And once more in first place

(drums, fanfare, fireworks!) with 8,500+ is**White-winged Dove!**

So, how many individual birds comprise this top ten list of species? If I counted correctly, the answer is 20,424. To give you an idea of how low the numbers were this year, the total number of individual birds we saw was a mere 22,381. That's only 2,057 more individual birds than there were in the list of top 10 species seen. So, 10 out of the 95 taxa listed account for 91.25% of the birds seen, leaving the remaining 8.75% of the birds counted to be scattered thinly among 85 taxa.

For an overall picture, here's the taxonomic list of the species we saw and the numbers of individuals for each one.

01. American Wigeon	4
02. Mallard	34
03. Mallard/Mexican Duck	161
04. Northern Shoveler	10
05. Ring-necked Duck	5
06. duck sp.	9
07. Gambel's Quail	213
08. Great Blue Heron	16
09. Black-crowned Night Heron	25
10. Northern Harrier	15
11. Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
12. Cooper's Hawk	25
13. Harris's Hawk	1
14. Red-tailed Hawk	23
15. Ferruginous Hawk	2
16. American Coot	9
17. Killdeer	2
18. Least Sandpiper	72
19. Wilson's Snipe	1
20. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	1,203
21. Eurasian Collared-Dove	269
22. White-winged Dove	8,500
23. Mourning Dove	920
24. Inca Dove	17
25. Greater Roadrunner	3
26. Great Horned Owl	3
27. Long-eared Owl	2
28. Black-chinned Hummingbird	1
29. Rufous Hummingbird	1
30. Belted Kingfisher	1
31. Ladder-backed Woodpecker	38

32. Northern Flicker	58*
32a. Northern (red-shafted) Flicker	9*
33. American Kestrel	53
34. Merlin	1
35. Peregrine Falcon	3
36. Black Phoebe	2
37. Say's Phoebe	49
38. Loggerhead Shrike	2
39. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	2
40. American Crow	2,997
41. Chihuahuan Raven	11
42. Common Raven	2
43. raven sp.	3
44. <i>Corvus</i> sp. (crow or raven)	1
45. Mountain Chickadee	cw
46. Verdin	17
47. Bushtit	3
48. Cactus Wren	3
49. Rock Wren	1
50. Bewick's Wren	3
51. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1
52. Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	1
53. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	19
54. Golden-crowned Kinglet	1
55. Eastern Bluebird	2
56. Western Bluebird	73
57. bluebird sp.	4
58. American Robin	414
59. Hermit Thrush	1
60. Northern Mockingbird	31
61. Curve-billed Thrasher	30
62. Crissal Thrasher	6
63. Sage Thrasher	cw
64. European Starling	673
65. American Pipit	70
66. Cedar Waxwing	14
67. Phainopepla	10
68. Orange-crowned Warbler	1
69. Yellow-rumped Warbler (3 definitely "Audubon's")	43
70. Pyrrhuloxia	47
71. Green-tailed Towhee	15
72. Spotted Towhee	26
73. Canyon Towhee	22

74. Chipping Sparrow	238
75. Brewer's Sparrow	149
76. Vesper Sparrow	1
77. Black-throated Sparrow	36
78. Savannah Sparrow	1
79. Fox Sparrow	cw
80. Song Sparrow	3
81. Lincoln's Sparrow	4
82. White-crowned Sparrow	581
83. White-throated Sparrow	1
84. sparrow sp.	18
85. Dark-eyed Junco (definitely 1 "gray-headed" & 1 "oregon")	43
86. Red-winged Blackbird	496
87. Eastern Meadowlark	25
88. Western Meadowlark	13
89. meadowlark sp.	8
90. Brewer's Blackbird	2,639
91. Great-tailed Grackle	1,469
92. House Finch	932
93. Lesser Goldfinch	35
94. House Sparrow	510
95. unknowns or "mystery birds"	21

Among the numbers that particularly caught my attention were the following:

The **paucity of ducks**—No one saw *any* Gadwall, and the scant numbers for the duck species we *did* see would seem to highlight the impact of the continuing drought on waterfowl.

Killdeer—In the South Valley sector of the CBC circle, there were numerous large agricultural areas and other open and semi-open habitat that seemed more than suitable for Killdeer. In the rest of the circle, there are similar tracts of habitat. Yet, in an all-day effort, 60 dedicated observers only saw 2 Killdeer! Effects of the drought? Maybe. The cold windiness of the day more than likely took its toll as well.

Greater Roadrunners—Our State bird fared a bit better than the Killdeer, but to see only three roadrunners seems unusual best.

Raptors in general—At first glance, it might seem that 25 Cooper's Hawks, 23 "Red-tails", 53 kestrels, and 3 Peregrines isn't too bad. But, in many years, numbers for America Kestrels have been considerably higher. The record for the South Valley sector alone is 42 individuals and several other sectors have numbers in the 20s to high 30s. When you add these up, 53 seems way down. The same general trend holds true for the other diurnal raptors we saw.

Owls were unusually scarce as well. In some years, the La Cueva team has seen as many as 8 Long-eared Owls. This year, they saw 2. And no one saw a single Burrowing Owl. One property owner who lets us bird on her land related how within the past five or six years there were several thriving Burrowing Owl nests there. Then a Bull Snake came through and wiped out the lot of them.

In addition to the all the low numbers, there were some birds noticeable by their absence. Besides the ones already mentioned above, we had no sightings of Prairie Falcons. Neither were there any Nuthatches reported. Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Pine Siskins were also absent from our count. Not that we rely on seeing lots of any of these birds, but to have none at all is unusual.

*There is no reason to suppose that any of these individuals were not the red-shafted form; however, only 9 were seen well enough to positively confirm that identification.