

WAYLAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

WINTER NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2019 | TEL: 508-358-3669 | CONSERVATION@WAYLAND.MA.US

Christmas Bird Count

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whichever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

By contrast in 2018 a record number of counts were submitted to the Audubon database—2,536 counts (447 in Canada, 1,933 in the United States, and 156 Latin America, Caribbean, Pacific Islands). Despite the record number of counts, the number of participants in the 117th CBC fell slightly below last season's record level, with a still-lofty total of 73,153 participants. Of those, 62,677 were in field parties and 10,476 observed birds at feeders. By country, 55,882 were in the United States (49,221 afield, 6,661 at feeders); 13,945 were in Canada (10,169 in the field and 3,776 at feeders); and 3,326 (3,287 field observers and 39 at feeders) in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Pacific Islands.

The CBC is divided into thousands of count circles nationwide each of which selects its own count day between December 14th and January 5th. Locally, Wayland is in the Concord sector of which was established in 1960. Historically the Concord count takes place the last Sunday in December and in 2018 was held on December 30th.

2018 was one of the warmer days for the count in recent years with a low of 28 degrees Fahrenheit and peaking at 36 degrees in the afternoon with little to no wind throughout the day. Starting at 2:30 in the morning and ending at 5:00 in the evening conservation land manager Brian Harris and his three volunteers totaled 57 species comprising of 24,731 individuals.

Highlights

The common yellowthroat from Washbrook Marsh may be a first for the count in Wayland and is at least the first record since 1998 for the Concord count proper. Along with the yellowthroat a state record high 15,000 American robins were recorded coming into the marsh at dusk to roost. A marsh wren and two fox sparrows were also good birds for the location.

A Yellow-breasted chat and a gray catbird were the best birds found at Heard's farm. Yellow-breasted chat and gray catbird can be somewhat local and rare on the immediate coast in Massachusetts in winter but are extraordinarily rare inland any time after November.

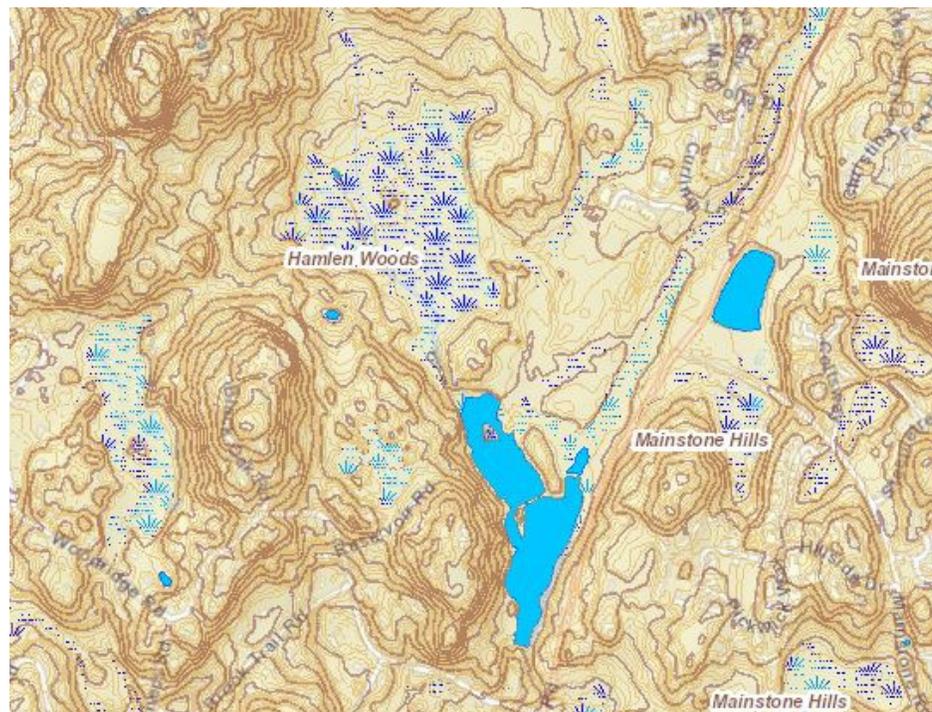
Blackbirds routinely overwinter at feeders locally and roost in small numbers throughout the marshes in town but 241 individuals of four species is exceptional.

In what has been a moderate year for irruptive winter finches three common redpolls and four purple finches was a decent representation.



Glacial Features

This winter as you stroll through Wayland's Conservation Areas, take a moment to contemplate the past ice ages and the legacy they left behind sculpting New England's landscape. From the eskers and drumlins that undulate across Wayland, to the glacial erratic's and kettle ponds that dot our yards and provide habitat for wildlife. While these features were created thousands of years ago, they still continue to influence our lives.



Glacial Lake

The area that is now Hamlen Woods Conservation Area was once the site of a glacial lake that filled the valley along Rice Road. Blocked by ice to the north and hills to the southwest and southeast, the glacial lake covered several hundred acres of the valley. The main outlet for the glacial lake was the gorge that now contains the Snake Brook Dam. Another lasting feature of this glacial lake is the flat marshy terrain that resides north of the reservoir. The flat nature of this area resulted from the deposition of sand and other sediments into the lake from glacial runoff.

Kettle Holes

If large chunks of ice breaking off of retreating glaciers is more your cup of tea, then take a visit to Upper and Lower Mill Brook Conservation Area. Kettle holes result from these isolated chunks of ice being submerged in sediments from the retreating ice sheets and slowly melting to form unique wetlands. One of the most well-known of these features is Walden Pond in Concord. The bog at Lower Millbrook Conservation Area just north of Plain Road is worth a visit to see the unique habitat created by 10,000 year old ice.



Eskers

The castle at Castle Hill Conservation Area is yet another glacial feature called an esker. Eskers are long, narrow, ridges that meander across the landscape. Eskers are the remains of accumulated sediments, mainly sand and gravel, putdown by meltwater streams within a stagnant glacier.



Wildlife In Winter

The best way to help wildlife make it through the winter is to step back and allow the animals' instincts to take over. To help wildlife near your home, focus on improving the wildlife habitat on or near your property, by including natural food and cover (e.g., some conifer cover and regenerating forest or brushy habitat). It is also important that wildlife populations are in balance with what the habitat can support.



Community Gardens

The Wayland Community Gardens provide a beautiful and active public space for community members to grow produce and flowers. The garden is a wonderful place to meet fellow gardeners and provides a true sense of community.

Applications will be available online starting mid-March and can be found on the Conservation Department's website, or drop by the office for a copy.

Any new gardener is encouraged to visit our website to learn more about the garden rules and guidelines.

Cow Common Land Management Plan

Last summer the Conservation Department worked with Mass Audubon's Ecological Extension Service to develop a management plan for Cow Common Conservation Area. The management plan makes several recommendations regarding invasive plant species control and enhancements to wildlife habitat passive recreation. To read more about the management plan for Cow Common, please visit the Conservation Department's webpage under Conservation Projects.

Invasive Plant Management Recommendations

- Obtain an herbicide applicators license by staff
- Treat phragmites near compost site at Community Gardens
- Strategically treat invasives within the property
 - Treat invasives around the community garden
 - Treat invasives from the trail system heading west towards the river
 - Treat invasives along the edges of the fields
 - Treat invasives within the forested areas of the property working from the trail system towards the interior of the property

Wildlife Enhancement Management Recommendations

- Restore two mowed areas on the western boundary to shrubland
- Create an acre of pollinator habitat near the Community Garden and apiary meadow
- Remove two acres of trees to increase grassland bird nesting habitat within the conservation area
- Mow grasslands before mid-May and/or after August 15th. Pollinator meadows should be mowed in October

Passive Recreation Management Recommendations

- Mow trails on perimeter of fields 4-6ft in width
- Walk trails after storm events to clear tree hazards and make repairs to boardwalks
- Construct 500 ft new trail & observation platform that extends to the cattail marsh on the southern side of the property
- Resurface parking area to smooth pot holes
- Install two sided entrance sign along route 27 to clearly advertise the entrance to the conservation area

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