

## 2013 Winter Bird Count Esopus Bend Nature Preserve, Saugerties, NY

The eighth annual Esopus Bend Nature Preserve (EBNP) Winter Bird Count (WBC) was conducted on Saturday, January 12, 2013, under relatively mild but heavily overcast and foggy conditions. Six field observers (some part-time) in one field party surveyed the 160-acre preserve from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. A total of **38 species** and **496 individuals** were detected during a ten-hour effort that included 1.25 hours of nocturnal "owling" immediately after dusk. This year's species count was slightly above the eight-year average of 35 species/year, slightly more productive than last year's 35 species/456 individuals, and just 53 individuals below the eight-year average of 549 individuals/year.

Temperatures ranged from an early morning low of 34° (F) to a very comfortable afternoon high of 46° (F) under dark solid overcast skies with prolonged dense morning fog that hampered some detection and identification efforts. Winds were calm throughout the count day, resulting in ideal audio conditions. Esopus Creek was open and flowing freely in the channel, with an average rate of flow, water level, and turbidity. Shallow coves and the large delta were predominately frozen, retaining some sporadic small pockets of open water. The beaver impoundment was completely iced over near the dam, but retained several areas of open muddy ground along inflows and ground springs. All of the preserve's tributaries were free of ice and flowing moderately. No moon light was visible through the dense cloud cover during the nocturnal prowling.

Ground conditions were predominantly covered with an average of 4-8" of soft wet snow with occasional small areas of exposed ground associated with sheltered southern exposures, ground springs and outflows. A small flock of sparrows was observed on two occasions taking advantage of open wet ground adjacent to springs in the upper beaver impoundment, and a Hermit Thrush flushed from open muddy ground under a section of boardwalk spanning one of the Preserve's tributaries, providing a nice extended close range view in good light as the bird perched low in an adjacent shrub.

Two new species were added to the count's historical composite, but hardly seem worthy of a "highlights" designation. Two **Great Black-backed Gulls** (one adult, one first-winter) were observed standing and feeding on the ice in the Esopus Creek delta, and two **Rock Pigeons** were observed flying over the Preserve, representing species number **62** for this count and a new overall record for the Preserve in any season! EBNP typically attracts a number of half-hardy winter species with the Preserve's abundance of fruit-bearing vines and rose hips, and typically hosts a good variety and number of wintering woodpeckers and creepers. This year the WBC documented a record high number of **Brown Creepers (12)**, **Pileated Woodpeckers (6)**, and equaled our previous high number of **Winter Wrens (6)**. Also well-represented were **Carolina Wrens (14)**, **Golden-crowned Kinglets (29)**, **Hermit Thrushes (10)**, **Red-bellied Woodpeckers (14)**, and **Hairy Woodpeckers (8)**. Common Mergansers were also present in modest, but record high count numbers (10) in the Esopus Creek channel, often frozen solid at this time of the year.

Consistent with recent counts, we once again observed a juvenile **Cooper's Hawk** perched near the neighboring bird feeders at Edgewood, no doubt resulting in the lack of small birds at the feeding station and a record low number of Mourning Doves (1), typically encountered in flocks at that immediate area. Only one Tom Wild Turkey was encountered at the feeders, and one Great Blue Heron was observed flying across the creek delta and later seen hunting along the edge in a patch of cattails off the far northeastern end of the Preserve. One **Eastern Screech-Owl** responded to audio playback at 5:40 p.m.

Notably absent were Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Cedar Waxwing, and only one Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was detected in habitat that often attracts several during the winter months. No catbirds, Field Sparrows, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Swamp Sparrows, or blackbirds were detected in the Preserve during the course of the count. Winter finches were also noticeably absent in this regionally eruptive year, though a flock of approximately 40 small finch-like passerines were very briefly observed flying silently over the meadow in a northerly direction towards the creek. The flock was a good candidate for Common Redpolls, but they remained atypically silent and no one in the field party was able to get a definitive binocular view to determine the species.

Multiflora Rose hips and Asiatic Bittersweet were not very abundant this year and many shrubs and vines held no fruit at all. Eastern hemlock cones appeared sparse again this year, and most mast crops were poor to non-existent. Weed seed heads were partially accessible above the snow cover, but ground seeds were largely inaccessible with the exception of sporadic areas of open ground as previously noted.

The following table summarizes the 2013 survey in comparison with the previous seven-year history of this winter bird count. Thanks to David Arner, Eileen Cunningham, David Grover, Dan Porter, and Wendy Tocci for their effort in conducting this year's count. Data collected from this annual January survey provides a basis for monitoring future winter bird population trends in Esopus Bend Nature Preserve and guidance for future land management and stewardship decisions. Next year's EBNP Winter Bird Count will be conducted on Saturday, January 11, 2014.

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