

2011 Gustavus/Glacier Bay Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Nat Drumheller

The word that sums up this year's count is "quiet". That is what many of the participants said, and that is what Gustavus residents found during the weeks leading up to the count. Heavy snow and cold temperatures, as low as zero degrees, in November froze ponds around town and pushed many birds south. Much warmer temperatures in December, as high as 46 degrees, melted most of the snow and thawed portions of local ponds. But by then, many birds had moved on.



A male Wood Duck found on count day by Phoebe and Harold Vanselow. Photo by Phoebe taken through a spotting scope.

Weather on count day, December 17, was good with periods of sun, brief rain showers, and temperatures between 34 and 39 degrees. A stiff wind out of the southeast created rough water on Icy Strait and along the beaches west of town, but conditions in lower Glacier Bay were excellent. Weather during count week, the three days on either side of count day, was a mix of wind, rain, and calm periods.

Twenty-six people participated in the count. This may be a new record, but is close to the number that participated in 2005. Twenty people walked routes around town, along beaches, and in Bartlett Cove. Three people went out in a park service boat to cover the entrance to Glacier Bay and part of the Beardlee Islands. Three people at two homes watched their yards. Bird feeders provide some of the most interesting birds in our count and in the counts of other communities. Gustavus is in need of people willing to count birds at their feeders in future Christmas Bird Counts.

63 species were found on count day. An additional 7 species were found during count week for a total of 70 species.

Two species new to the count were found on count day. A Wood Duck found on the Duck Pond is only the second observed in Gustavus/Glacier Bay and the first winter record. Five Ancient Murrelets near Point Gustavus are the first winter record for Gustavus/Glacier Bay.

Two species had record high counts. 135 Pacific Loons topped the previous record of 116. Two Eurasian-Collared Doves beat last year's record of one.

Species with the second or third highest counts ever were Common Loon, Pelagic Cormorant, Common Murre, Steller's Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. Two Brant were observed along beaches near town before and during count week. The only other count with Brant was in 1972, and this year's Brant are the third winter record for Glacier Bay.

Dunlin, Rock Sandpiper, and Sanderling, the three common winter shorebirds along Gustavus beaches, all made the count, but we missed the big flock of over 2,000 birds that contains mostly Dunlin. This flock was likely east of the count area. Numbers for some species common along the shore of Icy Strait, such as Red-breasted Merganser, were low due to poor viewing conditions in rough water.

Species	Number	Comments
Brant	CW	Second year in count. First was 1972. Third winter record for Glacier Bay.
Canada Goose	214	
Trumpeter Swan	22	
Wood Duck	1	New to count. Second record and first winter record for Glacier Bay.
Gadwall	9	
American Wigeon	12	
Mallard	386	
Green-winged Teal	2	
Greater Scaup	39	
Harlequin Duck	27	
Surf Scoter	558	
White-winged Scoter	427	
Black Scoter	183	
Unknown scoters	150	
Long-tailed Duck	47	
Bufflehead	135	
Common Goldeneye	18	
Barrow's Goldeneye	207	
Hooded Merganser	5	
Common Merganser	13	
Red-breasted Merganser	88	
Red-throated Loon	CW	
Pacific Loon	135	Record high count. Previous HC = 116 in 2006.
Common Loon	101	Second highest count. HC = 105 in 2007.
Unknown Loons	5	
Horned Grebe	36	
Red-necked Grebe	8	
Pelagic Cormorant	184	Second highest count. HC = 195 in 2005.
Great Blue Heron	2	
Bald Eagle	46	
Peregrine Falcon	1	
Killdeer	2	
Sanderling	34	
Rock Sandpiper	15	
Dunlin	10	
Unknown Shorebirds	60	
Wilson's Snipe	CW	
Black-legged Kittiwake	10	
Mew Gull	1254	
Glaucous-winged Gull	525	
Unknown Gulls	100	
Common Murre	2906	Third highest count. HC = 5,023 in 1989.
Pigeon Guillemot	363	
Marbled Murrelet	151	
Ancient Murrelet	5	New to count. First winter record for Glacier Bay.
Eurasian Collared-Dove	2	Record high count. One in 2010 was new to the count.

Northern Pygmy-Owl	CW
Short-eared Owl	CW
Belted Kingfisher	2
Downy Woodpecker	2
Hairy Woodpecker	2
Northern Shrike	CW
Steller's Jay	22
Black-billed Magpie	11
Northwestern Crow	103
Common Raven	51
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	101
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1
Brown Creeper	2
Pacific Wren	2
American Dipper	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	22
Varied Thrush	CW
Bohemian Waxwing	10
Snow Bunting	43
American Tree Sparrow	18
Song Sparrow	11
White-crowned Sparrow	1
Golden-crowned Sparrow	2
Dark-eyed Junco	122
Rusty Blackbird	12
Pine Grosbeak	27
Common Redpoll	12
Pine Siskin	4

Tied for second highest count in 1994. HC = 26 in 2005.

Third highest count. HC = 27 in 1995.

Tied with second highest count in 2004. HC = 3 in 1999.

Second highest count. HC = 20 in 2010.



One of five Ancient Murrelets found on count day.

Photographed by Nat Drumheller through a spotting scope.