

The Las Cruces 2022/2023 Christmas Bird Count by Mark Pendleton, compiler

The 48th MVAS Las Cruces CBC was on Saturday, December 17th, 2022. Teams that started earlier than others encountered some chilly temperatures, but many of us can remember far worse weather on previous CBCs.

Readers who want to get right to the point can skip down five paragraphs and see how many birds we identified this year. Ones who want more in-depth background knowledge and appreciate the pleasures of delayed gratification will continue reading.

Special thanks to Kristi Lane of Las Cruces's Wild Birds Unlimited for her donation of a \$25.00 gift card as a door prize at the post count get together. Also, a huge thank you to MVAS members Linda Miller and Marcia Wilson for organizing this successful event at Jason's Deli.

Fifty people participated in the 2022/2023 Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count. These citizen scientists were divided into thirteen teams ranging in size from two to seven or eight persons. Smaller teams tended to stay together, while larger teams were more likely to split into more than one party so as to cover territory faster. The least number of parties we had in the field was twenty-one; the most, twenty-eight.

All of these observers (that's you) put a considerable amount of time and effort into this annual event. You walked for a total of 61.75 hours, and covered 71 miles. Driving time and distance totals were equally impressive. You drove 469.75 miles in 62 hours for an average speed of a whopping 7.5766129 miles per hour! When we combine the walking and driving time and distance totals, we get 540.75 miles traveled in 123.75 hours for an average speed of 4.36969697 mph. Not bad at all!

There were even observers who watched feeders. Six people reported results from this form of birding. Together, they added another seven hours to the total citizen science effort for the day.

Let's now turn to the reason for the CBC—**The birds**. We identified 99 species on this year's CBC. The individual bird count was 12,224.

Have you ever wondered just how species are counted in the CBC? Only full species, not sp. sightings are counted *unless* there were no individuals of the "real" species seen on count day. For example, if no-one saw any Chihuahuan or Common Ravens on count day, but several people reported *raven sp.* sightings, then we would count that *raven sp.* as one of the species we saw and it would be part of the species total. But, several observers saw individuals of both Raven species. So, those 5 *raven sp.* sightings from count day 2022 don't get counted in the species total.

So, why count them? Because, even though they don't go into the species total, they do count as part of the total for individual birds seen. They are, after all, ravens, and they were seen on count day. The same is true for the 43 *duck sp.*, 30 *dove sp.*, and 3 *corvus sp.* (*crow or raven*) sightings from count day.

Other birds not counted as separate species were the 1 Harlan's form of Red-tailed Hawk, the single Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk report, the 67 Northern Flickers that weren't identified further, the 3 instances of various forms of Dark-eyed Juncos, nor the 10 Audubon's form of Yellow-rumped Warblers. They were subsumed into the count of their species, or, as in the case of the unidentified accipiter, their family. So, they all get counted, we don't get species overcount and the data retains its integrity.

We set 16 new records this year; 9 lows and 7 highs. I could give you the previous records for each of the species mentioned in the next two paragraphs, but mining the information from the database would put me past deadline for this article.

The **lows** (single birds except for the two Black-throated Sparrows) were Mexican Duck, Great Egret, *accipiter sp.*, Long-eared Owl, Plumbeous Vireo, Bushtit, House Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. The latter is the former Lillian's subspecies, now elevated to full species status as Chihuahuan Meadowlark. It just takes time for large organizations such as Audubon to get taxonomic changes into their system.

I was surprised to discover that this year set any **high** records, let alone seven of them. First were 3,534 Rock Pigeons or Feral Pigeons. Next came 1,875 Eurasian Collared Doves. Then there were 2 Black-chinned Hummingbirds. The fourth record high count for a species was 68 Eastern Phoebes. Topping that was 72 Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays. The sixth species for which 2022 was a record high CBC year was Juniper Titmouse. This was only the second time JUTI appeared on our count and there were 22 reported. The highest new high species record was for Verdin: 132!