

## WARMTH THEN COLD – LEADS TO A SUPERB 69TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT WITH 22,942 birds, 91 Species plus 3 “Count Period” species

Following the tough weather faced during the Hackensack-Ridgewood Christmas Bird Count (CBC) of 2016, we approached this season’s event with trepidation. Mild fall weather had allowed fair-weather birds to remain in the area, and delayed the arrival of many waterfowl from the north. But a shift to snow and cold weather began in mid-December, and a strong cold wave on Dec 13 prompted large flocks of waterfowl to fly south through our area, but possibly leaving us in the lurch.

As Dec 16 dawned, we were left wondering what could still be found. Much of Bergen County’s open water had suddenly frozen, there was an inch of fresh snow covering the frozen ground, and chances for those warm weather friends seemed doubtful. Happily, BCAS birders were not deterred from their appointed rounds, and participation went on as scheduled. Roads were clear, walkways passable, and unlike 2016, we did not face cold rain nor snowfall. There were fewer birds still overhead in migration, but plenty were sitting tight here in Bergen County. The result was an excellent CBC list, as shown on page 7 in the newsletter. The variety of species was better than average, and quite a few rarities were spotted.



A few species escaped detection on Saturday, so got listed only as “Count Period” birds, including an Orange-crowned Warbler in Hawthorne Woods, a Gray Catbird, and an amazing **Blue-headed Vireo** (shown above) in Teaneck Creek. However, we still racked up some highlights in our 69<sup>th</sup> annual CBC.  
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The **American Bittern** found at Mehrhof Pond on Dec 2 was still present on Dec 16, lurking along the warm waters of the BCUA outfall. Just a few yards away on the shore of the Hackensack River was a Nelson’s Sparrow lurking in tall grass, a first ever for the count. Just offshore in the river was a Horned Grebe, marking its first appearance since 1987.



*Photos courtesy of Joe Koscielnny*

Further up Overpeck Creek there were more surprises including two Cackling Geese, a flock of American Pipit, a Woodcock, and a large flock of Wilson’s Snipe at (frozen) Skeetkill Marsh.

Further north in our Count Circle there were big numbers of Bald Eagles, and a huge flock of Great Blue Herons roosting in Harrington Park, just above Oradell Reservoir. The Reservoir itself was still mostly open water. Besides the usual mass of Common and Red-breasted Mergansers there, a single Redhead was seen. A few Canvasback were found in the Hudson River. One flock of Snow Geese was seen overhead, heading south. Besides Bald Eagles, the most exciting raptors included 4 Merlin, 1 Kestrel, and 7 Peregrine Falcon.

I have marked certain species on the main list where birds were found in unusually high or low numbers. As always, I need to offer special thanks to our participants in the field, especially those who scouted in advance, and to many BCAS members who counted the birds at their feeders during that day. Their collective efforts across the Count Circle really paid off.

**DAVID HALL**