

Annual bird count finds 53 species

By **M. G. Criscitiello, MD**/ Special To The Tab

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Robins, Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwings were up; American Crows, House Finches, Canada Geese were down; Nuthatches, Hooded Mergansers, Downy Woodpeckers were holding steady; but Wild Turkeys and Wood Ducks were no-shows. The 32nd Annual Christmas Bird Count was held in Newton on Dec. 18 (www.newtonconservators.org/christmasbirdcount.htm). This year 17 local birders joined in, grateful for clear weather: Susan Abele, Dorothy Anderson, Cris Criscitiello, Richard Danca, Pete Gilmore, Jan Gilpin, Liane Hartnett, Deborah & Frank Howard, Sam Jaffe, Ted Kuklinski, Liz Micheels, Steve Olanoff, Anne Pearson, Ian Reid, Al Scott, and David Tobias.

Those who braved the dark at 4:30 a.m. were rewarded by finding eight owls - seven Eastern Screech Owls and one Great Horned Owl - a considerably better showing than last year. Later, after sunrise, five teams of seasoned birders spread across the city, chalking up a list of 53 different species. Eight of these had not been seen in the past few Christmas Counts. They included one hardy American Coot at Crystal Lake; single examples each of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swamp Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, and Purple Finch in Cold Spring Park; six Common Mergansers on the Charles River; a Great Horned Owl in Kennard Park; and a Black/Mallard Duck hybrid at Newton Commonwealth Golf Course.

The number of count areas in the US and Canada is now well over 2,000, each consisting of a circle 15 miles in diameter. As the territory covered increases, the data derived become more valid statistically. The Count is performed under the auspices of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

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