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Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey is Wrapping Up
Low counts this fall, with 9 at-risk species
For Immediate Release

November 13, 2019

This year Wildsight Golden is wrapping up the Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey (CWWS) project. Initiated in 2015, the CWWS is a five-year coordinated bird count where the major goal has been to mobilize and coordinate citizen-scientists to collect baseline data on birds.

Volunteers collect data that will be used to nominate the Columbia Wetlands into the 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Area' (IBA) program, a global initiative with over 600 sites across Canada. The IBA sites are considered to be the world's most critical bird (and biodiversity) hotspots.

"By all accounts, I think that this five year project was a smashing success, in large part owing to the dedicated 230 volunteers that have collected a huge amount of data - over 380,000 birds counted," states Conservation Biologist Rachel Darvill. "The CWWS data is already being used in a number of ways to help improve management and conservation of Columbia Wetlands habitat."

This fall the CWWS had a total count of 41,043 individual birds observed over the three dates at 102 survey stations, with 98 volunteers. With the exception of 2015, which had fewer survey stations and fewer volunteers, this was the lowest fall count that the CWWS experienced. The fall count in 2018 was 57,057 birds; and the fall 2017 count was 50,938 individuals. Reasons for the decline in total number of birds seen in 2019 are unknown. The highest count for an individual bird species was on October 5th with 3,577 American Coots, sighted at 16 survey stations. The second highest single species count was on October 5th with 3,405 American Wigeons.

Some of the more rare sightings included 10 Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Geese on all dates, and an American White Pelican that was badly injured and (sadly) ended up being euthanized at a Veterinary Clinic. Two species of owl were seen: Great Gray Owl and Northern Pygmy Owl, and nine at-risk bird species were recorded: Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, Horned Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Tundra Swan, California Gull, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron and Rough-legged Hawk. Also of note, we had our highest count for the red-listed Western Grebe with 295 individuals reported at 13 survey stations on October 5th.

“The CWWS would not be possible without the dedication of the incredible volunteers in our region, and because of the CWWS data I think that we have a very realistic opportunity of obtaining IBA status for the Columbia Wetlands,” states Darvill. “With a recent report stating that 2.9 billion birds have disappeared from North America since 1970, and with 1 million species currently at-risk of extinction on Earth, I think that it’s a critical time and opportunity to find and conserve the world’s most significant bird and biodiversity hotspots,” says Darvill.

More details on the fall 2019 results of the CWWS, as well as the entire 2015-2019 project will be forthcoming in a report available by January 2020. Check out the Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey webpage for details and contact information. The Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey project graciously acknowledges the financial support of the following: Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Shuswap Regional District, Regional District of East Kootenay, The McLean Foundation, Vancouver Foundation-Stewart Fund, Wings Over the Rockies, Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners, and the Province of BC (Gaming Grant).



Photo credit: John Pitcher