



Box 25 Golden BC V0A 1H0 • ph 250.344.5530 • e racheldarvill@gmail.com

Highest bird counts to-date for the Waterbird Survey!

More than 57,000 birds counted

For Immediate Release

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The results of the fall 2018 Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey (CWWS) are in! With the highest bird counts since the project's inception in 2015, and with the largest number of volunteers participating, this was Wildsight Golden's most successful round of waterbird counts! Taking place during bird migration, **105 citizen-scientists** observed birds from 104 survey stations located between Canal Flats and Donald. With each survey period lasting three hours, **57,057 birds** were counted on three survey dates! The CWWS ground-based survey area is only able to cover about 40% of the Columbia Wetlands, therefore many more birds were likely to be present in the entire wetland ecosystem. The previous CWWS record was made during the fall of 2016 with a count of 51,347 birds.

The overarching goal of the CWWS project is to involve community members in a science initiative and use resulting baseline data to nominate the Columbia Wetlands into the 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Area' (IBA) program. "After five years of consecutive data collection, we will create a report and subsequent IBA application, which will highlight specific bird species counts that may be high enough to enable the wetlands to be designated as an IBA," stated CWWS Program Biologist Rachel Darvill.

"After our great success this past spring of having the highest spring bird counts to date [48,264 birds], it is fantastic to have that followed by the project's highest overall counts to date!" stated Darvill. "I am continuously amazed and grateful for the large number of people that are dedicated to counting and identifying birds in the Columbia Wetlands through this project. We are learning so much about bird use and distribution in the Columbia Wetlands through voluntary citizen-science efforts."

Darvill is currently working with Environment and Climate Change Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service, as well as with a Masters student from Simon Fraser University. Together they are working to extrapolate some of the bird data that has been collected so that population estimates for some species can be formed in order to provide estimates for the entire ecosystem, not just the CWWS survey area. If the IBA status is obtained, the wetlands will become part of the globally-based IBA program. This will show the world that the Columbia Wetlands holds important conservation value and needs to be recognized internationally in terms of its habitat value to birds.

Some of the more interesting results from this past fall include the highest single day count on October 15th with 20,575 individual birds. The highest single day count for an individual species was 6,495

American Coots on October 5th. Additional high counts included 6,113 American Wigeons counted on October 15th, 2,917 Mallards on October 5th, and 241 Long-billed Dowitchers on October 5th. Some counts for provincially-listed at-risk birds were also submitted, including 84 Horned/Eared Grebes on October 15th, 47 Great Blue Herons on September 29th, 19 Western Grebes on October 5th, and 8 Surf Scoters on September 29th.

The CWWS continues to be an excellent avenue for people to become more familiar with the Columbia Wetlands and the significant biodiversity values found within, and to become more knowledgeable about local bird species. Are you keen to join the fun and participate in the waterbird surveys? If so, next year will be your last chance before we nominate the Columbia Wetlands as an 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Area' (IBA) at the end of 2019, using data collected through this project. There will be free bird ID training sessions and a limited amount of optical equipment lent to volunteers in need. The 2019 survey dates are April, 3, 10 & 16 and September 29th, October 5 & 15. Email CWWS Program Biologist at racheldarvill@gmail.com to register, or for more details.

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